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Politicised Ethnicity, Competitive Politics and Conflict in Kenya: A Historical Perspective

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Throughout the period of its political independence, Kenya has had a fairly limited experience with competitive multi-party politics. The first was the short-lived experiment with political pluralism from independence in 1963 to the "Little General Election" in 1966. The second began in the early 1990s and included the multiparty elections of 1992 and 1997. In both periods, ethnicity has emerged as the single most important factor in political competition. Political activity since the renewal of competitive politics in 1992 has seen the reconstruction of ethnicity, ethnic mobilisation and ethnic conflict as the main instruments of political contestation. Political parties have been organised along ethnic identities and state-power aggressively contested on the basis of mobilised ethnicity.

This paper attempts to tease out the complex transaction between competitive politics, ethnicity and ethnic conflict in Kenya's multi-party system. The central thrust of my argument is that in the context of the uneven development of capitalist penetration in Kenya, and its tendency to engender regional inequalities (ethnic inequalities?), contestation for political power is bound to reflect such regional disparities, and is therefore expressed in ethnic register, rather than in terms of social classes. Ethnicity has thus become the medium through which class politics is mediated. It is argued that ethnic clashes, which have characterised much of the period of multi-party politics, are not tribal conflicts in the primordial sense; rather, these constitute politically organised conflicts orchestrated to achieve short and long-term political, and ultimately economic, advantages. This formulation raises two interlinked questions. First, why does ethnicity provide such a convenient platform for political mobilisation? Second, why do politicians in a supposedly "modern" state resort to this type of contestation for political power? This paper is an attempt to answer these two questions.

Political Ethnicity

By political ethnicity I refer to a tendency among political elites to mobilise

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ethnicity for political ends. It is important to make a distinction between ethnicity or tribalism in its ordinary usage, that is, groups of people sharing common consciousness based on language, culture or common ancestral heritage. Historically this has not always constituted negative connotation or identification. Ethnic affiliation by human communities, Young tells us, is a natural condition, and not a social pathology. He points out that such identification can indeed provide a sense of solidarity in the face of a relentlessly globalising marketplace (Young 1996). In fact, during the early period of the establishment of colonial economies, ethnic-solidarity organisations played an important socio-economic function in early African urban settlements. As Markakis (1996:73) points out, the "invention of tribes" during this period was not simply the result of administrative expedience on the part of the colonial state, but also an African response to radical changes in the socio-economic and political environment. Thus ethnicity and ethnic solidarity in itself is not a negative phenomenon. It only becomes a challenge to broader societal harmony when it is mobilised against the "other" (Young 1996).

Political ethnicity, on the other hand, is the deliberate politicisation and mobilisation of these "consciousnesses" in order to achieve certain political and economic objectives. Goulbourne (as cited in Markakis 1996) refers to ethnic mobilisation as "a situation in which leaders seek to transform characteristics deemed ethnic into political currency" in order to achieve diverse or specific ends. This mobilisation only takes place under certain circumstances. In "normal" conditions ethnic identity does not really play an important role in the interactions between different groups. Only during certain specific historical conjunctures does the need to mobilise these elements of ethnic bonds arise. The aim may be to defend the identity of a group from a perceived attack from other groups, or simply to promote an already dominant group. Either way, the relationship between ethnic mobilisation and conflict is fairly clear. At one end, there might not be conflict at all while, at the other, the potential for conflict is enormous.

The question, then, is: Under what circumstances does ethnicity become politicised? In the Kenyan context, most commentators do concede that ethnic competition has often emerged in periods of acute contestation over resources and/or state power, which, incidentally, has remained the dominant instrument of dispensing resources and patronage. Thus, in explaining the nature and workings of tribalism in Kenya, Leys associated it with the development of capitalism and competition for increasingly scarce resources:

> The foundations of modern tribalism were laid when the various tribal modes and relations of production began to be displaced by a capitalist one, giving rise to new forms of insecurity, and obliging people to compete with each on a national plane for work, land and ultimately for education and other services … (Leys 1975:199)

Oyugi's point is similar:

> … the combination of colonial attitudes and strategies and the responses to them by the various ethnic groups were to provide the setting for future competition and conflict … the "development" strategies devised tended inevitably to benefit some groups at the expense of others. 'Open" areas with more missionary stations received early and relatively better education …. Education was later to prove crucial as a criterion of access to gainful employment and other economic activities … some groups adapted much earlier than the others … (Oyugi 1997:43)

So, while ethnicity in its ordinary usage has always been a feature of most societies, politicised ethnicity, it would seem, is a product of specific historical developments. The creation of the colonial state as a common centre, to which diverse ethnic groups and nationalities were compelled to relate, is one of these. Colonial control through indirect rule, uneven development of capitalism and, consequently, competition for resources merely accentuated rivalry and politicised ethnic consciousness.

As Muigai (1995) argues, in the absence of other platforms upon which to base political appeal, ethnicity presented itself as the most natural basis of political organisation, feeding, as it does, on pride and prejudice. Precisely because the majority of Sub-Saharan African countries remain rural economies, characterised by low literacy among peasants and administrative boundaries which set ethnic groups apart (even in urban areas, ethnic groups remained highly segregated for a long time), a perfect environment for the politicisation of ethnic differences was created long before the emergence of the post-colonial state.

The Colonial State and the Politicisation of Ethnic Cleavages

In order to appreciate the role of the colonial state in the politicisation of ethnic cleavages, it is crucial to understand the impact of the development of settler capitalism, particularly its uneven nature, on the different ethnic groups. Kenya has some forty odd ethnic groups. The dominant ones are the Kikuyu of Central Province who, together with their Bantu cousins, the Gikuyu, Embu, Meru, Akamba (GEMA), constitute some 25 per cent of the total population. The Luo of the Lake Victoria region, and the collection of the Bantu groups in Western Province, called Luhya, constitute 13 per cent and 14 per cent respectively. The Kalenjin, a confederation of groups — Nandi, Kipsigis, Tugen, Marakwet, Pokot and others in the Rift Valley — make up about 12 per cent of the population. The Kamba of the Eastern Province make up another 11 per cent. The Kisii of Nyanza, another 6 per cent; the Mijikenda of the Coast Province, probably another 5 per cent; and the rest constitute some 14 per cent.

It is the colonial capitalist penetration and the uneven responses by the major ethnic groups that probably best explain the context in which politicisation of

ethnic cleavages was made possible. It was in the Central Province of Kenya, among the Kikuyu ethnic group, that capitalist penetration got near to achieving its classical form, resulting in proletarianisation on a large scale and, at the same time, engendering a concentration of a landed and propertied class (Cowen, 1977; Spencer 1985; Sorrenson 1967, 1968). Indeed, it was the landed and landless that were to confront each other during the Mau Mau uprising in the 1950s.

Nyanza, on the other hand, did not experience capitalist penetration and land expropriation along the lines of the Central Province. The establishment of colonial authority simply closed the avenues of the reproduction of the pre-colonial modes of production. Thus confronted with minimal agricultural potential, lack of infrastructure, and markets for wage goods, the Luo responded to the modern economy as suppliers of labour: first to the newly completed railway works in Kisumu, and subsequently along the railway line as far as Mombasa. With time the Luo came to dominate the docks in Mombasa. Similarly, in the Western province among the Luhya, the establishment of colonial administration led to proletarianisation, but for different reasons: the fertility of the land, and its proximity to urban centres, gave rise to peasant commodity production, and consequently to competition over land. Ultimately, all these factors led to a landed, propertied class on the one hand, and, on the other, proletarianised owners of patches of land but obviously not to the same degree as occurred among the Kikuyu of Central Province.

By the late 1930s, the three ethnic groups came to dominate the Nairobi labour market: 92 per cent of the domestic labour market, 81 per cent of the semi-skilled in industry and commerce, and 73 per cent of the agricultural farm workers (Ajulu 1989). Subsequently, it was these same groups that came to control the labour movement from its embryonic stages right through to the 1960s. Before the outbreak of Mau Mau and the state of emergency, the Kikuyu, who had experienced the most intensive contact with settler capitalism, held the advantage in adapting to the demands of the "modern" economy — the acquisition of education, business, farms and others. A Kikuyu, Chief Koinange, was the first African to petition successfully to be allowed to grow coffee. Be that as it may, the other two groups, and to some degree the Kamba, were not far behind, particularly in the acquisition of education and, significantly, in the 1950s were among the emerging national political agitators. Other ethnic groups unfortunately did not match these developments. The Kalenjin confederacy, the Masai, and other nomadic and semi-nomadic ethnic groups within the Rift Valley: the Kalenjin, Masai, Turkana and Samburu alliance (KAMATUSA) remained largely on the periphery of capitalist penetration until very late in the 1950s. The first political organisations were therefore bound to be dominated by coalitions of these ethnic groups.

Kenya's first political organisation, the East African Association (EAA), formed in 1919, was a truly pan-tribal political organisation. Its leadership was comprised of the different ethnic groups, Kikuyu, Luo, Kamba, Luhyia, and some Ugandans, then the dominant ethnic groups in Nairobi's incipient labour market (Spencer 1985). Its political programme — protests against hut-tax, forced labour, and the *kipande* (the pass book) — reflected the frustrations of an embryonic urban working class confronted with the demands of typical settler colonial accumulation strategies (Ajulu 1989). Following the Nairobi riots of 1922, which were led by the EAA, the arrest and deportation of three of its Kikuyu leaders, Harry Thuku, Waiganjo Ndotono and George Mugekenyi, the colonial government seemed to have resolved not to encourage nation-wide African political activity. Rather, the policy was to encourage tribal associations. The subsequent period thus saw the proliferation of such tribal bodies as Kikuyu Central Association, Kikuyu Provincial Association, the Kavirondo Taxpayers Association, the North Kavirondo taxpayers Association, the Taita Hills Association and the Ukamba Members Association, whose activities were similarly confined to narrowly defined tribal "issues". It would be another twenty years before a new attempt would be made to form national political parties.

The first attempt to form a national organisation, the Kenya African Union (KAU), took place in the immediate post-war period. KAU had started in 1944 as the Kenya African Study Union (KASU), an organisation created by the colonial state to act as an advisory group to the first nominated African member of the Legislative Council, Eliud Mathu (Mueller 1984; Spencer 1985). However, KASU soon assumed a momentum of its own, and in 1946 was reconstituted as the Kenya African Union, which sought to unite all Kenyans. The first KAU executive reflected its broad composition. The president, Harry Thuku, represented the old loyalist class (Thuku had gone through a Paul-like conversion after his stint in jail, emerging to lead the Kikuyu Loyalists Association, and later became a successful coffee farmer); Achieng Oneko, Ohanga and Ambrose Ofafa represented the Nyanza embryonic commercial class and the educated elite; Mbotela and Francis Khamisi, from the Coast Province, represented the fairly prosperous African trader classes. Phillip Nangurai from the Masai was a wealthy businessman and Managing Director of the Masai Trading Company. Of the three Committee members, Albert Owino, who sat on the Nairobi Advisory Council, Walter Odede and S.O. Josiah were African Administrative Assistants (Spencer 1985). Josiah was to become the first African Provincial Commissioner at independence in 1963.

In 1947 Jomo Kenyatta assumed the presidency of KAU and brought into its fold the old Kikuyu Central Association's political constituency. At about the same time the leadership of the labour movement also joined KAU and brought along its militant political constituency — the urban crowd. KAU then constituted a broad national movement comprising several class forces: the proletarianised and semi-proletarianised militants of the labour and the squatter movement (Furedi

1973; Tamarkin 1976); the African educated elite; and the indigenous embryonic class of propertied people (the moderate collaborative middle class so often referred to in Kenyan literature as the loyalists). Over the next three years the balance of forces within KAU continued to shift to the left, and in 1951 a "coup" in the Nairobi branch of KAU (Nairobi being the nerve centre of the party) led to the seizure of the party by the militants of the Transport and Allied Workers Union (Kaggia 1975). It is important to emphasise that as representative as KAU might have appeared, it was in essence the political home of the urbanised, proletarianised and educated sections of the society. Ethnic groups from the periphery of capitalist development had probably not even heard of KAU.

The declaration of the state of emergency in 1952 and the beginning of the Mau Mau rebellion led to the arrest and imprisonment of the entire KAU leadership and most of its militant activists. They were to stay behind bars for the next nine years. A year later KAU was proscribed, and African political activity reverted to tribal and welfare associations. The ban on party political activity was to remain until 1959. The repression of the period locked the militant nationalists and its moderate opponents — the two main contending political forces in KAU — away from the political arena for the period 1952 — 1960, thus creating a space within which the colonial state attempted to construct a different set of political forces.

The defeat of the Mau Mau in the mid-1950s led to the relaxation of political activity. In 1957 direct African elections to the Legislative Council were finally allowed under the Coutts Commission's limited franchise, which stipulated that educational qualifications and an income of no less than Kshs 2400 per annum were prerequisites for election. The franchise was defended on the basis that there was a need to protect "men of proved character from the rabble rousers". Political parties conceded to this logic. But the elections were permitted only at District levels. This, as Sanger and Nottingham observe, nourished the seeds of latent tribalism (Sanger & Nottingham 1964).

Predictably, the 1957 elections brought relatively new men to the political centre stage. Apart from Oginga Odinga and Tom Mboya, who were already radical nationalist figures in their own right, the rest were relatively unknown political figures, predominantly men from minority ethnic groups who had neither a history of political activity nor connections with earlier political organisations. Muliro (North Nyanza) was a graduate of Fort Hare University in South Africa, and a teacher at Alliance High School; Muimi (Ukambani) was a graduate of Makerere and a teacher at Alliance High School; Ngala (Coast), Benard Mate (Embu) and Jeremiah Nyaga (Meru) were similarly graduates of Makerere and teachers at Buxton High School and Alliance High School; W.W. Awori, was a formerly nominated member of the Legislative Council and a minister under Lyttelton's transition government; finally Daniel arap Moi (Rift Valley) was a primary school teacher.

Thus, when in 1959 the colonial state removed barriers to the formation of national political organisations, and the struggle for control of the post-colonial state began in earnest, it was inevitable that this contestation would initially take place mainly between the two forces of African nationalism. The one force consisted of the broader nationalists whose traditions of anti-colonial resistance could be traced back to the second decade of the century; the other force was the political elite that had emerged in the post-Mau Mau period. The contradictions between the two groups have appositely been described as the "disharmony between the patterns of urban and rural-orientated nationalism" (Gertzel et al. 1969). Given the absence of a solid foundation for national political organisation, the already entrenched nature of regional (tribal) associations was bound to be the predominant feature of political organisations.

Not surprisingly, the period leading up to the first independence elections in 1963 saw a proliferation of regional, ethnic and, at the very worst, clan based political organisations: the Mombasa African Democratic Union (MADU), the Taita African Democratic Union (TADU), the Abagussi Association of South Nyanza District (AASND), the Masai United Front Alliance (MA), the Kalenjin Peoples Alliance (KPA), Tom Mboya's Nairobi People Convention (NPC), Argwings-Kodhek's Nairobi African District Council (NADC), the Rift Valley Peoples Congress (RVPC), Muliro's Kenya Peoples Party (KPP), the Baluhya Political Union (BPU), Paul Ngei's Akamba Peoples Party, later on named African Peoples Party (APP), and others. These district-based political organisations were to constitute the most effective recipe for the politicisation of ethnic cleavages. The settler community, intransigent and resentful of the prospect of a unitary state in which their small numbers would permit them very little say, soon took advantage of the possibilities for ethnic division. The burning question then was which group would secure control of the independent Kenyan state and what would they be capable of doing with this control.

During this crucial period of imminent transfer of state-power into the hands of indigenous classes, ethnic identities appear to have been constructed as instruments of negotiating access to that power. It is against this background that the formation of the nationalist parties, Kenya African National Union (KANU) and Kenya African Democratic union (KADU), and the 1963 independence election can be understood. KANU was formed in May 1960, significantly after the first Lancaster Conference at which the constitutional models of transfer of power had first been mooted. KANU brought together the old forces of KAU. This was an alliance of urbanised, proletarianised and relatively more educated sections of the indigenous ethnic groups, which for historical reasons came from the Kikuyu, Luo, Kamba and sections of Luhya. It was also an alliance of three political organisations: the NPC which, for all practical purposes, was the political wing of the trade union movement, the Kenya Federation of Labour (KFL); the NADC, the political home of the urban radical nationalists, which was closely allied to Oginga Odinga's Luo Union; and finally, James Gichuru's

old KAU. Paul Ngei, a veteran of KAU and a Kapenguria trialist (Mau Mau leaders were tried in Kepenguria, a small town in the Rift Valley Province some five hundred kilometres from the capital, Nairobi) failed to secure an executive position in the newly formed KANU and broke away to form the Akamba Peoples Party, later renamed African Peoples Party (APP). The APP was, however, Ngei's trump card. Once he was able to demonstrate that he had the Kamba vote solidly behind him, he was able to negotiate a return to KANU on a stronger footing. Accordingly, the APP was disbanded soon after the 1963 elections.

Masinde Muliro, Daniel arap Moi and Ronald Ngala, the post-war generation of politicians, however, refused to be drawn into the KANU alliance. A month later they formed KADU, which appealed to communities that were less urbanised and least exposed to education. The regional (ethnic) political organisations which came together to form KADU were the Kalenjin Political Alliance (KPA), of Moi and Taita Towett; the Coast African Peoples Union (CAPU) of Ronald Ngala and Francis Khamisi; the Masai United Front (MUFO) of Ole Tipis, and Muliro's Kenya Peoples Party. The language of this alliance was fear of domination by the majority ethnic groups. KANU, they argued, could not be trusted to protect the interests of the minority groups, namely, indigenous ethnic minorities and the settlers. However, the reality underpinning these considerations was of course competition over resources. It was in these circumstances that KADU was to emerge as the party of ethnic separatism, an advocate of "majimboism" (quasi-federalist constitution), which was a reflection of its electoral weakness — its inability to compete on an equal footing at the centre.

But federalism, after all, was not KADU's creation. It had its origins in 1954 with the formation of the whites-only Federal Independent Party (FIP). The FIP sought to protect the "White Highlands" from African control; hence they adopted a federal platform. In 1958 the FIP was transformed into the Progressive Local Government Party (PLGP); the rhetoric had changed but the objectives remained the same. They advocated strengthened local governments, with powers over local taxation and expenditure. The PLGP hoped to exercise political control over the White Highlands. KADU only adopted the idea in 1961 and it became clear that together with its allies, Michael Blundel's New Kenya Party (NKP) and the Kenya Indian Congress (KIC), which then controlled the transition government, they were unlikely to win the 1963 election and assume control of an independent unitary state. It was then that majimboism was launched under the slogan "Regionalism or Civil War" (Sanger & Nottingham 1964).

William Murgor, then parliamentary secretary to the Defence and Internal Security in the transitional government, invited his Kalenjin tribesmen to sharpen their spears and wait for the sound of his whistle for the beginning for the war to drive non-Kalenjins out of the Rift Valley. Moi, then Chairman of

KADU, vowed to shed his blood to ensure that regionalism was written in the independence constitution (Atieno-Odhiambo 1998). Thus from 1961 ethnic clashes swept through the Rift Valley Province. The Kikuyu, Luhyia and other ethnic groups, which had lived in the area for years, were labelled foreigners, their were houses burnt, and the majority of them were rendered refugees. Exactly the same phenomenon has been witnessed over the last two competitive elections. In the Coast Province, KADU's Sammy Omari popularised the slogans — *Wabarra Kwao*! (Up country people, Back to their own homes) and *Kila mtu kwao*! (Every person to his or her own home). These had to be enforced by violence. The threat of ethnic cleansing, with the support of the settler press, was enough to ensure that the independence constitution provided for eight separate regions, each with a regional government.

KADU, however, had the support of what Bennet (1963) called the "alliance of the pastoralists tribes" — the Kalenjin, Masai, Turkana, Samburu and the Giriama of the Coast and sections of Luhyia — and therefore could only secure control over two regions, the Rift Valley and the Coast. The federalist dispensation, however, was bound to be short-lived. Confronted with a central government bent on frustrating what was seen as an "imposed" constitutional dispensation, and lacking resources with which to dispense patronage, the opposition KADU abandoned their party to join the ruling KANU at the beginning of 1964.

Post-colonial Political Ethnicity

The ruling KANU party, as we have indicated above, was an alliance of different forces that had come together with the sole purpose of capturing the post-independent state. Nyong'o (1989) has suggested that KANU was not a party, but rather a coalition of different organisations. More accurately, KANU was a party with different political bases in the different regions, a fact that probably explains its fractious nature, and which ensured that control of the post-colony would be aggressively contested between the different factions of the party. Soon after independence, the rivalries that had characterised much of the 1960 — 1962 period resurfaced. It was this competition for control of the post-independent state that was to provide the background for post-colonial political ethnicity.

Kenyatta and the Politicisation of Ethnicity

The merger of KADU and KANU in 1964 shifted the balance of forces in the ruling party in favour of the conservative elements and created an environment in which the long-running battle between the radicals and the conservatives could now be fought to a conclusive end. The key players were Kenyatta (Kikuyu) and Mboya (Luo) on the conservative wing of the party, and Odinga (Luo) and Kaggia (Kikuyu) on the radical wing. In 1966 the Odinga faction broke with KANU and formed the opposition, the Kenya Peoples Union (KPU).

This was a culmination of a protracted battle over ideological differences that had consumed the party throughout its six years of existence. The formation of KPU and the return of multi-party competitive politics confronted the Kenyatta regime with its first serious political crisis and, in the end, exposed the authoritarian character of the regime. Odinga and his deputy Kaggia were followed into the opposition benches by thirty three MPs representing a cross-section of the country. For a Parliament of one hundred and twenty-two members, this was indeed a significant opposition. What was to be done about this radical threat now reconstituted into a viable parliamentary opposition? In the end the government decided to amend the constitution to force the newly created opposition to seek a fresh electoral mandate. It was argued that resignation from the party implied the withdrawal of constituency support, which obliged the member to seek a fresh mandate. This had not been necessary two years earlier when KADU resigned en masse to join KANU.

Be that as it may, in the ensuing "Little General Election" in 1966, KPU retained only nine MPs, seven from Odinga's Luo stronghold, Oduya Oprong from Busia District and Kioko from Ukambani, the former APP stronghold. Bildad Kaddia, the deputy party leader, lost in his Kandara stronghold. The KPU strength was thus reduced to Luo Nyanza, and to the extent that the party continued to be perceived as a tribal party, its national image and effectiveness was sufficiently undermined. This suited the ruling party and the government quite well; it was a deployment of ethnicity in a defensive way. Mueller (1984), however, suggests that this was deliberate. KPU's presence nationally, she argues, was much stronger than its Nyanza representation might have suggested, and that the state deployed its repressive apparatuses against the party selectively to achieve this result.

Mueller suggests that once it was realised that Odinga was unbeatable in his Nyanza bailiwick, the state decided to concede Nyanza to KPU, and to ethnicise the contest, the most effective instrument against the opposition being to project it as a Luo ethnic party. The state monopoly of sanction and economic rewards was deployed to close KPU from the rest of the country. The regime's monopoly of sanctions, economic rewards and patronage ensured that the opposition could not compete openly with the ruling party. KPU candidates outside Nyanza were granted minimal licences to conduct meetings. KANU's youth wing, police and Provincial administrations broke up the few meetings they were allowed. In Kandara, Kenyatta and his minister of state, Mbiyu Koinange, took personal charge of Kaggia's political harassment. Kandara was too important to be left to chance. Kaggia lost the election, but a few days later newspapers reported Kaggia's abandoned ballot papers floating on Chania River.

Kenyatta's second political crisis came in the wake of the assassination of Mboya in 1969. Mboya was the victim of internal rivalries within the party for Kenyatta's successor (Karimi and Ochieng 1980: 10–11). His assassination,

however, came at a time of increasing resentment by a majority of ethnic groups of the consolidation of economic and political power by the hegemonic Kikuyu ruling elite. This elite was Kenyatta's inner cabal that was exclusively from the Kiambu district of the Central Province — the Kiambu Bourgeoisie or the "Family" as it is sometimes called (Ngunyi 1993). Mboya's assassination thus threatened to unite the Luo and other ethnic groups behind Odinga against the Kikuyu. This possible resurgence of Odinga's political fortunes struck panic within the "Family". The "Family" reacted by seeking cover under Kikuyu ethnicity. The government organised and orchestrated an oathing campaign to mobilise the Kikuyu peasantry, the urban *sans-culottes*, and its professional classes behind the Kenyatta regime. It was not the small hegemonic elite that was threatened by the crisis, which they had brought upon themselves; rather, they argued, it was the entire Kikuyu ethnic group that was under threat. Kikuyu therefore had to take the oath in readiness to defend the House of Mumbi, the eponymous founder of the Kikuyu tribe. As Ngunyi puts it,

> … to protect its stakes and maintain the regimes inner stability … the "Family" quickly constituted a Kikuyu brigade charged with the tacit responsibility of mobilising the entire Kikuyu community to protect the "motherland" against the "enemy" … The brigade was also responsible for administering to the community an oath of loyalty to the House of Mumbi and vowing by the oath to ensure that the Presidency never leaves the "tribe". (Ngunyi 1993)

Kenyatta's third political crisis emanated from the assassination of the populist Nyandarua North MP and a former assistant minister, Josiah Mwangi Kariuki (popularly known as JM) in 1975. Kariuki was similarly a victim of intra-party rivalries over the succession issue. Unlike Mboya, Kariuki was a Kikuyu, but one from the "diaspora" — those who had migrated into Rift Valley, like most landless Kikuyu at the beginning of last century — and therefore not part of Kenyatta's Kiambu coalition which held a stranglehold on political and economic institutions of the state. He had built a strong populist following from the two Kikuyu districts of Nyeri and Muranga and counted among his following such Kikuyu heavyweights as Waruru Kanja from Nyeri and Charles Rubia from Muranga. He also had support within the populist wing of the party and counted, among his parliamentary following, MP for Tinderet and a deputy speaker of the House, Jean Marie Seroney of the "Nandi Hills Declaration" fame, Joseph Martin Shikuku, the populist member for Butere, Elijah Mwangale (of the Bungoma constituency), and several assistant ministers.

Thus, like Mboya and Odinga before him, he had a national following, but as a Kikuyu he was capable of subverting Kikuyu sub-nationalism from within (Throup 1987). He thus posed the most serious political threat to the Kenyatta coalition. Kariuki's assassination was to divide the Kikuyu ethnic group down the middle, isolating Kiambu from Muranga, Nyeri, and "Diaspora" Kikuyu. And hence the context of ethnic mobilisation changed. This time the Kiambu Kikuyu took an oath to guard against the *piki piki* (the presidential motor cycle

outriders) from crossing the Chania River, the boundary between Kiambu and its neighbouring Kikuyu District of Muranga.

Moi and the Consolidation of a Minority Ethnic Coalition

Kenyatta died in 1978 and was succeeded by Daniel arap Moi, who had been his vice-president for the previous twelve years. Initially President Moi had no alternative but to rule through a section of the Kenyatta coalition, which had ensured his succession from a hostile challenge from the Kiambu coalition of Change the Constitution Movement. Two years before Kenyatta's death, this group had launched this movement to campaign for the amendment of the constitution, with a view to stopping the vice-president acting as president for ninety days pending election (Karimi and Ochieng 1980). Thus, for the first four years President Moi relied on Mwai Kibaki, from the Nyeri district of the Central Province and a Minister of Finance under Kenyatta, whom he made his vice-president, and Charles Njonjo, Kenyatta's Attorney General who had been instrumental in thwarting the Kiambu-led Change the Constitution Movement. Njonjo, a Kiambu man, was part of the "Family", but was not one of Kenyatta's close relatives (Karimi & Ochieng, 1980).

From 1979, however, President Moi began assembling his coalition. The 1979 election had brought the largest contingent of Kalenjins[1] — eight — into the cabinet. The 1982 abortive coup attempt enabled him to do two things. First, to purge the army and the Air Force and pack the military hierarchy with his loyalists. Second, he could purge political forces, which were either too powerful or outside his own control. Thus, like the previous regime, Moi's regime eventually came to rest on a small clique, most notably the Kalenjin. To this was cobbled the old KADU alliance. The Masai were brought into the fold under Justus ole Tipis and later William Ntimana, and George Saitoti (later to become the vice-president), the Luhyia under the late Mudavadi, and the coastal alliance under the late Ronald Ngala's son, Noa Katana Ngala. By the mid 1980s President Moi had perfected the art of deploying patronage and clientilism to construct and deconstruct his coalition. However, the centre — the "Karbanet Syndicate"- remained the same, a group from President Moi's inner tribal grouping. President Moi's coalition was, however, a relatively weak economic class. Unlike the Kenyatta coalition, which had constituted the most prominent pre-colonial and colonial primitive accumulators (Cowen 1981; Swainson 1980; Kaplinsky 1980; Spencer 1985; Sorrenson 1967), the Moi coalition initially comprised a comparatively impoverished alliance from areas of the least capitalist penetration. So President Moi's most important task was to construct a capital base for his coalition. In the absence of fresh areas of accumulation, Moi's embryonic accumulators were compelled to "loot" from the old accumulators or, as Ngunyi (1993) puts it, the capital base of the new coalition had to be constructed upon the dissolution of the already entrenched Kikuyu capital.

Bates (1989) lists a number of forms of "primitive accumulation" that this alliance was involved in, but also points out that a good chunk of it was pure predation, such as the transfer of agricultural surpluses to favoured regions, particularly the Rift Valley and sections of the Western Province. Clearly, the capture of state-power enabled president Moi to shift the distribution of patronage and resources away from the Kikuyu to the "disadvantaged ethnic groups" previously marginalised by the Kenyatta coalition, and which, therefore, bore real economic and political grievances against the Kenyatta coalition. This period constituted the populist phase of Moi's regime.

Ultimately, patronage and resources came to be concentrated around president Moi's own ethnic group, the Kalenjin in general, and the Tugen in particular. This process coincided, as it were, with the consolidation of his coalition in the aftermath of the 1982 coup attempt. Furthermore, Moi, like Kenyatta, completely politicised the allocation of public and private investments — roads, educational infrastructure, and agricultural investments were directed mainly towards Moi's political constituency. To paraphrase Mamdani (1998), the new power was self-consciously a Kalenjin power, institutions previously dominated by the Kikuyu were "Kalenjinised". Access to university education and employment in state parastatals depended on whether or not one was recognised by the government as a member of the "KANU tribe". This type of distribution of resources and the crude use of the state for primitive accumulation could only be predicated on authoritarian control. But more importantly, this system of primitive accumulation fostered a kleptocratic bourgeoisie whose existence and survival depended very much on its continued access to and control of this type of authoritarian state. This class, Njonjo (1977) argues, was not an indigenous class of capital and property, but rather a social stratum of property hunters. Despite the appearance of wealth, their property remained mortgaged to financial institutions, and they could not afford the luxury of losing state power as this would render them paupers overnight.

It is against this background that the regime's response to the introduction of competitive politics, its mobilisation of ethnicity and, ultimately, its resort to violence must be understood. Confronted in 1992 with prospects of an open political process, and a situation in which state institutions would have to be subjected to public scrutiny and accountability, this class sought to defend its property and class interests through mobilised ethnicity. To paraphrase Atieno-Odhiambo (1998), property had to be protected using power and in turn power itself had to be consolidated. The Kenyatta regime sought to consolidate power, as Ngunyi (1993) points out, through the Kikuyu and the House of Mumbi. The Moi regime similarly chose consolidation of power through the construction of minority ethnicity, the KAMATUSA alliance within the Rift Valley Province.

The reintroduction of competitive politics thus witnessed the return of ethnic conflicts in the Rift Valley Province of Kenya. Once again, it was the same

coalition — the KAMATUSA, but now under the umbrella of the ruling Kenya African National Union (KANU) — which fell back on ethnicity. They publicly called on their ethnic brethren to commit acts of violence against other ethnic groups which were not perceived to support the ruling KANU. In Nakuru, the KANU district chairperson Wilson Leitich called on KANU youth wing members to patrol the streets with knives, ready to chop off the fingers of anyone who showed the two-finger multi-party salute. He also instructed them to confiscate trading licences from multi-party advocates and take them to the KANU office (*Africa Watch* 1991:49–50; *Daily Nation* 10.6.1990).

And, as in the early 1960s, they mounted "ethnic cleansing" in the Rift Valley Province and throughout the bordering areas leading to the removal of what they called Madoadoa (islands of non-Kalenjin groups) in the Rift Valley. Their ultimate objective was stated rather bluntly: "with the introduction of multi-party system the survival of the smaller ethnic groups is [sic] threatened and the only way to safeguard their interests was through this type of ethnic separatism" (*Kenya Times* 20.5.1993). The story of the 1992 ethnic cleansing in the Rift Valley Province has yet to be told in full. The available evidence, however, does suggest that the killer bands, recruited mainly from the Kalenjin and Masai supporters of the ruling party, had the encouragement of top officials of the ruling party, and the government (*Africa Watch* 1991). Once again, in the run-up to the 1997 election, Kenya witnessed an outbreak of a savage war of annihilation in Likoni in the Coast province. This came at a time when the ruling party, KANU, had lost the political initiative to a section of the opposition and its allies within the National Convention Assembly, and increasingly it was beginning to look as if a constitutional reform which would "level the playing ground" would be possible. It was in these circumstances that violence erupted in Coast Province with attacks on Likoni police stations on the Mombasa mainland. It is widely held that, once again, persons very high up in the government had been responsible for organising, funding and orchestrating the violence.

According to a report by the Kenya Human Rights Commission (*Economic Review* 15–21, 12, 1997), the Coast violence was seen as a strategy unleashed by the state to achieve two main objectives. The first was to create an environment which would have served as a convenient pretext for a declaration of a state of emergency, thereby postponing the December elections until such a time that the government had regained the initiative from the opposition. The other objective, of course, had to do with undermining the demographic strength of the opposition parties in a number of constituencies at the Coast in the run-up to the election. The large populations of the Luo, Kikuyu and Luhya have often been considered as a crucial swing factor in the Coast electoral calculations.

The significant feature of these confrontations is that the government and its security apparatus appeared incapable of bringing them to an end, which in turn fuelled the speculation of state involvement. By May 1992 the clashes, particu-

larly in the Rift Valley, had escalated to an extent that demonstrated that these were not spontaneous outburst of anger and hatred between different ethnic groups but were, rather, orchestrated political acts by forces seeking to derail the multi-party exercise.

Two separate commissions, the all-party group and the task force, established by the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NECK) and the Parliamentary Select Committee Report on the clashes (the Kiliku Report), conducted an inquiry and arrived at similar conclusions about the origins and objectives of the clashes. The task force pointed out that:

> the prime cause of the clashes is political in the sense that it is geared at reducing the member [sic] of non-Kalenjin voters in the Rift Valley by evicting them from the Province and by disenfranchising those within the Province … [The political motive] was consistent with the hostile political speeches given at various places within the province late last year, and very recently in Narok District … the task force found the involvement of senior government officials, senior cabinet ministers, senior Provincial Administration Officers, senior KANU officials, names of government officials included Vice-President George Saitoti, Wilson Leitich (KANU) Chairman Nakuru, Wilson Kisiero, MP, Mt Elgon. (Task Force, 1992).

The Kiliku Report named highly placed government ministers and party officials: Nicholas Biwott, the former minister for energy, Vice-President George Saitoti, William Ntimana, the minister for Local Government, and the Speaker of the House Professor Ngeno. The report directed that further investigation into those named be undertaken. The failure of the government to take further action was clearly an indication of its complicity. In early 1993 (soon after the 1992 elections) President Moi publicly commended Nicholas Biwott, one of the alleged perpetrators, for having ensured that the "KANU he wanted was in the Rift Valley Province". Biwott was subsequently appointed as a minister in the president's office.

Conclusion

It has been necessary to trace this historical perspective in order to reveal the complex transactions between electoral politics and ethnicity in Kenya. Quite clearly, ethnic cleavages and political conflicts have been at their most volatile during the periods of open competitive politics. But it must be emphasised that what has been described here are not necessarily tribal conflicts in the primordial sense. On the contrary, these are organised political contestations, in most cases championed by dominant elites, with ethnicity acting simply as the organising principle. The question, however, is: why is political power contested so fiercely along ethnic cleavages, and why does ethnicity become such a centralising and mobilising factor?

As has been indicated above, this is not tribal or ethnic conflict in the primordial sense. On the contrary, this is organised political violence predicated on the

worst of human instincts: fear and insecurity. It is a political strategy, as has been shown, deployed and orchestrated by dominant classes to acquire control or to extract concessions from the centre by those who are unable to compete at the national level. It is, indeed, the first steps towards warlordism. In South Africa, Buthelezi's Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and De Klerk's National Party (NP) put this strategy to very good use in the run-up to South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994 to extract concessions from the centre.

Note

1. The Kalenjins were Moi's wider ethnic group, but it needs to be pointed out that there is no such thing as a Kalenjin ethnic group. Kalenjins who today are said to be the second largest ethnic group in Kenya are in fact a motley confederation of some eleven nilotic ethnic groups with separate languages and cultural practices.

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