



API Research Note

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Ndii's Nihilism view on Kenya, a ploy to rout Democracy in 2017

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A choreographed ploy by a tiny but vociferous group of increasingly radicalized Kenya intellectuals and activists has emerged posing a deeper existential threat to the country come next year's General Election. These group subscribe to nihilist school of thought advocating for violence, splitting and Balkanizing Kenya into 42 ethnic nation. These tiny group of intellectuals do pose an obsessive personal hatred for President Uhuru Kenyatta and are merely pushing for ODM political strategy of 2017, and out rightly rejects peaceful resolution of any dispute by ridiculing it as "tyranny of peace" leaving violence as the only option.

Seventeen months to next year's General Election, a tiny but vociferous group of increasingly radicalized Kenyan intellectuals and activists poses a deeper existential threat to the country perhaps than even the Al-Shabaab extremists.

This becomes clear from a deeply troubling and provocative article by the Kenyan economist and public intellectual, David Mwangi Ndii (DN, March 26, 2016).

Ndii is a grand master in conjuring up the obscene and the grotesque. This time round, he used the metaphor of "a cruel marriage" to paint Kenya as a country inexorably hurtling down to another cataclysmic post-election violence.

Propelling this prediction is a sheer intellectual hubris rather than a serious scientific enquiry. "If Uhuru Kenyatta is declared winner in another sham election, this country will burn," he declares.

Claiming that he cannot sit back and wait for the "coming genocide," Ndii calls on Kenyans to take cue from the former Soviet Union and bring to a "blissful" end the 121-year-old "Kenyan project." Also cynical is a view that Kenyans "voluntarily" breaking up of the civic nation into myriad "ethnic nations" to avoid the type of violence that rocked Yugoslavia.

In Ndii's jeremiad, peace is not an option. "What I do not see is another accept and move on — "the tyranny of peace," he says.

One would be tempted to treat Ndii's hubristic piece as a mere fireside prattle by a public intellectual known for his obsessive hatred for Kenyatta, and who loves to niggle and criticize every aspect of the Jubilee regime. But Ndii and his ilk mean business.

This begs the question: What form of thinking is driving Ndii?

Ndii's piece reveals a complex amalgam of ideological and philosophical trends that are driving his activism.

Foremost is nihilism, a philosophy of extreme skepticism and cynicism that maintains that nothing in the world has a real existence — everything is "invented" or "imagined".

Judged by the tone and content of his political pieces, Ndii may be modern Kenya's leading nihilist, an intellectual trend that virulently and violently rejects all authority.

It is in this context that Ndii invokes Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, as the basis for treasonously repudiating the Kenya state.

After 2013, nihilism in Kenya has increasingly evolved into a movement hell-bent on using violence for political change.

Uncannily, Ndii's rendition of Kenya as "abusive marriage" carries the familiar echoes of the Russian nihilists who expressed anger at what they described as the "abusive nature of the Church, the tsarist monarchy and domination of the Russian economy by the aristocracy".

On his part, Ndii has railed against the "abusive nature of the Jubilee regime", the "Kenyatta dynasty," and the alleged domination of the Kenyan economy by a Kalenjin-Kikuyu "ethnocracy".

With the collapse of the Kenyan cases at the ICC, the Kenyan nihilists have become increasingly desperate and radicalized. They see violence as the only pathway to power and are preaching against peace — or what they condescendingly call "the tyranny of peace."

Yet, the nihilists are also astute entrepreneurs of violence. Once the guns fall silent and violence is over, they will be queuing to get donor funding to "tackle impunity" relating to the violence.

Ndii is a self-declared "card-carrying member" of what Jubilee activists love to lampoon as the "evil society." He is also one of the intellectual activists behind the opposition's Okoa Kenya referendum initiative.

This introduces the second plank in Ndii's intellectual hue: "Odingaism," a rarely acknowledged intellectual trend harkening back to Jaramogi Oginga Odinga.

However, Ndii exposed his lack of deep ideological nuances and understanding of the intellectual politics of Luo Nyanza when he cited the eminent Professor of History, Bethuel Allan Ogot, to buttress his thesis that Kenya is a "failed project".

In a nutshell, intellectual trends in Luo-Nyanza take the form of what the Nigerian scholar, Peter Ekeh, described as “the two republics” living side by side.

The first intellectual trend is Jokoyo (singular, Jakoyo), corresponding to Eke’s “primordial public as the space of traditions, customs and political mobilization of local identities and sensibilities. The high priest of the Jakoyo is Jaramogi Odinga and his political heir, Raila Odinga.

“The Jokoyo represent the ugly face of Luo politics,” quipped one Luo elder, adding that: “The chaos you witnessed during the State of the Nation address exemplifies this ugly face of our politics.”

The rival intellectual trend is the *Jonanga* (singular, *Jananga*), again corresponding to Ekeh’s “civic public” as the modern space of civic order, rights, laws and mobilization across multiple identities and sensibilities.

Tom Mboya is immortalized as the hero of the *Jonanga* because of his cosmopolitan vision of the Kenyan nation.

But since the death of Mboya, the *Jonanga* have been eclipsed or “colonized” by the Jokoyo as the dominant political force.

After 1997, the Jokoyo moved quickly into the national space, injecting the polarizing negativism, extreme skepticism and chaos into the Kenyan public sphere.

Ndii would have been correct if he invoked the late Professor E.S. Atieno-Odhiambo as the intellectual who “pronounced the Kenya project dead”.

It was Atieno-Odhiambo who declared in 1998 that: “The future of ethnicity is robust, the career of nationalism ended at independence, and the future of democracy, like the arrival of a matatu at its destination, remains uncertain.”

In contrast, Ogot is generically not an Odingaist, but a Mboya man, a *Jananga*, with a pan-Kenya vision.

Having studied under his feet and served him as Secretary-General of the Kenya Historical Association (1994-1998), I can unequivocally say that at no time or space has Ogot proposed the quartering and breaking up of the Kenyan nation into “ethnic nations”.

Indeed, his book, *Kenya: The Making of a Nation* (2000), is a celebration of a nation at a 100 years (1895-1995).

In this configuration, Ndii is ideologically aligned to the Jokoyo. Like Bildad Kaggia before him, Ndii is an Odinga man who privileges distributive policies over wealth creation or production.

Like the Odingas, he has an obsessive hatred for Kenyatta, which has blinkered his intellectual objectivity. His repugnant hypothesis of replacing the civic nation state with ethnic nations is a recipe for anarchy and chaos. It is a sneaky way of setting the stage for the opposition to deal with a potential defeat by rejecting results and pushing for power sharing.

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