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The struggle for space: minority religious identities in post-independence Kenya

Mildred A.J. Ndeda

Introduction

- 1 Despite differences in religious integration, similar ideological tendencies are observed in many countries with some religions having an upper hand. In Britain, for example, the Anglican faith is universalised at the expense of the existing religious diversity (Beckford, 1999). The marginalisation of minority religious identity groups by the former colonial powers within their nation state narration was duplicated in the colonies that they occupied. By so doing, the process of national homogenisation necessarily eluded historical, social and cultural differences among the colonised people of Africa.
- 2 The nature of the contemporary African State is largely due to the colonial era, when administrators tried to employ religion tactically in their pursuit of religious political domination. Missionary activities were an important facet of attempted colonial cultural domination, with both repressive and liberal functions. They were agents of both European superiority and political domination and the purveyors of modernisation especially western education.
- 3 Most African countries became independent in the 1960s on a surge of optimism, even euphoria. The new governments set about modernising their societies without an effective model other than Western one. Before long, however, the euphoria of early 1960s turned sour. The African State from birth was essentially an agency for control and extraction. There was never any merging of state and society as common expressions of shared values. Thus there has been little in the way of legitimacy, or popular commitment to public institutions like the church/religion.

- 4 The trend of lack of integration of religious minority groups in the nation state narration continued in most former colonies in Africa beyond the independence watershed. In Kenya, the post-colonial state was essentially a reproduction of the colonial state at the level of ideological orientation, laws and the basic economic structures (Gutto, 1993: 265). It therefore ignored some of the illiterate fighters of the *Mau Mau* movement that had been instrumental in the liberation struggle. The reason for exclusion from central manipulation of policy issues and control of power in the new nation state narration was due to the perceived association of *Mau Mau* adherents with the indigenous religion of the Agikuyu that missionaries and colonialists disliked (Kenyatta, 1968). Such suspicion of the nation state narration about members of indigenous oriented religious minority groups still persists to date.
- 5 Apart from the mainline churches and indigenous groups, religious diversity exists in Kenya in other words the religious space and the public realm is shared. Despite this diversity of religious identities, it seems that the government of Kenya gives more attention to the mainline Christian churches and some brotherhoods of Islam in its nation state narration. Consequently, minority religious identities seem to be subordinated against, a fact that impinges on the human rights of some citizens of the Kenyan post-colony. This scenario could be a recipe for violent sectarian confrontations. The contest between the official nation and these minority religious identities generate serious implications on issues of democracy, human rights, and freedom as well as on citizenship. The emergence of minority religious identities in public life in recent times has brought to the fore the pleas for recognition of their values and identities given that they seem to lack space for fruitful participation in the nation state narration.
- 6 In spite of the fact that freedom of worship is embodied in the constitution, there are no existing policies in the relations between religion and the affairs of state.¹ And yet religion and politics in the nation state narration concern each other. Hence it would be stated that the separation of religion and state in the individual national context is usually one of theoretical degree rather than practical certainty. Religion and the nation state narration are power centres, bound to affect each other a great deal given the nature of African politics with its personalisation of issues and then, often close relationship between socio-economic elites.
- 7 This paper interrogates the contest between the Kenyan state narration and the religious discourses, specifically, the minority religious discourses in order to investigate whether or not the post-colonial Kenyan state has accommodated the interests of the minority religious identities since independence. In particular, it focuses on the dynamics of accommodation and exclusion that inform the relationship between the official disposition of the Kenyan nation-state and the minority religious discourses that operate at the margins of the nation-narration. It also examines how the emergence and existence of minority religious identities have enhanced or threatened the stability of the nation-state narration in Kenya and the effects of minority religious discourses on the critical issues of democracy, human rights and citizenship. This paper also analyses the various methods used by minority religious identities in Kenya to assert themselves by looking for space in the nation state narration.
- 8 Examples of the marginalised religious group identities are Sufi Islam (and the brotherhoods that comprise it), African Independent Churches (African Independent

Pentecostal Church, *Legio Maria* and Power of Jesus Around the World, etc.) and African indigenous religious groups (*Dini ya Msambwa*, Tent of the Living God and *Mungiki*, etc.). With or without the mainline religious groups the Kenyan religious space is shared and vehemently contested. Given the large number of minority religious groups in Kenya this paper only tackles the aforementioned marginalised religious group categorised as African indigenous religious groups within this space.

- 9 It is the assumption in this paper that the Kenyan state interest is political stability hence the position of various religious groups remain ambivalent and ambiguous. The ambivalence of the state and its negative responses to the minority religious groups has often led to negative externalities such as intolerance and aggression that may afflict the society. It is also assumed that the indigenous religious groups remain suspect within the nation state narration in spite of its efforts to accommodate them. Open or hidden conflicts have been characteristics of Kenya State when it has ignored or suppressed certain minority identities. It is obvious that despite the coexistence of the minority religious groups and the state, they have had numerous issues of grievances, thwarted hopes, state manipulation that caused them to voice their marginality. Finally that the minority religious groups, because of their awkward backgrounds, do not have discourses on critical issues such as democracy, human rights and citizenship hence they are easily manipulated. Basically some of the minority religious groups sometimes meet with favour only if they become useful tools to the government but sometimes their responses are met with negotiations or severe reprimands and occasionally violence.
- 10 Why would there be a fight for space? In sub-Saharan Africa, the brief duration of colonisation resulted in a form of state power which on the surface and theoretically resembled European institutions, but in practice was quite different. Alternative centres of independent power are rare, the acquisition and use of state power for political purposes result in the holder(s) becoming rich. Those associated with the state including some semi-religious figures, may use their positions to benefit themselves personally and their religious groups corporately. Certain members of church at high levels may be close to the government. Some religious leaders quite often enjoy cordial relations with the political authorities. If there are benefits in the public realm then definitely all must pursue them. Thus the minority religions are seeking the collective common space where all are equal, at home and exercise the basic freedoms. This public space seems to have been privatised and yet the privatisation of public space is an attempt to diminish the democratic dreams of ordinary citizens and to make them forget that they had the power and basic rights.
- 11 This means that the position of the state can be quite ambivalent and very exclusive.

Conceptualising State-Religious relations

- 12 Religious practices have a critical bearing on the political interests of the state. It is against this background that some religious identities in Africa have enjoyed more positive political and state attention than others giving rise to the dichotomous notion of minority and dominant religious discourses within the African state. It is argued that Kenya is not an exception to the general African experience. It is therefore a battlefield of numerous religious outfits, all of them struggling to gain recognition, attention and favour from the state. The state itself maintains an ambivalent stance.

- 13 Contemporary Kenyan nation-state was born out of the imperialist project of European colonialism in Africa. While maintaining the fundamental tenets of the Western nation, especially with regard to law, economics and political organisation the nation-state in Kenya became a tool of Western control, domination and exploitation of the Kenyan people.² Control, domination and exploitation were, in turn, consummated by powerful Christian religious principles which were propagated by various denominations including those within the Catholic and Protestant movements. At the heart of the teachings of these Christian denominations were deliberate efforts to denigrate African cultural values including the belief system of polygamy and clitoridectomy. The denominations assisted the state in privileging and recommending Western variants of development. In a sense, colonialism in Kenya failed to distinguish the state from the church. Like the case was in the premodern world, colonial Kenya witnessed both the state and the church playing complimentary roles.
- 14 At independence, the western nation-state in Kenya remained intact both in structure and content except that, then, colonialism had officially been africanised (Kisiang'ani 2003).³ The same Christian religious denominations which had been recognised and privileged in the period of formal colonialism continued to play similar and dominant roles under the arrangement of informal colonialism. Christian religious denominations such as the Catholics and mainstream Protestants were joined by mainstream Islamic groups in influencing the direction of affairs within the newly independent Kenyan post-colony. The result has been that more and more religious sects especially the traditional African religions, the African instituted Christian churches and the non-conformist Islamic sects have become marginalised within the textual narration of the nation-state. The list of marginalised religious discourses in Kenya is almost endless but they include the traditional religious groups such as the *Hema ya Ngai Wi Moyo* (Tent of the Living God) *Mungiki*, *Dini ya Msambwa*, *Legio Maria* and *POJAW*; the minority Christian sects, especially the revivalist and evangelical denominations and the Sunni Shiite variants of the Islamic faith.
- 15 Two challenges emerged. First the local population expressed their disgust for the Western nation. The local anger found expression in the emergent religious diversities most of them opposed to the mainstream religious groups that had hitherto patronised the Western nation-state in Africa. Second, the ruling elites, having their legitimacy in the West rather than in Africa, have found themselves endangered by threats of war and civil strife emanating from opposition caused by minority identities. Consequently, frustrated by their failure to accommodate diversity, or at least strike a middle ground, these elites have tended to give overwhelming acceptance and support to dominant religious discourses, which are harmonious with classical Western modernity, as they suppress minority voices which are viewed as inimical to the survival of both the state and the ruling elite.
- 16 Within the paradigm of critiquing modernity, it goes without saying that European Christian religion is just one of the many religious practices spread all over the world. It is hence untenable to privilege either European Catholicism or Protestantism over the traditional religious practices of Africa, Asia and Indian-American. Yet it is evident that modern colonialism was a deliberate European modernist agenda to Westernise, exploit and control non-European inhabitants of this world. Through the same agenda, European values including, religious practices were imposed on the colonies of Africa, Asia and Latin America in the name of spreading superior civilisation. As a result newly

created entities like Kenya came to espouse the “universal” practices of Catholicism and Protestantism. During the colonial period Islam was treated with contempt because it had not originated from Euro-America.

- 17 However, in the post-modern spirit of questioning the tenability of Western modernity, a different group of scholars, emerging from formerly colonised spaces, have put more pressure on Western civilisation. The scholars have made their impression through the emergent post-colonialist thinking. Apart from focusing their general attention on the relevance of the Western-bred nation-state in formerly colonised areas such as Asia, Latin America and Africa, postcolonial thinkers have interrogated specific perspectives and challenges within the post-colonies. For example, some of these scholars have explored the ways in which minority discourses contest the exclusionary tendencies of national consolidation.⁴ In Kenya, like in a many post colonies, national consolidation has seemingly been accompanied by the privileging of certain religious identities, on the one hand, and the suppressing of some other religious groups that are viewed to be on the margins of the nation narration on the other hand.
- 18 It is evident, from research that, such religious groups as the Catholics, the mainstream Protestants (AIC and Anglicans) and some Muslim sects have been privileged to the extent that they operate at the centre of the nationalist narrative while the Sunni Muslims, the revivalist and evangelical churches as well as the traditional religions operate on the periphery of the nation narration. Significantly, the process of national consolidation based on the privileging and suppressing of certain religious groups reflects the cultural continuity of the nation-state within the colonial and the post-independence dispensation yet the existence of religious differences also implies a differential articulation of cultural differences. Minority religious discourses are thus sites of resistance to hybridity, diversity and difference. Consequently, resistance against national homogeneity remains one of the leading challenges to the stability of the nation-state in Africa.
- 19 Essentially, post-colonialists propose that Africa’s development problems have been caused by its cultural and intellectual dependency on the West. Therefore, taking the contest to the field of culture, the post-colonial theoretical scholars insist that formerly colonised *others* should radically rethink forms of knowledge and social identities authored and authorised by the West.⁵ In this paper it is argued that in its post-independence dispensation, the Kenyan nation state has been defined and informed by forms of knowledge and social identities authored and authorised by the West. Consequently, forms of knowledge and social identities that do not fit in the homogenising and normalising experience of the nation-narration in Kenya have been subverted, raising serious concerns about the rights and privileges of some citizens.
- 20 But the notion of “post-colony” is extremely controversial. Indeed the mention of the word quickly raises the question of when, indeed, the postcolonial experience began. According to Linda Hutcheon, the “post” in the post-colonial may imply “after” because of colonialism; it may also be unavoidably inclusive of colonialism. In this regard, the postcolonial designates moments within colonialism and beyond.⁶ However, Achille Mbembe argues that the notion of “post-colony” signifies a given historical trajectory—that of societies recently emerging from the experience colonisation and the violence which the colonial relationship, par-excellence, involves.⁷ In its complete arrangement, the African post-colony has two major battles to fight. First, it has to continue struggling against the Western hegemonic tendencies that have little relevance to local

conditions and, second, the post-colony has to contend with local problems that threaten its own stability. The Kenyan post-colony is not an exception to this stark reality. The post-colony is, today, confronted with the problematic of hegemonic colonial proclivities, which have consummated the cultural “universals” of Western modernity on the one hand, and the increasing pressure of local diversities on the other hand. Minority religious discourses at the level of nation-narration have hence opened up critical sites of contestation. Thus the post-colony is chaotically pluralistic and sadly deficient in internal coherence.

- 21 Consequently, the post-colony tries to survive internal and external pressures by adopting a distinctive political improvisation characterised by regime violence, discrimination against minority identities and the general privileging of certain discourses. For instance, the political improvisation could be done in two ways. First, bureaucratic practices, a world of meanings all its own, a master code which in the process of becoming the society’s primary central code ends by governing perhaps paradoxically the various logic that underlie all other meanings within society (*ibid*: 4). Second, state power attempts to institutionalise its world of meanings as a socio-historical world and to make that world fully real, turning it into a part of a people’s “common sense” not only by instilling it in the minds of target population but also by integrating it into the consciousness of the period.⁸ Essentially, the operations of state power in Kenya have been exclusionist because identities deemed to be outside the “socio-historical world” and the world of “common sense” have been suppressed, marginalised or ignored. Such identities (in this case religious identities) have been given new meanings that only help to isolate them from the “real world” of “common sense.” It is important to remember that the African post-colony is also made up of corporate institutions and a political machinery which, once in place, constitute a regime of violence that tends not only to sustain the dominant discourses and identities which are friendly to the state, but also suppresses those identities that are considered dangerous or unsuitable to the stability of the nation-state.⁹
- 22 It has to be observed that the colonial state was fundamentally established and maintained by a well-defined regime of violence.¹⁰ Colonial violence served, among other things, to subvert indigenous cultural values at the expense of the incoming European social values. As a result, most African discourses that narrated the African reality touching on such issues as, eating habits, sex, marriage, government, economy, culture and religion were condemned to a minority status. In their place, Western social–political, economic and religious systems were implanted, highlighted and accorded the status of dominance. The entire transformation process was the work of violence in both its psychological and physical forms. The cultural teachings of the Western colonial advocates tended to downgrade the African values by preaching the imagined superiority of everything that came from the West. Thus, as the colonialism cemented its roots in Africa the African people lost the psychological war of defending their own socio-cultural systems. Indeed, those who espoused Western lifestyles and religious practices were rewarded with favours and appointment by the colonial system. Where the psychological war was not won, the European colonialists in such countries as Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa used force to claim obedience and compliance.
- 23 Clearly then, the onset of political independence marked not just the continuity of the process of marginalising the discourses of the African cultural reality but also the

uninterrupted domination of European discourses imposed to the social reality in Africa. This was because the new African leadership that took power at independence was recruited from the lot that had not just been educated in Western-European values but one that had already permanently succumbed to the psychological violence of European colonialism on the continent. It is therefore no wonder that the same social discourses that were subverted under formal colonialism received similar treatment under African governments.

- 24 But these minority identities have hardly accepted their inferior status. Cases abound where these identities have hit back, sometimes violently in an effort to claim a dominant role in the project of nation-narration. This has occurred because being at the periphery of the national narrative does not just imply cultural isolation. Rather it also signifies loss of access to the social, economic and political commodities that the nation-state creates and distributes. Thus, the struggle against peripheralisation has also been the struggle for empowerment. In Kenya, there exists massive documentary evidence, especially between 1995 and now about the struggle between the government and minority religious identities such as the *Mungiki*, the *Akorino*, and the *Tent of the Living God*.¹¹ Other religious groups such as *DyaM* (the religion of our culture) have had its adherents permanently opposing the Western-nation-state and its cultural polices in Kenya.
- 25 Moreover religious identities are so significant and effective forms of ideological mobilisation but as ideologies they also become implicated in secular conflicts. Thus other criss-crossing forms of social affiliations and solidarities challenge religious affiliations and solidarities.¹² Religious identity is one kind of social identity, which means that religious groups involved in confrontational debates have to embrace the structures and strategies of interest groups. In the modern state system, the effectiveness of an interest group seems to require bureaucratic organisation. Finally religiously oriented groups can enter into the political arena either to promote collective religious values (the Umma of Muslim religious groups for example) or to defend the temporal interests of some of the brethren (business regulations for example).
- 26 Thus as a form of social identification, religious identity is frequently mingled with other forms of identity and may exceed the limits of strictly religious claims and concerns particularly when operating within the political system.¹³ This means that all religious groups be they minority or otherwise are involved in secular affairs and are confronted with the problems of power. They have to cope with the realities of political life which have developed according to the rules, norms and cultural references of the post-colonial state, but they have to also take into account their own characteristics and particularly the resources and weaknesses of their own western communities.¹⁴
- 27 Since Western European modernity was introduced to Africa through the project of colonialism, it tended to come with its preferred religious practices. Thus, through the brutalising pressures of colonialism African colonies found themselves surrendering their own religious belief systems to either Western Protestantism or Catholicism. At specific levels, Protestantism also came with its own dominant and minority discourses with some areas espousing the Anglican Church while others embracing Quakerism and Presbyterianism and so on. But all this happened against the backdrop of marginalised discourses narrating native spiritual and social realities. The trend continued within the post-independence dispensation. However, we have argued that minority religious

discourses have, despite suppression from the dominating Western nation-state in Kenya, continued to thrive. The struggle between these discourses and the dominant narratives of the nation has been protracted and sometimes violent. But this struggle, too, represents deliberate efforts by the marginalised identities to free themselves from the exclusionist tyranny of the Western nation-state in Africa. Most importantly, members of these marginalised groups have fought to be accommodated at the centre of the nation-narration in so as to gain access to the social, economic and political commodities hitherto denied.

Mainstream religious organisations and the state

- 28 In the post-independence period the Christian-capitalist separation of state and church was deemed to be of fundamental importance in the development of modern centralised states. African rulers concentrated primarily on remaining in power and officially, but certainly secondarily, on building socially cohesive, economically successful polities. Religious, communal and regional issues were obviously unwelcome, regarded as “divisive” and inappropriate during the phase of state building. National leaders hoped that as citizens became “modernised” they would drop their “primordial” allegiances, become “developed” and follow secular ideologies of nationalism, state or “African” socialism and thus, aid state consolidation and centralisation.
- 29 There were several additional factors, which helped to produce particular relationships between religion and State. First, it was especially difficult for any manifestations of independent power to assert themselves for the first twenty or thirty years of the independence era, during which time the one-party or military regime seemed, rather powerful. The state’s security forces could quickly quell isolated manifestations of dissidence. Second, religious groups were usually slow to pronounce publicly on political issues because of the existence of two realms, the temporal and the sacred, which often resulted in the church “*keeping its nose out of the state’s affairs.*”¹⁵ Others did not have the capacity to speak because of ignorance and lack of knowledge of how to handle temporal issues. Third, mainstream religious institutions were also involved with the state in as much as political leaders expected them to be quiescent partners in the national-unity project. The former, by their control of educational and other welfare roles, were also of singular importance to many regimes, for the ability to replace the church in the provision of such goods was limited. As a result, the main churches were tolerated, even encouraged, and as long as they offered welfare services.
- 30 Historically, in Kenya the politics of religious freedom more directly interacts with national politics in part due to the instability of Kenyan politics. The words of Cherry Gertzel suffice. He says:

Every state that has moved from colonialism to independence has sought to shape its inherited institutions to the changing circumstances and ideas of that independence seeking to move away from the colonial past they are concerned with adapting their political system to the needs of the independent society. But new states often like to seem newer than in fact they can be, for they all have to work within an inherited framework that is more difficult to change than it might appear.¹⁶
- 31 Before examining the state and minority religions in contemporary Kenya an analysis of the colonial era is requisite. To this end it is argued that the routes of contemporary

relationships between religious groups and the state can be traced back to the period of the European colonialism which lasted from 1895 to 1963. During this time, there was clear affinity between Christian missionaries and colonial administrators and this as Haynes says “*did not rest solely on their shared ‘Christian-ness’, as it were but was also bolstered by their shared European-ness.*”¹⁷ That is to say, even though Christian officials and missionaries may on occasion have been unhappy with certain aspects of colonial policy, there were generally many more points of agreements, their disagreements between religious and secular colonial personnel. Both parties pursued a similar aim, to civilise the African. A further factor, which could have consolidated the ties between the European Church leaders and the secular colonial personnel, was the challenge of Islam. By later 18th century, it was already a highly significant religion. Colonial administration in Kenya was both centralised and authoritarian. The rulers manifested a sense of superiority over those they ruled and power was experienced as coming from above rather than flowing from below. Thus the ruled developed a sense of the state as an alien institution, to be feared but also to be deceived and exploited, since it existed on a plane above people whom it governed, beyond any chance of content. African responses took various religious forms, one was the persistence of traditional religious patterns. In the early years of the colonial system a growing number of Africans began to join the African Independent Churches because they were seen as more in tune with the African religious needs than the hierarchical European dominated Churches.

- 32 Christian missionary work in Kenya only began with colonial rule and not before. Missionaries interacted with colonial governments from the onset.¹⁹ Nevertheless by 1920s and 1930s, there was a three-way relationship; at times conflictual, between missionaries, settlers and colonial churches and colonial authority over three issues; treatment of indigenous, land and education. From very early years the missions exerted great influence because they were pioneers in medical services, education and social welfare and economic development. Although they could at times be criticised for undue narrowness of view, they set standards, which were vitally needed.¹⁹
- 33 The relations between government and members of the churches were often strained but frequently cordial. From 1920s prominent clergy, such as the Rev. Dr. Arthur of the Kikuyu Church of Scotland Mission (henceforth CSM), in 1920s and Archdeacon (Bishop and later the Archbishop) Beecher of the Church Missionary Society (henceforth CMS) in the 1940s, had been nominated to represent the African interests on the Legislative and Executive Councils.²⁰
- 34 The missionaries tried to resist many things in colonial Kenya. They disagreed with the settlers particularly on issues, which appeared oppressive to the Africans. In the Legislative Council (henceforth LegCo) where they represented African interests they seemed to represent an opposition wing of the council.²¹ But despite this, they never ventured into such issues outside the LegCo. Most clergy and church workers in colonial Kenya had a very restricted theology of power. Most of these workers of the CMS and CSM belonged to a conservative tradition, with its belief in individual salvation and the strict authenticity of the Bible. This legacy dominated the church in the Kenyatta era and the first Moi era, when the church showed unlimited loyalty to the state.
- 35 When the church supports the government and assists in formulating governing policies it usually defends the state and those policies. If the government then appears to serve the interest of many minorities against those of the majority, then the church

becomes one of the oppressors. In view of this many missionaries most of whom were Anglicans may be seen to have assisted the colonial government in furthering the British interests in the colony. During this period, in the Anglican Church in British colonies “*the Bishops in the British territories needed letters patent from the crown to make their consecration lawful just as English bishops did. It was assumed that their legal status was exactly that of bishops in the Church of England.*”²²

- 36 In their efforts to implement colonial policies considered to liberate Kenyans from the barbarism of pre-colonial African life the missionaries participated in some of the oppression. Their gospel was hostile to much of the African cultural practices and favoured the western culture. As Welbourn asserts,

The missionaries did not bring to Africa a “pure milk” of the gospel but a complex culture, which can be termed “Christian Western.” Missionaries are Europeans offering a culture which is Western as well as Christian, unable to escape, whether they wish it or not from identification with men of other professions of the same race.²³

- 37 Like their colonial counterparts it has been established that the missionaries retained class boundaries and they segregated themselves from their converts and some of the missionaries discriminated against the African clergy. The missionaries, like their colonial counterparts, found it difficult to dislodge the paternal mantle of authority.²⁴ The notion of the inferiority of African race was one of the reasons they were denied the opportunity of sitting in the Legislative Assembly with the Europeans. This alienated them from the policy-making institutions that discussed their affairs.

- 38 The Anglican Church was especially highly placed. First the majority of the settlers were members of the Anglican Church and the residence of the Archbishop in Nairobi was located with the government’s immediately outside the gate of the government house perhaps for ease of communication and consultation. During the First World War the CMS offered the government unqualified use of its personnel and property as that principle that “*it is our first duty to render to the government any assistance in our power even though it may interfere with our work.*”²⁵ It is no wonder that the freedom agitators, associated them with the colonial order that oppressed them. This however portrays the existence of a very close relationship between church and state. However, Lonsdale argues that the church was not barred from holding political opinions. In fact the majority of missionaries in positions of authority in the mission churches were hesitant raise issues that would have contradicted the government policy in the colony due to the co-operation that existed.²⁶ But while the colonial church defended the state, a few individual missionaries made their stand obvious concerning the African liberation. The most notable were Archdeacon Walter Edwin Owen of Kavirondo in western Kenya and Archdeacon Leonard Beecher who represented Africans in the LegCo.²⁷

- 39 Generally, the British missionaries did not take a confrontational stance against the colonial government because “there was in England at the time a very close relationship between church and state.”²⁸ Lonsdale observes that, the societies that were accorded an “established” status by the state such as CMS and CSM were frequently called upon by the colonial government as consultants.

- 40 The Catholic missionaries were not necessarily British and refrained from any conflict with the colonial powers and indeed as by one Catholic historian who asserted, “*But how was the church to better the lot of local population if not by entering into some form of understanding with the colonial power?*”²⁹

- 41 But Catholics were acutely sensitive concerning their “foreign” status and so were not anxious to press any particular political view. This hesitancy was reinforced by continental European Catholics relations with State in the 19th century.³⁰
- 42 In colonial times, main protestant bodies were politically quiescent. They possessed a limited theology of political power given their conservative evangelical tradition of strict adherence to biblical authority and the privacy of individual salvation. Both Anglican and Presbyterian (Church of Scotland Mission) churches developed a close semi establishment relations with the state long before independence. Perhaps this was possible because the church as well as the colonisers originated from the same place.³¹
- 43 Their close identification with the colonial order and the consequent lack of nationalist legitimacy meant that the main-line churches including the Catholic Church became hesitant to be embroiled with the post-independence State. Their chief fear was that the nationalists who had struggled were in power.
- 44 Towards the end of the colonial rule, Christian Mission Churches were regarded by some nationalists with great suspicions despite the fact that the majority of them were Christians. The role of the Mainstream Religious organisations in the context of the drive for independence was both complex and multifaceted.
- 45 Mission churches were agents of European domination and superiority and this was equivocally recognised by the Africans as the key to advancement in colonial society. Mainstream Christianity was significant for the colonial government established in 1895 in Kenya. It was tactfully employed in the pursuit of political domination.
- 46 On December 12, 1963 Kenya attained political independence with Jomo Kenyatta as the first head of state. The local elite took over the instruments of rule from the colonial powers. Kenya came to independence with a surge of optimism even euphoria. They began a modernising process but with no model. Before long the euphoria turned sour.
- 47 Kenya was a multiparty state soon after independence,³² but Kenya became a republic and a *de facto* one party state in December 1964. The adoption of one party states in Africa were to face constant attacks from dissident and some church leaders who felt that absence of an opposition was the main cause of state authoritarianism.³³
- 48 In his first address to the nation his remarks were very religious. His message was a reconciliation that was biblically based and which alone could foster forgiveness. By adopting a stance that was religious Kenyatta was to make it difficult for the church leaders to criticise him for any mistake his government was to commit.
- 49 At independence, many of the churches were themselves still controlled by foreign mission boards and missionaries. This means that they were themselves unprepared for the role, which was thrust upon them, as they became self-governing. In some instances, it took considerable time for them to break free from the negative image of being the instincts of colonialists and to become churches in their own right. But whether the churches were supportive of the independence struggle for independence or not, it did not make much difference once independence was achieved. At the same time, the churches became increasingly cautious about intervening in the political arena. But there is no doubt that on the whole the post independent governments either wanted the full allegiance of the churches, or else they wanted them sidelined to purely spiritual activities. As most churches were pietistic in orientation, eschewing prophetic social witness, they generally concurred, preferring church-state peace and patronage to conflict, they were often only too willing to be co-opted and as a result

they were unable to oppose the rise of dictatorships, clientelism and corruption in the post independent years. Such critically and prophetic witness as there was usually ecumenical in character, rather than denominational.³⁴

- 50 Moreover, the identification with the colonial order and consequent lack of nationalist legitimacy meant that the main denominational churches including the Catholic were hesitant to be embroiled with the post Independence State once the nationalists were in power. The only body that could indulge in politics and the state was the National Christian Council Churches of Kenya (NCCCK).
- 51 Kenyatta had pleaded with the churches to continue to help and maintain their co-operation with government particularly their support in bringing lasting unity among the different ethnic Kenyan communities.³⁵ Many missionary leaders of founded churches had not participated in the freedom struggle. But Kenyatta wanted everybody to forget all their differences in order to participate in national development. Kenyatta's emphasis on reconciliation and forgiveness made him appear as a leader ready to cherish Christian virtues. Under this political climate, the church was free to lay out its own development strategy.
- 52 In spite of these seemingly imaginary fears in the Kenyatta era
- 53 (1963–1970) the relations between the government and the churches remained relatively cordial. Like the mainline protestant churches, the Catholics felt well recognised by the first Kenyan President. Church and State relations seemed to have been sealed during Kenyatta's installation as a political leader [Kenyatta]. On a platform, Kenyatta stood with two Catholic bishops, an Anglican Bishop with his chaplain and two Muslim Sheiks besides distinguished dignitaries.³⁶ To Christians, the churches became the most active and persistent voice of the Kenyan political discourse. Moreover they found that active church membership was one of the most practical tools in the day-to-day struggle for survival.³⁷
- 54 Personal and ethnic activities as David Throup points out had implications for church capacity and relations with the state. Much of churches prior were derived from close family ties between Kenyatta and the church leadership as well as the fact that after independence the CPK, PCEA and Roman Catholics had all become increasingly dominated by Kikuyu Churchmen. Moreover, he emphasises the fact that influential positions in government were held by church lay members. But the churches' power was not based on these connections alone, but the intensive social involvement throughout the country was by far the central foundation of the church's power.³⁸
- 55 The president's own relations held positions of power in two of the main line churches (Monsignor Muhoho [Catholic] and Obadiah Kariuki [CPK]). Moreover, by independence the NCCCK had also developed co-operation with the nationalist movement. There were limits to this understanding between the churches and the state because some of the nationalist leader's position remained ambivalent.³⁹
- 56 Given the position of the church soon after independence there was fear that the church might be controlled by certain political leaders and Henry Okullu warned in his publication in *Target* in 1972, that such times could be compared to the time of Constantine who managed to manipulate the church by offering government protection. Okullu remained an outspoken clergy throughout his life particularly over church state matters. Yet, in spite, of the scattered incidences of criticism, mainstream Church-state relations remained generally amicable.

- 57 The Church-state co-operation gained momentum when in 1964 Kenyatta called upon Kenyans and other residents irrespective of race, or origin, or religion to unite and build the country. For the church, this was a mere transfer of co-operation from colonial to independent Kenya. The two institutions had co-operated in their history in colonial Kenya. As already intimated, this was due to the influence of the relation between Churches and state in the United Kingdom, hence the main Protestant churches, organisations operating in Kenya (the church Missionary Society [CMS] and the church of Scotland Mission [CMS] had a close allegiance with the state.⁴⁰
- 58 Such co-operation between Church and State at Independence was evidenced by the Church's participation on December 12, 1963 at the Uhuru [Independence] celebrations. On this occasion, Kenyatta shared the dais with senior church leaders among them two Catholic bishops and two Anglican bishops.⁴¹ Similarly politicians who formed Kenyatta's first parliament had been educated in the missionary schools and were also indebted to the Church's contribution towards their education. There was close interaction between the Church leaders and politicians. Lonsdale's observation affirms the scenario:
- Cabinet Ministers and other dignitaries spent much of their public time in opening schools, local leaders' conferences, or urban welfare projects, with speeches that extol civic and Christian virtues. Such occasions for public exhortation are particularly important in Kenya where the political party has been allowed to wither away; the church and other voluntary associations have inevitably become more instrumental to the government in its efforts to enlist popular participation in "nation building" campaigns against poverty, ignorance and disease.⁴²
- 59 The colonial legacy of non-confrontation characterised Church and state at Independence. There was a close relationship between church leaders and Kenyatta's government.
- 60 Since the young Church, in the young nation that had not developed a new model of relationship with the State, the colonial model of Church and State co-operation, drawn from the established churches in UK dominated Kenya like any other former British colony.
- 61 Obviously then the church manifested a positive dimension of co-operation with the state. At the time of Independence Bishop Ndingi observed and condemned the "principle of subsidiarity." He maintained that the Church and State needed to maintain complementary roles in developing the whole person. This was in compliance with the teaching of the gospel concerning the liberation of the human kind.⁴³
- 62 Whereas co-operation was significant at this time, the co-operation between the church and state has been historically known to be a hindrance to the prophetic mission of the church. The clergy who would address the social and political dimension of the gospel were gradually emerging and were beginning to vocalise their observations. Henry Okullu, the then editor of *Lengo* and *Target*, NCKK magazines was the first to publicly protest over some issues. Okullu was later joined by Dr. David Gitari [later to become Bishop and Archbishop] from the CPK who became quite vocal in condemning the engagement of the state in political and social evils.⁴⁴
- 63 Despite the pervasive and influential presence of the mainline protestant churches like CPK (later Anglican) in the education, health, social and economic realm, until the 1980s most of the activities remained on the fringes of the public political debate.⁴⁵

- 64 The argument here is that the leaders of the mainstream religious organisations after independence were strongly supportive of the government of the day. These supportive relations could have been due to three factors, first the shared class concerns on the part of both sets of leaders, religious and temporal. The second was the strong desire by religious leaders to maintain influence, as far as possible, with political elites. And finally there was the normative concern on the part of both sets of elites that political stability was a good thing in itself and so both had to maintain it. Thus pragmatism dominated state religious institution relations in Africa.
- 65 Similarly, the churches had a dense network of structures, bodies and organisations in virtually every social and economic sphere, together with its on-going physical presence among the people in their everyday lives through its religious services which gave it an organisational distinctiveness. The organisational distinctiveness gave it to channels of access. First it had contacts with peoples of all ages, classes, professions, ethnic background and localities gave it unparalleled insight into the needs and moods of people. The organisational web also afforded the means for broad dissemination of its doctrines, social and political view. This two-way web could also serve as a means of communication through the church to the people on behalf of the political elite. The state desired to use this for its own purposes. The churches also enjoyed various facilities such as radio broadcasting time and weekly newsletters published. Due to such relations, these churches were also financially independent, had international connections, which gave them immunity from government control and strengthened their position in the local arena.⁴⁶
- 66 Leaders of these movements quickly realised the necessity of cultivating close links with political leaders in the post-colonial era. Denigrated to lower levels so big men would not want public association but secretly visit them. The responses concerning their observation on the government's efforts to relate with the minority religious groups over time varied.
- 67 In post-colonial Kenya the right to believe in a religion and the freedom to worship were guaranteed in the constitution. Hence from independence serious attempts were made to respect this fundamental right and freedom. And whereas the Kenyan State seemed to have no official religion, religion remained in the forefront of a number of state functions, for example state functions were normally conducted in accordance with the Christian rites. Religion potentially the Protestant version of Christianity was also given ample time even in state radios and televisions. Moreover though Kenya is a secular state the majority of its leaders even this early had a religious leaning. However, the most powerful religious institution in Kenya was the Christian church and that is why most political commentaries were normally directed to the Christian church. In most instances politicians in particular tried to inform the church about the expectations of the government of them and what kind of a church independent Kenya desired. As the late Bishop Henry Okullu put it, "*In Africa today the state seems to be writing the agenda for both itself and for the church.*" Towards the end of the 1980s, mainline church leaders emerged from the stupor and began to critique government activities quite adversely vocal on various issues to the chagrin of the state.
- 68 Kenya became independent in 1963 following the departure of the British who had hitherto ruled the nation. The post-colonial Kenyan State became a secular state with features of liberal democracy such as legislative bodies, the executive and the judiciary. The trend during the 20th century was to work towards the establishment of liberal

democracy although this was always negated by the country's move towards authoritarianism. Although a secular state, religion always influenced both the evolution of the Kenyan State and the character it assumed after Independence.

- 69 In spite, of the claim that the country was secular, the state continued to be involved in many aspects of religion and in fact competed with religious organisations on certain issues. Notable examples included the supply of social services in education and health.
- 70 In matters pertaining to governance (constitution, public order and nationalism) the state initially failed to realise that religion had enough cleavage in the body politic to warrant specific legal provisions. The constitutions did not provide for religion except for the limited reference to fundamental human rights. Tensions persisted in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. The explosive nature of religious activities compelled the state to issue many public orders to curtail break down of law and order by religious groups. In this chapter, an attempt is made to reconstruct the basic history and tenets of some of the religious groups and their interaction with the Kenyan nation state in the period between 1963 and 1978.
- 71 Here we simply identify the religious groups, which emerged in the said and precisely discuss their tenets history and interaction with the state. Secondly, the activities of the religious groups that emerged in colonial times but persisted into the post independence period are also analysed. They were part of the religious terrain, generated own history, added to existing tensions because of the rivalries with other bodies and tend to portray either an extremist or different image on a number of religious and secular issues. Such religious groups exerted considerable control on the members and were quick and ready to fight the state when they felt threatened. These groups are briefly analysed on the basis of evidence already adduced.
- 72 In 1978, when Mzee Kenyatta died he was replaced by President Daniel Toroitich arap Moi. In the Moi Era from 1978–2002 the situation did not dramatically change in the first years. The last part of this period he had become extremely authoritarian that he could not stand any opposition to him. It is at this time that the religious communities stiffly opposed certain misdeeds of the state. In Kenya during the 1980s, when all opposition political activity was banned, stiff opposition emanated from churchmen: the Anglican Bishops Gitari,
- 73 Muge and Okullu, and the Presbyterian Timothy Njoya. At the end of the decade the Catholic bishops began to play a similar role.
- 74 Given the severe limitations imposed on the intermediary structures between state and society, with the context of unlimited exercise of state power, the church took the “substitution” role.⁴⁷ This role was legitimised by the church through its theology. The church indeed enjoyed tremendous power that was widely acknowledged had a large constituency for which it was expected to speak, since it had the cohesive structure, a firm organisation and a solidly unified institution. It was on the ground of this that its luminaries spoke with vigour (e.g. Henry Okullu and others). By mid 1980s, and in the absence of the effective alternative forums, only church leaders had the freedom and the power to criticise without detention. Out of this controversy concerning church state relations would ensue. From early 1980s the right of the church to criticise the state was seriously challenged by the politicians. They acknowledged that the church and the state had emerged as two antagonistic powers and the government viewed the church as impinging on state prerogative.⁴⁸ In the public debate, which emerged in the

1980s and early 1990s, the government sought to establish a clear separation between the prophetic and the political mandating the church to be involved in the prophecies.

- 75 Although Church—State controversy was not unknown during Kenyatta's era, the confrontations between the religious and secular leadership became more frequent under Moi's reign. Concerns were related to the fact that curtailment of civil rights and freedom of expression.
- 76 During the early years of Moi's rule the Roman Catholic Church kept a remarkably low profile on political issues.⁴⁹ The silence of the Catholic Church gained it praises from politicians who maintained that the church had to confine itself to religious issues.⁵⁰ Generally, the KANU government managed to keep the Catholic Church silent on political issues by pouring constantly praises on its leadership.⁵¹
- 77 The Catholic hierarchy unlike in other established mainline churches approached political issues in collegiality.
- 78 As the Church to strengthen its opposition outside parliament, so did the KANU politicians increase their attack on church leaders.⁵² The concerns of the Church leaders were order and good governance and that is why the complaints about rigging were wide spread. But those in the government to civil order by condoning what public considered inimical. The call for change by church leaders and other dissidents was a consequence of people's lack of confidence in the government in power.⁵³
- 79 From 1986 to 1992 Kenya turned into an authoritarian state. The church emerged as defenders of the voiceless in society, at a time when other agitating groups like the Law Society of Kenya had succumbed to harassment. During this period, the church distanced itself from the KANU government in order to fill an opposition vacuum created by a one-party authoritarian state. The state was engaged in the erosion of civil liberties, increasing human rights violations the stifling of all opposition and an unprecedented consolidation of power which the church leaders felt they could address without being thrown into prison.⁵⁴
- 80 The criticisms of the government by Muge, Gitari and Okullu put the KANU politicians on the defensive. They had already christened the CPK as the church of the politics of Kenya, which had been serving the interests of "foreign masters." The bishops had previously been threatened with the withdrawal of their freedom of worship for their failure to "respect" the government.⁵⁵ In its struggle with the KANU government it was defending the citizens against oppression by the state when it was difficult to use any other machinery in Kenya.⁵⁶
- 81 The Church leaders in the second Nyayo era attempted to establish the limits of the power of State, first through their study of the Bible. In defending the people against state extremism, the Church was playing the role the elder. Their concerns were government violation the constitution by its failure to uphold people's rights especially through the provision of excessive power to the presidency. Church leaders constantly cautioned the government against the abuse of its power, which could be generated by authoritarianism.
- 82 Due to both local and international pressure in early December 1991 Moi initiated a special conference of KANU delegates, which resolved to permit the introduction of a multiparty political system. Soon afterwards the National Assembly approved appropriate amendments to the constitution.⁵⁷ It was then announced that both the

subsequent presidential and legislative elections would be in the context of multiparty by March 1993.⁵⁸

- 83 The outspoken church leaders became the real driving forces towards change⁵⁹ and the church acted as the society's conscience by speaking on behalf of whole people. It enabled other dissidents in the government and bound by the oath of allegiance, to oppose the government and the President.
- 84 The Church in the 1990s confronted the State by mobilising the citizenry against the authoritarianism. It created a situation that would lead to accountability of the state to the people the government would become accountable the people it represented. They did this through their sermons and pastoral letters. Inter-church and religious groups not only championed the cause of multiparty democracy, but were also intermediaries both between opposition political parties and governments.⁶⁰ The NCKK on behalf of the member churches viewed democracy as a way of life and argued that democracy essentially involved placing value on humankind. Humankind possessed fundamental freedoms and human rights, making all people equal before the law.⁶¹
- 85 The church's role in the multiparty era (through the NCKK) was a major breakthrough in the history of the Christian Church in Kenya. First it forced a dialogue with the government through the media and through the KRC. Secondly it pressurised the government to repeal Section 2A and return the country to a multiparty system and finally it launched a teaching programme to expose the citizenry to the demands of multiparty. And thirdly it educated the citizens about defending themselves against manipulation by those in power by fully participating in the democratisation process.
- 86 The clarion call for change by the church and other political dissidents was strongly resisted by the KANU government. It challenged the government on matters related to accountability and protection of its people. It raised the issues of democracy and good governance on behalf of the voiceless Kenyans. This was mainly because of the failure of government to render good governance. In the prevailing circumstances, the church was the strongest challenger of President Daniel arap Moi and his KANU government. The churches open demand for change in the political system where the regime made it the strongest force in the struggle for multiparty democracy in Kenya.⁶² But why would the state regard the role of the Mainline Churches. This was because it was a force to reckon with. In any case they had related with the church earlier times as a capable ally.

Alternative Visions and the State: Indigenous Religious Groups

- 87 Soon after the establishment of colonial rule African response seemed to assume different focus. Some collaborated, others turned to violence but then there was also the emergence of violent cults and religious independency. African churches arose between the World Wars as a reaction to situations characterised by severe instability and change following European conflict. They helped deal with the effects of cultural and political subjugation during colonial period. At the end of colonial rule they did not die off and they have survived to date for apparently different reasons.
- 88 Such movements were the manifestation of popular religious movements with a number of interrelated religious, social and political goals. The emergence of such

religions was often explained in terms of the unique pressures and transformations associated with colonisation.⁶³

- 89 Their emergence in colonial times was seen as contrasting with and in opposition to colonial religious institutions whether those of mission churches or of reified traditional religion. Hence nearly all religious movements whether witchcraft eradication movements or millenarian sects, have been treated as explicable in terms of special pressures and transformations of colonialism. One such movement was *Dini ya Msambwa* (henceforth *DyaM*). It could have risen because of number of reasons such as the context of colonial oppression or as a response to cultural and psychological tensions and not expressions of political antagonism.⁶⁴
- 90 Buijtenhujis challenged and disputed Audrey Wipper's (1977) interpretation of the *DyaM* movement in western Kenya. Predictably, he found that *DyaM* "is not a political protest movement but a social and cultural protest movement." Meanwhile a markedly ferocious exchange between Jan De Wolf (1983) and Audrey Wipper (1983) herself further spelled out their conflicting interpretations of this Western Kenyan movement.
65
- 91 These attempts to portray African religious movements as either purer than inferior to political activity are no more convincing, however, than previous notions that they were essentially part of the sequence of anti-colonial nationalism. Few can study these movements without feeling that even if they were not unequivocally anti colonial they constituted a form of politics; without sensing rationality in their irrationality; without being struck by the instrumentality of their symbols. *DyaM* was a good example of these African indigenous responses colonial situation.
- 92 Basically, *DyaM* was fighting for space or recognition within the colonial system, which would neither listen nor provide the space. The founder had grievances, which seemed fair. Elijah was a defiant and impatient person and ignored threats from the church and did not obey orders from the Native Tribunal Court, which he served from 1937 to 1942. He was clear that for his people to be accommodated within the colonial space they needed a religion firmly rooted in their traditions and way of life, a religion that would be comprehensible and meaningful as well as sympathetic to the peoples social code. Christianity was not a place to feel at home, they needed a religion, which could blend African traditions and the more wholesome parts of Christianity.
- 93 *DyaM* attracted a large following, which considered it "our own religion" as distinct from the established churches.⁶⁶ Despite descriptions from a hostile colonial system, his members regarded him as messiah, and his religion as the rightful and true religion. For example, they declared, "Europeans have long troubled us; we have now got our own God. Let us go forward."⁶⁷ As the leader of the sect Elijah fought for space. He was able to exploit the grievances of the people, and champion their cause, win their support. Despite government measures to stamp it out by making itself intolerable to the members, they continued with their activities by night on Mt. Elgon. They threatened the administration with death and sent all sorts of letters to them. Throughout the attitude was defiant and arrogant. Again throughout this period for *DyaM* politics and religion were intermixed. The state used state violence to respond. But despite efforts to guzzle the movement it spread further afield.⁶⁸ Moreover, it survived into independent Kenya.
- 94 Obviously then emergence of organised protest movements among Kenyan communities came mainly as a result of growing discontent against the policies of the

missions and the colonial administration. The minority independent Christian Churches/culture movements were automatically rendered strange bedfellows with the state, the moment they delinked from the Mission bodies and made their own concoctions. Evidently Christianity was largely associated with European colonial domination of large numbers of Africans. Many left to join the burgeoning African Independent Churches and cults.

- 95 At the declaration of the state of emergency in 1952, the independent churches and other suspect religious practices suffered a blow. Some operated underground whereas others were totally banned and survived from operation and only in name. *DyaM* was banned but its operations went underground. Independence was the occasion for its re-emergence in public. The post-independent government, however, endorsed the re-emergence of all religious groups although *DyaM* ignored Kenyatta's call for its immediate registration.
- 96 The re-emergence of *DyaM* in the post-colonial period, witnessed the release of Masinde and some of his followers from detention. When Masinde was released from prison in 1961, after 13 years in detention, he was given a hero's welcome and indication of the special place Masinde held in the hearts of the people.⁶⁹
- 97 On April 12, 1964, Jomo Kenyatta revoked the colonial order that had declared *DyaM* an illegal society. Those imprisoned nevertheless had to complete their sentences. The new government, which took power in 1963, told *DyaM* to register like any other religious organisation in order to resume its activities and obtain official recognition. The alternative was to disband and refrain from secret activities. Despite the fact that it was not registered, *DyaM* continued to hold meetings and the government arrests persisted because its meetings were regarded as illegal.
- 98 In May 1964, *DyaM* was registered and one of its objectives was to abide by the law of the land and to be non-political. But its constitution remained a mere piece of paper, for soon after, Masinde got embroiled in the crosscurrents of Kenyan politics. Rumours were rife indicating that Elijah would head a new party, since he was quite categorical that he would not join any of the existing parties, which were disunited. He said "*I want to tell the political leaders to unite on every major national issue. I shall ask them why they are in so much disputes, delaying the country's independence.*"⁷⁰
- 99 He later gave support to KANU in an area predominated by Kenya African Democratic Union (henceforth KADU) and referred to Kenyatta as "*my greatest friend*" at a KANU rally in Kitale, reassuring that both of them suffered for the cause of saving Kenya. He even stated that God had revealed secrets to him during his sleep. The Kitale politicians did not take this well.⁷¹ His own community was angered by him on this matter. Moreover his followers began to engage in a number of disruptive activities. They invaded missionary centres and ordered them to leave. Most of such incidents occurred during the 1964–65 Congo crisis. One of them occasioned the rush of police reinforcements to Kimilili because it was feared that *DyaM* members could easily resort to violence against the American missionaries in the vicinity.
- 100 The community was also adversely affected by the *DyaM* activities. The overnight ceremonies particularly night drumming was a major disturbance and he was warned by the local chief. He led his followers in sacrifices and condemned those who had purchased land in Maitri hill declaring that *DyaM* followers would snatch the lands for free. He even castigated several policemen for spying on their meetings and caned two members arrived at the venue of the meeting in a police car. Meanwhile the Africans

who owned land, reported to the powers that be, their fears of DyaM's activities with regard to land.⁷²

- 101 In the first years of independence, DyaM's major project was the construction of their own schools because their adherents could not raise fees to take their children to government and mission schools. Despite lack of facilities and teachers, they proceeded with the construction of schools and some parents withdrew their children from government schools and enrolled them in DyaM schools, which provided free education. The District Education Officer repeatedly warned Masinde to either register his schools or close them down to no avail. Perhaps years of opposition to colonial government had taken their toll on Msambwa's amenability to any government authority. The government was not ready to take what it considered disobedience subsequently the government charged DyaM for starting illegal schools. Their case was heard in Bungoma in November 1965 and those responsible were fined and released.
- 102 Masinde was becoming a jailbird with numerous charges against him. On September 23, 1968 Masinde was again released for taking the law into his own hands when he beat up Grace Nasimiyu for philandering. On this date they visited her at work, a local bar in Kimilili and made a declaration that it was illegal for harlots to operate in town and beat her up, forcefully took her back to her former husband, and ordered her to defrock before them for cleansing ceremony. Soon after the function, she reported to police and both Masinde and her husband were arrested and given terms of two years and one year in prison respective.⁷³
- 103 Masinde's confrontations with the authorities took on a characteristic pattern, his confrontations were in public places, they were showy events and yet such confrontations were significant for each party concerned as a test of their power. For instance, in May 1972 in Kenyatta Avenue Kitale at around 1 o'clock, he began to stop all vehicles along that road because they seemed to interfere with the crowd he was addressing. Efforts by skeletal police who happened to arrive at the scene to stop him were futile, when they went to seek reinforcement, Masinde had departed with his followers.
- 104 Masinde's predilection for confrontations with the authorities was also reciprocated by the powers that be. The police had had enough of Masinde's disturbances and were on the alert for any excuse to keep him in jail. He was severally arrested on charges of "*conduct likely to cause a breach of peace, incitement to defiance of lawful authority, obstructing police officer in carrying out his duty, resisting arrest, being a member of unlawful society and holding unlawful meetings.*" In the 1960s and the 1970s he had so many cases that some ran concurrently. For Masinde and his followers, the police was their enemy number one.
- 105 Masinde complained against police harassment and often for his redetention to save him from police threats. But the persistence of Masinde's revolutionary activities in postcolonial times caused concern. The community was experiencing him daily due to his confrontation with authority. He was an individual condemned and ridiculed, viewed as an agitator and not a nationalist. Some went to the extent of requesting his detention. Masinde's erratic moods and eccentricities were no longer admitted, in fact, the opinion grew that he was demented. His followers also continually reduced in numbers.⁷⁴ They were tired of paying the fines. Masinde further compounded his diminishing numbers of followers by denouncing Kenyatta's government as one of usurpers and predicted that Kenyatta would be short. In December 1966, the Attorney

General Charles Njonjo regretted that the government had released Masinde because it was premature. He claimed that Masinde's release was based on assurance of some of its members concerning his transformation and that he would henceforth cooperate with the government. Njonjo declared *DyaM* a bogus religion and used as a tool to earn some income by Masinde. Consequently, the government continued to keep *DyaM* under surveillance.⁷⁵ In 1968 the Vice President warned that *DyaM* would be banned if it persisted in holding political ideologies and destructive tendencies to disunite the people of North Nyanza.⁷⁶ Finally in October 1968, the Attorney General Charles Njonjo proscribed *DyaM* as a "*society dangerous to the good government of Kenya*" because it preached sedition and revolt and not the word of God.⁷⁷

- 106 In the same year, tangible property owned by *DyaM* was lost, the Elijah Masinde Building fund account with Barclays Bank was closed on government orders and its balance of KSh 1,557.35 confiscated in accordance with the societies Acts of 1968 and the movement was proscribed in the same year.
- 107 Some sections of the local Bukusu community also dismissed the religiosity/spirituality of *DyaM* due to its syncretistic nature, preaching politics instead of religion, member's failure to subscribe to local standards and the more general customs of the Christian behaviour (they drank excessively, smoked bhang, committed adultery) and engagement in idolatry. The locals described the followers as fanatics, uneducated, ignorant, lazy, no progressive, emotional, and immoral and malcontents. But these were subjective designations by local people. Negative stereotypes both in the colonial and postcolonial periods, but perhaps the cohort of followers were different in both periods.
- 108 The loyal members were persuaded that Masinde was an innocent victim of the police and government harassment and were appalled that an African government not only arrested him but also treated him like any ordinary lawbreaker. They expressed fury that President Kenyatta failed to intervene on behalf of (the messiah) an individual who had agitated for Kenya's political independence and was even detained for more years than Kenyatta. Moreover, he had supported Kenyatta in his bid for power. According to his followers, Masinde was undergoing persecution and disappointment and bitterness gave rise to a myth, that Kenyatta's government was doomed because of the maltreatment of Masinde. They prophesied that a new prophet would emerge overthrow Kenyatta and Masinde would rule and his former persecutors would seek his forgiveness and pardon.⁷⁸
- 109 In 1975, while Masinde was serving a jail term, the movement, as far as could be ascertained, became inactive. This did not mark the demise of the movement because soon after his release he was again popping comments on all issues even political leadership. Several times the courts referred him to Mathari Mental Hospital to ascertain his sanity but the moment he was discharged he would consistently comment on the political order of the day. He led his group in agitation even at the time when detention without trial was legal and even president Moi was uncomfortable with him. But in 1987 he died as Kenyans were hounded by political intolerance. His movement survives and may not necessarily be politically active.
- 110 It is obvious that despite the coexistence of the minority religious groups and the state, they had numerous issues of grievances, thwarted hopes, state manipulation that caused them to voice their marginality.

- 111 The pressure of the minority religious groups during the Moi era seemed to be minimal, possibly because most of them lacked the capacity to handle trouble at this level. Most of them were also engaged in internal wrangling, that they frequently called for state intervention. Those that wrangled lost their credibility as forces to reckon with. The engagement of the minority churches in politics may not be significant, because for many of them politics was never an issue because their concerns related to their maintenance and retention of their religious traditions. They would rise against government if it interfered with their religious traditions. They would respond violently.
- 112 In the late eighties and early 1990s many religious groups which were difficult to categorise begun to emerge. They seemed to have an unclear agenda but which had political overtones. An example of these was *Mungiki*, a supposed religious movement clothed with diverse aspirations ranging from political to religio-cultural and socio-economic liberation. One of the dramatic aspects of the *Mungiki* was its prophetic and vocal fight for the political liberation of Kenyans through a return to indigenous shrines.
- 113 *Mungiki* was a religio-political movement composed mainly of large masses of Gikuyu origin, mostly youths in the 18-40 age groups with exceptional cases in the 40-60-age bracket. In the 1990s, the movement was estimated, by its national co-ordinator, to have about one and a half million members, including 400,000 women. This number remained questionable, but their members were distributed around Nairobi, particularly within the slums, and scattered in Central and Rift Valley Provinces.
- 114 Its membership comprised mostly the victims of land clashes on the eve of the 1992 multiparty general elections in Kenya, the majority of whom had minimal education and hence composed mainly of low-income earners in the *jua kali* (appropriate technology or “hot sun”) sector. The group strongly resented exploitation and the accumulation of massive wealth by a small proportion of Kenyans, especially in top political ranks and at the expense of the masses, which were left landless and jobless. *Mungiki* followers demonstrated their goodwill by sharing resources among themselves.
- 79
- 115 Since the group comprised the less advantaged in society they equated the term *Mungiki* with oppression, exploitation, and alienation of the masses. Initially the aim of *Mungiki* was to sensitise people against the government, which they accused of starting and fuelling the 1992 clashes. It started administering oaths of unity to its members to effectively retaliate against the violence. The movement immediately alarmed the government to the extent that to date its individual members and its assemblies have been victimised by the police.⁸⁰
- 116 *Mungiki* members were initially part of the Tent of the Living God—a sect founded by Ngonywa wa Gakonya in 1987, with a large following in Central, Nairobi and Rift Valley Provinces. Ngonywa nurtured the idea of Tent movement from as early as 1960. He started sensitising people about African religious beliefs to the elders chagrin and joined the Akorino sect briefly in 1980s, before breaking away. Thereafter, he engaged in rigorous public campaigns, which were banned in 1990 after a mass rally held at the Kamukunji grounds in Nairobi. Consequently, Ngonywa was arrested and imprisoned for two years. His release, through a presidential amnesty, coincided with the clamour for political pluralism in Kenya. Leaders of the Tent decided to form a political party, which they argued, would play a role as the forerunner to a religious culmination. The

Democratic Movement (DEMO), a political party, was born, with Ngonyo as its interim leader but was denied registration because of its religious background⁸¹ or, as its leaders argue, it was blocked by the ruling party KANU from participation in the 1992 parliamentary elections, for fear it might win. Ngonyo later collaborated with KANU, a move that caused some of his followers to denounce him as evidence that he lacked principles.⁸²

- 117 *Mungiki* was a splinter group more vibrant than the Tent of the Living God. It maintained secrecy due to fear of being hounded and subsequently detained. However, the group benefited from freedom of worship, expression and association with the advent of multiparty politics in 1992.
- 118 The main objective of the *Mungiki* was to unite and mobilise the Kenyan masses and to fight against the yoke of mental slavery. Although initially exclusively a Gikuyu affair, the group expected to embrace all other Kenyans through similar but autonomous movements that would revive the heritage of other African peoples.⁸³ *Mungiki* had four aims: to unite the Gikuyu people, and consequently, other Kenyans; to redeem the Gikuyu from Western culture brought about by Christianity and colonialism; to liberate the Kenyan masses from political oppression and economic exploitation; and to restore Africans to their indigenous values, culture and religion.
- 119 The notions of the denunciation and repudiation of foreign worship, specifically Christianity, and the reversion to indigenous shrines caused much controversy, and misunderstanding resulting in a chorus of condemnation of the *Mungiki* movement by many Kenyans. The church and the state, in particular, were quite vocal in condemning this belief. Given that the sect seemed to propagate a subversive doctrine and agenda the Church needed to reject and combat it decisively, in particular its demonstrations. Its action amounted to a clear onslaught against the established churches. Further, it seemed a fundamentalist movement with a religious, political and cultural agenda: its slogans were heretical and its philosophy of isolation was a dangerous move to alienate the Gikuyu community and set it on a collision course with the government and other communities.⁸⁴ Its followers denounced ferociously the Christian faith with all its beliefs and practices due to their irrelevance. Christianity and its appendage, the Bible created mental slavery and mental colonisation from which the Gikuyu and all other Kenyans had to rid themselves off. Since God would not support corruption, corrupt Christians were not genuine worshippers of God.⁸⁵
- 120 *Mungiki* emphasised the political polarity in Kenya during Moi's reign was a consequence of abandoning African culture and religion. They criticised Moi's political system for its persistent oppression, amassing of wealth through seasoned corruption, grabbing public land, bribery, and economic exploitation of the masses.
- 121 *Mungiki* associated every problem ailing Kenya with Moi. However they were also aware that Europeans had also strategically planned and created economic hardships that plagued Kenya throughout time. Neo-colonialism escalated the economic hardships. Given that Western religion was also used to oppress Africans, *Mungiki* would in turn use its religion to mobilise and fight for African rights and identity. They vehemently rejected the accusation that they were regressive. *Mungiki* proposed an indigenous religio-political revolution. Members operated like terror gangs. They raided police stations, engaged in bloody battles over control of local public transport and repulsed police raids.⁸⁶ As a result, the authorities always described it as illegal organisation and disrupted all its meetings.

- 122 The local press reported Mungiki's clashes with the authorities. Church leaders and government officials continuously and vehemently condemned the movement. The KANU government was so anxious about the sect and several times the Member of Parliament for Molo, Kihika Kimani, paraded groups of deadlocked youths at presidential rallies in Nakuru town, introducing them as repentant *Mungiki* followers. The *Mungiki* leadership swiftly denounced these as impostors used to gain political advantage. According to the sect's followers, conversion to *Mungiki* was irreversible.
- 123 The sect has, however, clearly acquired impetus from several political events. A case in point occurred on December 12, 1998.
- 124 Waruinge organised his own congress at Mukurweini-wa-Gathanga the mythical home of origin for the Gikuyu people, 17 kilometres from Murang'a town since it is situated on government land, gazetted as a National Monument on November 19, 1998, it was controlled by the state. Chanting *Mau Mau* war songs and reciting traditional prayers, the sect hoisted their flag with the stern warning that they would not tolerate further disruption of their religious activities by the government.
- 125 The Murang'a County Council, under whose jurisdiction the shrine fell, immediately declared it out of bounds for the *Mungiki*. The *Mungiki* invoked their constitutional right to hold prayers at the Heritage site at any time, even during the public celebrations. They based this claim on the constitution which allowed freedom of worship, and which did not stipulate time and venue. The only non-Gikuyu epithet read *Muungano wa Ukombozi*, the Kiswahili words for "liberation movement."
- 126 Members constantly expressed concern for the politics of contemporary Kenya and bitterly lamented KANU's machinations that split the original Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (FORD) party which would have removed KANU from power. They criticised the widespread political oppression, poverty and violence experienced by Kenyans at the hands of government agents in the same breath as they condemned cultural and religious imperialism. (OI: Scattered members).
- 127 Their protests were sometimes very violent, for instance, on Sunday 3 March 2002, 200 to 300 *Mungiki* adherents terrorised the residents in a section of Nairobi's Kariobangi North estate. They rampaged through the busy streets and alleyways, armed with an assortment of *panga*, swords, iron bars and knives, violently assaulting local residents and passers-by. The carriage was gruesome. By morning, 20 residents were confirmed dead, and a further 31 had been admitted to hospital with serious injuries.⁸⁷
- 128 The attitude of the police and government to their activities at this time raised a number of questions. These questions became all sharper following the attack, when it was revealed that Kasarani MP, Adolf
- 129 Muchiri, had reported his fears about the tension in Kariobangi two weeks prior to the massacre. The police and office of the president was aware because the information had been appropriately given them. On the very day of the attack, Muchiri on three occasions contacted the police to inform them of the imminent violence by *Mungiki* was likely in Kariobangi.
- 130 Public concern over police failure to take adequate steps to prevent the violence was deepened by the reports of police heavy-headedness, insensitivity and general incompetence in rounding-up supposed "suspects" upon their arrival in Kariobangi some hours following the attack. It was almost evident that the State could not guarantee the full application of the law. Granted, the law promised a lot, but no one

was arrested in connection with the killings and to date that is a silent chapter in Kenya's history. It was also evident that the state kept altering its stance against *Mungiki*. Failure of the police to do their primary job of dealing with crime and preventing breakdown of law and order was evident in this incident.

- 131 The rising tension gave birth to injury and death due to the absence of civil order and lack of a symbol of authority they could trust to arbitrate their conflicts and punish wrongdoing as well as an authoritative deterrent to the expression of their violent emotions. Evidently there was a vacuum in the reassurance of law and order in their lives, for all weekend, the Government was comatose. But possibly the ambivalent behaviour could have been due to the states change of stance regarding *Mungiki*.
- 132 *Mungiki* members like others lacked employment and resorted to supplying the political thuggery and violence; they re-engineered themselves into security managers parallel to the police. They arrogated to themselves police powers and duties. They actually succeeded in creating an image of efficiency, which the police lacked. They manned *matatu* terminus, patrolled estates and arbitrated in disputes.
- 133 Underlying these fears was the suspicion that the slaughter had been politically motivated. There was widespread speculation, reported in all Kenyan newspapers, that *Mungiki* members were in fact protected by senior politicians, that the violence had been orchestrated for political ends, and that *Mungiki* even had recruits within the ranks of the police force. This conclusion was reached because before 2002 police had been violently breaking up *Mungiki* meetings, but in 2002 it had been allowed to hold rallies in Nairobi, Thika and Nyandarua. Some KANU officials even participated in these meetings and donated money.⁸⁸ Many analysts saw the Kariobangi attack as symptomatic of Kenya's growing culture of political violence, making connections with other incidents of vigilantism elsewhere in the country and with previous cases of politically mobilised inter-ethnic violence surrounding the elections campaigns of 1992 and 1997.
- 134 From its inception in the early 1990s, *Mungiki* was one of Kenya's most controversial religious sects, demonised by all and sundry. Mainstream Church leaders, the authorities, and President Moi described it as "*illegal, Satanic and violent*," viewing it as a sinister, anti-Government movement motivated by tribal atavism. On the other hand, it was supported to the hilt by a few Members of Parliament from Kikuyu-dominated areas in Central Province, parts of Rift Valley and Nairobi. Thus, to many Kenyans, the sect was a Kikuyu movement with a hidden political agenda.
- 135 *Mungiki* had many lives and in intense moments disappeared and re-emerged with new force for instance in August 2001 everyone, was taken aback by the new-look *Mungiki* Sect during one of its meeting. The speakers sounded transformed and the members were unusually law-abiding, peaceful and conciliatory in their political utterances. They exuded confidence and pride as they trooped, cycled and rode to the industrial town's Starehe grounds, while local traders took no chances and closed shop in case there was a violent confrontation between the visitors and police.⁸⁹ At the Thika meeting just before the 2002 general elections they also seemed well organised, the venue properly arranged and sufficiently decorated. At the climax of the meeting Mr Waruinge announced that the sect would be transformed into a political movement—not a party—targeting 150 of the 210 constituencies through the various parties. He was clear about its financial ability, and the qualities they expected an aspiring presidential candidate. This time the police allowed the sect to hold what the co-ordinator

described as an “annual delegates’ meeting” to chart out its future stand in the socio-political landscape. To observers, the sudden Government turn around to allow *Mungiki* to hold a meeting, especially one with such a strong political agenda, was unusual.

- 136 The Moi era had paradoxes for *Mungiki* the beginning was hectic but later there was change as they related well with the state obtaining much encouragement. They engaged in public demonstrations with state approval. Moi at this time was described as a wise and understanding person, a visionary leader and with the conception of the value of morality. Due to the fine relations, *Mungiki* experienced phenomenal growth and got a lot of moral and financial support from KANU politicians. It is possible that Moi’s regime tolerated *Mungiki* for political gain.
- 137 As at 2002, *Mungiki* leaders engaged in critiquing politicians the Moi government was apprehensive about. They criticised Mwai Kibaki, then official leader of the opposition in the then Parliament, and the Kikuyu-based Gikuyu, Embu and Meru association (GEMA). *Mungiki* seemed to have been financed to erode the influence of Mr Kibaki’s Democratic Party in Central Province. Their appreciation of Moi for his decision ready to step down in 2002 elections in favour of a young contender seemed unbelievable given their past relationship. To many observers, Waruinge’s move was reminiscent of Mr Ngonywa wa Gakonya’s Tent of the Living God sect, which was very vocal against the government before the first multi-party elections in 1992, but which faded away as soon as KANU romped home. So as the clock ticked closer to 2002 General Election, It was interesting to note where this born-again movement was headed.⁹⁰
- 138 Inferences could be made concerning this rally, first, that the *Mungiki* rally was sanctioned by KANU and second, that *Mungiki* was emerging from the tribal garb to entertain the yearning for national unity. Ironically, they affirmed that they would be decisive in this action and not merely watch the country “go to the dogs.”
- 139 Due to its activities during the pre-election fever, *Mungiki* was initially not accepted soon after Moi left power however, it garnered support from strange quarters. In 2003 the US State Department in its 2003 Annual report on International Religious Freedom criticised the Kenya Government of “harassing” the *Mungiki* sect.⁹¹ Kenya was accused of “frequently harassing and periodically arresting and detaining” members of *Mungiki*. Perhaps the State Department’s critique may have been misplaced because obviously the report did not take cognisance of the many violent incidents the sect had been implicated in.
- 140 The State Department’s assessment of religious freedom, especially regarding the handling of *Mungiki*, seemed be weird but it had a precedent in Kenya itself. This opinion was also expressed four months after the Government banned the sect along with 17 other organisations in March 2002⁹² by the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK), when it released a report in praise of some of *Mungiki* practices and beliefs as “progressive.” The report hailed the sect for preaching self-reliance, hard work and independence. NCCCK report was amazing because the oldest umbrella body for Kenyan Protestants considered female genital mutilation and tobacco sniffing, as the sect’s only “retrogressive practices.” This countered the individual churches opinion about *Mungiki*.
- 141 *Mungiki*’s presence as religious groups in Kenya would be considered a sign of the religions muddle for while religion might have played a role in its formation observers believed that it was no longer a key characteristic of the group. It claimed to espouse a return to Kikuyu traditional religion and cultural practices. But as at 2003, its members

were freed to join any religion and indeed its own national co-ordinator Ndura Waruinge converted to Christianity in 2003. This was also evidenced earlier in 2002 when they tried to woo Muslims to become their allies. It failed. Mungiki's initial religious mission espousing the Kikuyu culture seemed to wane.

- 142 At the inception of the Kibaki government at the start of 2003 *Mungiki* had become on its own preoccupied with arrogance and self assumed importance that it began issuing numerous threats. The security officers responded to this severely with the blessings of the government until *Mungiki* followers had to change identity. In the year 2004 there was a resurgence of its activities and the government remained mum raising numerous suspicions concerning its relations with the majority of the politicians of the Kikuyu ethnicity. *Mungiki* retreated into a level of secrecy that seeking information from and about them became an extensively risky affair. This remains the position to date and available evidence indicates that in any agitation, the government might find it a viable tool to cause fear and acrimony.
- 143 In the Kibaki era, *Mungiki* adherents experienced total harassment, intimidation, persecutions, arrests and systematic extermination of the group and a “*demonisation of the religious movement*.” The government even encouraged *Mungiki* members to defect to other religions. The minister for internal security vowed in 2003 to completely destroy *Mungiki* and these immensely annoyed members who went underground. However in the same year the state's ambivalence regarding *Mungiki* was noteworthy. It began to be used as a tool to terrorise and subjugate other Kenyans. Indeed its *Mungiki* forces that were used by President Kibaki and his cronies to fight in the towns of the Rift Valley and Nairobi on behalf of the Kikuyu ethnicity during the post election violence in Kenya in the recent past. In 2008 after the post election violence *Mungiki* made a number of stand-offs to which the state machinery failed to respond leaving the population wondering and speculating.
- 144 The evident ambivalence with regard to *Mungiki* in both the Moi and Kibaki governments occurred only before they knew how to utilise *Mungiki*. At this moment they meted violence on *Mungiki* but the moment they discovered that *Mungiki* could also be manipulated and controlled, they withdrew into their cocoons.
- 145 Conclusively this religio-political movement adopted Gikuyu religion as a weapon to challenge political and religious authority. In *Mungiki*, religion became a tool to mobilise the masses for active resistance and to claim liberation and justice, as demonstrated by its condemnation of ethnicity, tribalism, nepotism, oppression, bribery, corruption, idleness, immorality, drug abuse, crime, and so on. However, despite their efforts to condemn ethnicity and tribalism, by establishing a purely Gikuyu sect in terms of culture, beliefs, and practices, they were promoting the same vices they opposed and alienated many Kenyans.
- 146 *Mungiki* operated on the shoulders of the Radical Restoration—“Tent of the Living God,” which emerged in 1987. According to informants, the leader was the radical Ngonywa wa Gakonya, then the 52 year-old leader of a “back-to-the-golden-Kikuyu-culture” movement known as the “Tent (dwelling) of the Living God” and advocate of “Africanity” (his word). Ngonywa wa Gakonya was an outspoken advocate of traditional African ways of worship. He had interesting observations:
- 147 African religion is perhaps the oldest in the history of mankind. But the [conventional] Church has ignored its existence and its values. We have come to demand the return to our culture through our churches. Most people do not understand religion. The

greatest religion is in the homestead that is why when there is a crisis, we go back to our homesteads.

- 148 Basic tenets of the movement were straightforward and, according to Ngonya, “*similar to the beliefs of the Zulu and other African communities across the continent.*” Myths of Kikuyu origin focused on Mt. Kenya, toward which all worshippers of *Ngai* (God) turned their faces when in formal prayer.

Ngai, the creator God, gave birth to the human community and provided all the resources necessary for life. It was wrong to ask or beg of God for sustenance. Ngai’s abundance was already with men. Human beings had to use these resources and fulfill their obligations by procreating and nurturing their offspring’s in an orderly manner.

- 149 Adherents of the faith had been widely exposed to, or, according to them, variously “destroyed” by Christianity. Indeed, Ngonya himself was raised in a family with membership in the Presbyterian Church. Due to a series of disappointments, among which was his fathers refusal to organise for his timely circumcision, he became intensely interested in the Kikuyu tradition. This interest was further piqued when he missed a scholarship, which he felt was rightly his due. Beginning in 1974, he left his formal sector job and engaged in the profitable business of selling herbal medicines. In the 1980s, he was exposed to traditional ritual gatherings, eventually meeting with Kikuyu elders under the rubric: “The Tent of the Living God.” However, such people seemed closely tied to aspects of the biblical Old Testament and were poorly informed about to traditional Kikuyu beliefs. He chose to attain great understanding of traditional faith with his family as the focus and it was only later that it became possible, eventually, to address public audiences.

- 150 Despite the fact that he was hounded, during the early 1990s by church leaders and the international community as an “anti-Christ,” he was able, by 1997, to “ordain” 18 candidates into a form of elderhood. Meanwhile, his relationship with traditional practitioners extended beyond the Kikuyu to include the Meru and Embu, with whom they had spiritual and cultural affinity. He did not perceive himself as an ordinary elder, though he ordained and related with other elders and a Council of Elders. He understood that this council was neither recognised by the Kikuyu people generally, nor by the Kenya government, as an authoritative Kikuyu voice. Ngonya perceived himself as a visionary, a spiritual leader (he allowed the term “evangelist”), in the tradition of his grandfather, identifying the sickness of modern Kenyan society and pointing toward a restoration of the tradition as a source of well being.

- 151 Ngonya affirmed the following value and faith elements,⁹³ three essential foods—*nyama* (meat), *asali* (honey), *maziwa* (milk); three essential values—*amani* (peace), *upendo* (love), *umoja* (unity); three essential colors—*red* (blood), *black* (people), *green* (land-vegetation).

⁹⁴ The Tent of the Living God sustained a strong sense of a return to the origins of Kikuyu culture and identity. In the context of this research, the Tent of the Living God community serves as a purist, but so far a marginalised, reconstruction of the traditional Kikuyu community. However truncated, it must be recognised as one of the current expressions of Kikuyu religio-cultural tradition, perhaps one end of a broad continuum giving voice and shape to an idealised version of the world of the elders and *Ngai*, the *Mwathani* (the greatest ruler).⁹⁵

- 152 Concerning the *Mungiki* sect, he stated that the members were initially his followers, but strayed when they began to advocate for women’s forceful circumcision, and

offering of sacrifices in ways not prescribed by Kikuyu tradition. Ngonyo freely acknowledged that his movement appealed to low income people of Kenya. He recognised that his group would not exercise any influence on the government of Kenya and on the body politic. He was unable to register a political party known as DEMO and ended up establishing the Cultural Trust of Kenya, which he claimed was registered, despite the lack of the evidence of an official certificate. This trust enabled him to seek monetary contributions from Kenyans and other donor agencies.

- 153 Later Ngonyo joined KANU and this caused his followers to feel betrayed that they sought to eliminate him and he fled for his life. Ngonyo was later to warm his way back into association with Ford Asili one of the political parties. Ngonyo swore by God that he never defected to KANU in spite of television footage where he was welcomed on various occasions to the presidential dais by the president Moi himself. He did not have his traditional regalia on but was clad in a Kaunda suit.
- 154 These indigenous religious groups did not differ from other religious groups that emerged in violence but after a while necessarily manipulated by state functionaries. Their violence and the human rights violations could be committed by both sides but somehow after a while interests would begin to converge and the religious violence would no longer be violently responded to by the state. This would mean that they would be tethered and made useful tools by the state.

Independence in the Church and State

- 155 The African independent churches in Kenya were movements that developed and broke away from the mainstream colonial churches, funded and controlled by missionaries. They represented, among other things, protest against the monopoly of church authority by the missionaries; their resentment was exacerbated by strongly authoritative patterns of church organisation. The result was the emergence of African churches. These were breakaway bodies and in Kenya these breakaway ecclesiastical bodies are currently referred to as independent churches since most of them emphasised independence from missionary content. Independence as Mbiti points out is chiefly the terms of organisation, leadership, decisions, finance and direction.⁹⁶ A.F. Wallis has clarified the term independent church to include churches where the leadership is African, their ministry overwhelmingly African, and their missionary direction minimal. According to this, some of the independent churches are nowadays virtually indistinguishable from the mainline churches from which they sprang. To examine this phenomenon of independent churches, it is significant to inquire into some of their causes⁹⁷ but this is beyond our scope.
- 156 Obviously the emergence of organised protest movements among Kenyan communities came mainly as a result of growing discontent against the policies of the missions and the colonial administration. They began quite early in Kenya. Among the Kikuyu there was dissatisfaction with the missions and the colonial government over land, labour and cultural issues among many other questions before 1920. Prior to 1919, these protests were haphazardly made manner by individuals who felt directly affected by the policies.⁹⁸ The individual protests ended in 1919 when organised protest began with the formation of Kikuyu Association and the Young Kikuyu Association.⁹⁹ Whereas the Independent Churches had not emerged at this point religion was getting engaged by the Kikuyu Political Organisations like the East African Association and the Kikuyu

Central Association (henceforth KCA). Initially the protest was about mission lands, but by 1929 the issues expanded to include clitoridectomy a contentious issue between the missions and the adherents since 1900. The missions' fight was great and the Kikuyu response through the Kikuyu Central Association was also vehement. A division was imminent and indeed by end of 1929 there was a mass exodus of the Agikuyu from the mission churches. They sang *muthirigu* questioning the identity of those who remained in church.¹⁰⁰ Out of this background emerged the African Orthodox Church and the African Independent Pentecostal Churches (henceforth AIPC). The AIPC was associated with the Kikuyu Independent Schools Association founded in 1929. They accepted polygamy and female circumcision among other practices the community could not discard but there was no great theological difference between it and the Anglican and Presbyterian Churches. The operations of this church began as school prayers in a prayer house, later transformed into the erection of a church.¹⁰¹ After 1937 the growth of AIPC was gradual but steady. The influence went beyond Central Province to the Rift Valley with more ordained ministers.

157 From the time of its emergence, the move towards Mau Mau had made inroads into the church. Insurgence and the sect had something in common—revolt against the White man. They were also trying to get followers opposed to these white “intruders.” It was indeed a perfect example of how politics and religion complimented each other. This was a marriage of convenience because both *Mau Mau* and AIPC were desperate for members within the indigenous population. Although the colonial government saw the AIPC as a threat to its stability nothing dramatic happened for some time. The church premises could occasionally be used secretly as venues for administration of Mau Mau oaths. Trouble started in 1952.¹⁰²

158 In 1952, the Independent Churches in Central Kenya were accused of conducting subversive activities against the colonial government. They were accused holding similar practices like Gikuyu political movements of the 1930s and 1940s. It claimed that the Independent Churches were nothing but a disguise for political movements, for their worship services combined what the government interpreted to be *Mau Mau* oath ceremonies, fund-raising and ammunition collection campaigns. In addition the government claimed that the members of these independent churches were not true Christians. Real Christians, the government claimed, were to be found in the Mission Churches, who for all practical purposes supported the state. Corfield claimed that Kikuyu schools and AIPC were associated with the KCA and later Kenya African Union (henceforth KAU). Leakey too, in 1952, was convinced of a close link between Kikuyu schools and KCA during the time when the latter body seemed to have been growing increasingly anti European and openly subversive to colonial authority.¹⁰³ These accusations evoked a strong outcry from many African Independent Churches. The independent churches strongly refuted these accusations. Such appeals were not listened to and from October 1952, the government enraged by the subversive climate began to act with extreme rigour. On October 20, 1952 the government announced a state of emergency. Between October 1952 and October 1953 hundreds of leading members of the African Independent Churches were arrested and detained. They were accused of taking the oath and leading a clandestine movement. On October 20, 1952, after massive arrests and detentions the government proscribed all African Independent churches under the colonial governments Emergency Regulation Act of 12A, Government announced on Radio broadcast that it would no longer allow such

movements to exist in Kenya. It would only allow organisations which it considered reasonable and with sincere interests of the indigenous people.¹⁰⁴

- 159 The proscription led to the loss of AIPC lands and schools. Some of the schools were given to other churches while others went to the District Education Board (DEB). The ban on AIPC was lifted in 1959 but none of the schools were returned to date despite appeals to successive governments.¹⁰⁵
- 160 The minority independent Christian Churches/culture movements were automatically rendered strange bedfellows with the state, the moment they delinked from the Mission bodies and made their own concoctions. Evidently Christianity was largely associated with European colonial domination of large numbers of Africans. Many left to join the burgeoning African Independent Churches.
- 161 These movements played a very significant role. They were vehicles of ethnic solidarity. Such movements always have connections with specific ethnic communities. These movements may not necessarily have a clear cut political role attracted those for whom colonisation had been a cultural upheaval and social destruction. Leaders of these movements quickly realised the necessity of cultivating close links with political leaders in the post-colonial era. Denigrated to lower levels so big men would not want public association but secretly visit them.
- 162 African response to marginalisation was noted either in the formation of independency that seemed Christian, like AIPC, or those that included more African culture despite retaining some Christian symbols like Msambwa. It was a fight for space and one decided the modality of the fight. AIPC chose to use the very symbols of colonial rule (church and school) to struggle and show evidence that they could still go on. The *DyaM* decided on violence, and a return to, perhaps old cultural practices given the circumstance in which they were. The *DyaM* maintained the violence throughout the colonial times and into postcolonial Kenya. This violence met with colonial violence and scheming until it was proscribed for a while.
- 163 At the declaration of the state of emergency in 1952, the independent churches and other suspect religious practices suffered a blow. Some operated underground whereas others were totally banned and survived from operation and only in name. The AIPC among the Kikuyu was banned, similarly *DyaM* was banned but its operations went underground. Independence was the occasion for their re-emergence. The re-emergence of AIPC was a welcome factor in the Kenyatta government, but this did not mean the end of its internal problems and fresh relational issues with the new state.
- 164 The post independent government, however, endorsed the re-emergence of all religious groups. Some religious groups were harassed, for example, *Legio Maria* in its formative stages on the eve of independence, *DyaM* which ignored Kenyatta's call for its immediate registration, and AIPC which re-emerged with vigour in the favourable climate.
- 165 As Masinde's religious group fought for survival at independence, another movement emerged among the Luo of Nyanza Province. This was *Legio Maria*, an offshoot of the Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic missionaries in Africa saw relatively few independent churches breaking away from their missions. Catholic leaders viewed the breakaway movements with faint amusement and dismissed them as a typical Protestant hereditary affliction bred through generations of deficient discipline. These leaders had not fathomed the pull of popular revival, venerable local customs and

national feelings. The Catholic Christians of Nyanza in the 1960s shared the prevailing religious view of the time that it was normal that charismatic persons start their own churches; there was undue domination by Europeans, also in the churches; *Uhuru* (freedom) would bring fantastic blessings, no more restrictive laws, no more masters to be bowed for, and possibly ready cash for all. In Nyanza however, there was a very significant exception: The Legio Maria Church of Africa.

- 166 The *Legio Maria* began as an organised movement in 1960s, representing the continuation of a Luo response to colonial Christianity and the control exercised by European missionaries on Christian communities in Western Kenya. The search for “why did it happen?” is naturally conducted even more seriously in the case of *Legio Maria*, since it was considered so unusual. *Legio Maria* was officially launched after some dispute with Catholic Missionaries almost the same month that Kenya became independent. Just as self-governance was the political order of the day, so the followers of this new “African Catholicism” clearly articulated their desire for independence from the European church domination. They eventually developed a constitution for the movement that included a hierarchical structure, including a pope, cardinals, bishops, priests, and altar boys.
- 167 The “Legio Maria of Africa Church Mission” began when three Luo Catholics, Simeon Ondeto, Gaundencia Aoko and Maria, Ondeto’s “spiritual mother,” claimed to have undergone prophetic experiences. All three of them had powerful dreams, visions and calls and had already before the breakaway been practising exorcisms, gathering followers around them. The *Legio Maria* seemed to be an offshoot of an Irish lay organisation, “The Legion of Mary,” a charismatic movement within the Catholic Church.
- 168 The Legion of Mary members fostered the involvement of lay people in the life of the Church. But there was discontent because priests alone instructed members of those groups, and exercised an active ministry in the Church. As a result, Gaudencia Aoko and Simeon
- 169 Ondeto, the founders of the *Legio Maria*, invoked the authority given to them by God through personal visions, to heal, to preach, to pray for the sick, baptise at no cost and pray for those unable to pass examinations based on rote learning of the catechism, and women in irregular unions.
- 170 Consequently, Aoko and Ondeto were excommunicated in 1962, and they left with a large following and created a separate church organisation. Within a year, they had a following of over one hundred thousand members, many of whom wished to retain the Latinate Mass, as well as a Catholic sense of church hierarchy. Members of the Legio regarded themselves as African Catholics rather than Roman Catholics. Their focus on protection against disease, witchcraft and spirit possession, issues of great concern in Western Kenya, while retaining familiar Catholic Church structures, attracted a considerable following among the Luo. At its peak the Movement had over 90,000 members. This dropped to 50,000 by the early 1970s.¹⁰⁶ However, by 1980 the church numbered 248,000.¹⁰⁷
- 171 *Legio Maria* was remarkable in many ways; for instance, it was the only major breakaway from the Catholic Church and the only representative in Western Kenya of the messianic type of independent churches. *Legio Maria* comprised a real community of often poor, insecure or frustrated small people, a community with a flashy cult of symbols, rites and taboos suggesting a new life, a community of agreement, equality

and common activities, where full active participation led to firm commitment, a community full of African relevance: spirit world, healing, ecstasies, dreams, tolerance of polygamy and Christianised witchcraft.

- 172 *Legio* believed in the central message of Christianity, and specifically in the central role of Mary as “queen,” “mother” and the “mediatrix.” However, beliefs on the interaction between the spirit world and living human beings differed slightly from mainstream Catholic beliefs. Central importance was given to the need to control the world of the spirits through possession, exorcism, healing, and the actual use of mediums, mainly lay people and members of the movement. In the realm of ecclesial organisation, the *Legio Maria* adherents believed that priests were not needed to contact the spiritual world, but particular individuals with personal visions of Mary (or Jesus and Mary) had the power to heal and to deal with the world of the spirits. Thus *Legio* leaders prayed for healing and exorcism as the need arose. They added features of Pentecostalism to Catholic style of worship, symbolism and hierarchy. In the same vein, *Legio* rejected Western and traditional medicines, alcohol, tobacco, and dancing, but accepted polygamy and was strongly nationalistic.
- 173 After some years, Melkio Simeon Ondeto assured the role of Pope and sooner proclaimed himself the risen but African Jesus with the task of delivering the Africans and the entire world. Both he and *Legio* adherents believed that when God revealed Jesus to the white world, they rejected, persecuted and murdered him. Ondeto was God’s second revelation of Jesus. Ondeto was revealed to redeem the world from evil, the works of Satan, witchcraft, to protect the poor, bring justice to the world and harmony in the nations. The *Legio* argued despite the resurrection of Jesus, the missionaries and the whites used the church to subjugate the Third World, prepared the way for colonial/capitalist exploitation, generally mete out injustice and violence in the world. This is why God decided to create a black Jesus to rectify the situation and save the world from God’s wrath and imminent fire.¹⁰⁸
- 174 *Legio* sprung up during the religious commotion that engulfed most of the Eastern and Southern Africa countries. Most of the reasons for the commotion lay on reviving some African cultural practices, otherwise held in disdain by missionary churches. There was rebellion against oppression in the early mission churches. They sought communal gods, not individual gods and where they could dance and clap and jump and drum for their God.
- 175 Clearly, the relations between the breakaway and the Mainline Churches were always problematic, and so was the case of *Legio* and the Catholic Church. However, the Catholic Church and the state were not in any kind of relations so the state had no issues with what affected them. However, *Legio*’s activities could have provoked government interference. Minority religious groups were not friendly with the government whether colonial or postcolonial. *Legio Maria* had its share of government interference in the Kenyatta era. It was described as “a collection of lapsed Catholics and pagans, practising heresy that is a mockery to Christianity and the Roman Catholic Church” by a senior resident magistrate in Kasumi, Mr. John Abraham. He was delivering judgement on 39 members of the sect accused of holding an illegal meeting in defiance of the ban on public meetings and processions which had been enforced by the Kenyan government. The 39 adherents pleaded guilty and three of their leaders were jailed for one month each. The other thirty-six were released on condition that they kept peace for one year. Squads of baton-armed riot police were on duty outside the law court and

the nearby Jubilee Market during the judgement and sentence. There were no incidences reported. *Legio Maria* was not yet officially registered as a religious organisation and had received prior police warnings and twice they were barred from holding meetings.¹⁰⁹ Since the police believed that it was a threat to public order when they sought permission to hold meetings, it was not granted and they in turn defied the police order and held their meetings. This is exemplified in the report as the police officer Dajamp Singh who found a large crowd crammed into a house singing, shouting and gesticulating. “When informed of the illegality of the meeting they persisted and had to be dispersed. Their defence lawyer stated that a new religious movement *Legio Maria* met stiff resistance from the mainline churches, who did exactly the same thing to the founder of Christianity as they have done with this sect.”¹¹⁰

- 176 The Christian character of *Legio* was doubted by the state. *Legio* was defended on this by Secretary-General of the East African United Churches (F. Ndirangu) who lamented its comparison with the Lumpa Church in Northern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) which had engaged in some grisly murders. In his defence, he stated that *Legio Maria* was a Christian society and

... it would therefore be a great folly to think that it can at any time come to terms with such barbaric and cold hearted murders, neither would it be fair to suggest that it can associate itself with such groups of murders. It is most appalling that there have been certain people who up to this moment have been saying that *Legio Maria* is not a Christian society.¹¹¹

- 177 The colonial government and missionaries misunderstood the aims and objectives of the sect. Despite the fact that *Legio* leaders were not provided with the opportunity to expound their mission, vision and objectives to the government. Yet they persisted in asserting that *Legio* was not anti-government, they said,

It must be known that *Legio Maria* has full confidence in the Kenyan government, its prime minister and all his ministers and all those who are employed by the government to work for the betterment and well being of the people of this country. The leaders of *Legio* also thank the Kenya government very much for what it has done for them in handling their case. They will not forget the kindness of the Kenya government.

- 178 The East Africa United Church that represented all the indigenous churches declared *Legio Maria* “one of the true African indigenous churches.”¹¹²

- 179 The relations between *Legio* and the state was not always strained, in fact, in 1991 the Archbishop of South Nyanza, Raphael Abala appreciated the fact that Kenyatta facilitated the registration while giving a brief history of the church. They recognised that Mr. Oginga Odinga arbitrated over a conflict between the Catholic Church and *Legio Maria* followers over this registration. He said,

Mzee Kenyatta convened a meeting between the two warring churches which was attended by the “messiah” and it was decided that the Catholic Church would have its headquarters in Rome while *Legio Maria*, being an African Church, would have its headquarters in Kenya, Africa.¹¹³

- 180 Cardinal Lawrence Chijaji told the crowd that the church was registered in 1964 but before his registration, the Messiah was arrested twice in 1963 and 1964 as he agitated for the registration of the church. He emphasised the significance of 1964 in the life of the church because during the year most of its clerics including Mama Maria were arrested and charged with spreading syphilis after their refusal to succumb to pressure to abandon the faith. He reiterated that such arrests and detentions culminated in the

death of Mother Maria died in 1966 at Nzoia in Siaya where she had been deported.¹¹⁴ According to him, the *Legio Maria* adherents in Ugenya commemorated the arrest of Ondeto held at Ukwala Police Station, on December 26 and 27, 1960 participating in unlicensed meetings each Christmas season. The arrest was at the site of the river Nzoia church before the *Legio Maria* was registered.¹¹⁵ Initially, the Kenyan government was not prepared to register the sect but soon after independence, undue pressure was placed on the new government by members of the parliament and sect leaders it was forced to.

- 181 Despite the official recognition, *Legio Maria* met heavy state resistance. Its adherents were variously described in the words of KANU South Nyanza branch Mr. Osur K. Otieno in 1969 in Kisumu where he alleged that he had observed a crowd of *Legio Maria* followers roaming about South Nyanza as “*People who idly roam in Nyanza Province, wearing white clothes, claiming they were the followers of religious sects and were the greatest enemies of Kenya’s development.*” The crowd comprised women who had abandoned their marital homes and some that had deserted their husbands. He called for state action against *Legio*. He further accused the *Legio* and Israel Nineveh of engaging in political agitation and showing outright opposition to the government.¹¹⁶
- 182 The responses from Luo nationalists to such intimations were different. They had established unofficial co-operation with *Legio Maria* leaders at the regional level. Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, the member of Parliament for the region and the most prominent among the Luo politicians, supported the new nationalist church as means of strengthening his stance in Nyanza and the entire Kenya. He seemed to find “*in religious symbolism, a power of political resistance to central government.*” And as soon as Odinga fell out of grace with the Kenyatta Government in 1966 *Legio* also went to the backyard and began to respond in opposition. Similarly, the *Legio Maria* began to defy government orders and clashed with police many times. This defiant attitude stood in a strange contrast with the otherworldly attitude displayed by their members and clergy many times, which incorporated the official condemnation of Christian involvement in politics.¹¹⁷ Despite its erratic appearances in the public space *Legio Maria*, made its presence felt in the Kenyatta era.
- 183 In the multiparty era, *Legio Maria* also made a debut in the public space although mystery and secrecy surround the *Legio Maria* sect. It was persistently accused of backward and anti-development tendencies yet sometimes late 1998, the *Legio Maria* sect held a long prayer for peace, the faithful braved the cold in the morning, the heat in the day, and walked long distances, some barefoot as far as 30 kilometres, to show solidarity with the poor and pray for peace in Kenya and other African countries. The procession had all and sundry including men, women and children but save for the children, all the adults fasted. Nairobi looked so colourful because the *Legio* had multi-coloured uniforms, commensurate with their powers and gifts. On this occasion the leader stated to the press:

Gentlemen of the press, we have had enough, of you now and before. We don’t know what the future holds but you have heaped all the negative things about *Legio Maria*, all the sensational and weird reports about us. We know you as biased people. Please take any pictures you may want to take as we are here the whole day. You cannot talk to our bishop today. It’s a most important day of prayer. A day we devote for peace. We don’t wear shoes even if we talk on stones or rocks. We don’t use any locomotives. We don’t eat. So go ahead and write about anything you see,

bad or good, positive or negative, distorted or true and write in capitals. But we will remain *Legio Maria*. We are one million plus across Africa and we are growing.

- 184 Just before the Moi–Kibaki transition, they again appeared in the public space, this time to sweep the space signifying the transition that they expected. They dealt with every possible hindrance in the spiritual realm hoping that this would manifest in the physical not necessarily to the transition but that would cause chaos in Kenya.
- 185 After Kibaki became the president, they again appeared in the space and their appearance has become the annual practice. In 2005, the *Legio Maria* again made its debut in the political arena when about 300 *Legio Maria* faithful caused a stir in Homa Bay town when they stormed the local station to pray for peace in the wake of a Cabinet reshuffle. The faithful claimed the reshuffle which had allegedly Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) short-changed through demotions of their members in the Cabinet called for immediate prayers in order for peace to prevail in the country. The faithful further claimed that they visited the station to perform a cleansing ceremony. Led by Archbishop Ongawo Aloo of Nakuru Archdiocese and Bishop Samwel Otieno Odongo of Kisii, the faithful reiterated that Kenyans needed a people-driven constitution, which was enshrined in the Bomas draft. Clad in flowing robes of various colours, the faithful arrived at the Homa Bay police station claiming they needed to pray for the police, so they would not be manipulated to cause may not be used to bring mayhem in the country. The church leaders, who included Father Vitalis Edward, Jackson Mika Otieno of Dede, were preceded into the police station by the dreadlocked youths claimed to be armed with wooden swords and guns ran helter-skelter within the station in what was termed as a cleansing exercise. Family members of the local police officers thought the invasion of the station by criminals so they locked themselves inside their houses. The spouses of the officers emerged only after it became obvious that the *Legio* adherents were there only to pray. Their prayers were intermittently interrupted by screams from some members on the assertion that the Holy Spirit was making revelations. In his prayers, Bishop Odongo called for God's guidance to the government nurture peace in the country because the reshuffle in which most members of LDP were allegedly demoted called for divine intervention if peace was to prevail in Kenya.¹¹⁸
- 186 For AIPC's survival in Kenyatta's era, it had to reinvent itself. First they did away with their advocacy for polygamy, female circumcision, sniffing tobacco and drinking Kikuyu local beer (*muratina*). It was reregistered and got immense support from Kenyatta. However, it has had wrangles that frequently require the use of the government armed forces to bring peace.
- 187 At independence the state tried to be at peace with the religious groups that had suffered during the struggle for independence. The nationalist felt that since their struggle was within a colonial setting their aims were similar and so at independence they pursue similar goals. However, given the activities of *DyaM*, AIPC and the *Legio Maria* in the post independent era, they were at loggerheads with the state. In fact, Elijah Masinde intimated that given their common suffering constantly with Kenyatta, intimacy with the state would cause his movement to prosper but this was not be.
- 188 The Kenyatta state felt that what these religious groups advocated were outdated and were inimical to proper state functioning. Hence Kenyatta had to struggle with *DyaM* leader throughout his reign. Regarding the relations of the minority groups with the government of the day, they stated that in the Kenyatta era the conflict between

Odinga and Mboya affected the relationship between the government and *Legio Maria*. Some form of hostility persisted. This hostility culminated in the killing of people and the arrest of others in October 1969 in Homa Bay, Ukwala and Kisumu all in the then Central Nyanza. *Legio Maria* seemed militant in the earlier years but became of no consequence in later years. These religious groups were also an impediment to the areas where they operated to the mainline churches. These religious groups marginality seemed to have been carried over from colonial times. For the AIPC the relationship was cordial and they were given freedom of worship, land for building churches. They did not have any problems, but if any preacher criticised the government he was dealt with very sternly. It was in his era that the church was revived after having been banned by colonialists. The president helped the church in putting up more churches and also supported them because he was a culturalist, which the church greatly advocated. The relationship was cordial; in fact he even would call us to statehouse or visit us in our churches. They consider Kenyatta as a friendly leader; and who supported the group because of their involvement in the struggle for independence. Thus during his tenure there was great improvement from the sufferings they experienced before independence.

- 189 It is obvious that despite the coexistence of the minority religious groups and the state, they had numerous issues of grievances, thwarted hopes, state manipulation that caused them to voice their marginality. Minority religious groups sometimes met with favour only if they become useful tools to the government but sometimes their responses were met with negotiations or severe reprimands and occasionally violence. Not all minorities experienced this, for some had favour with the government like the AIPC because they prayed with and for the president and had also participated together with him in the independence struggle.
- 190 The AIC's relationship with the state is not clear regarding inclusion or exclusion. The religious groups considered excluded like *Legio Maria* had poor and uneducated adherents and whose association was feared because of their attire. In fact most African Independent Churches lack influential personalities to advocate for their recognition in the political arena. Some such religious groups have even been relegated to the level of cults and therefore denied registration, for example, Tent of the Living God, *DyaM* and *Mungiki*. Akorino, AIPC and some Independent Pentecostals also tended to be despised by the government because of their unpopularity. AIC and African religion are sometimes considered ascetic, inferior, spiritual and apolitical. Moreover, they lack learned leaders in comparison to the mainstream churches. However, most of these groups may not be interested in their inclusion in the state affairs because they did not want to combine religion and politics.
- 191 Whereas the general opinion of all the minority religious groups might be that mainline churches were favoured by the state and demonstrated by the fact that they had been allowed to operate freely, own land and engage in business and being present and participated at state functions, and Members of Parliament had also taken part in *harambee* functions¹¹⁹ to help them, the majority of the AICs might be of the opinion that these religious groups did not hinder religious minorities from having political influence. A few of the minority groups are clear that "*they make us look inferior and hence make our contributions unnoticeable.*" In fact it appears like just an apparition and a catch for media people.

- 192 Despite the efforts by the state to muzzle the political engagement of the minorities, these religious groups seem aware of the fact that separation of the state and religion was not possible. The various minorities interviewed felt there was no way that politics and the state could ignore religion. *Mungiki* respondents, for instance, said that religion needed to play role in political and development orientation of any nation. According to them, religion and politics are inseparable. Because religion encompasses truth and was about God it had a relationship with both politics and development. The AICs believe that religion and politics are inseparable because religion harmonised behaviour and provided the moral base of a society. It enabled a people to achieve peace, and it also ensured the overall well being of a people. To build a good country people must participate in religion. In other words, religion, political and economic issues are interlined. Religion was part and parcel of the country's politics. Religion could prevent the state from making extreme decisions with adverse effects on it. Religion was significant as the conscience of a nation that had to point out the evils and offer correction where possible. Since so much in a nation impinged upon it was therefore not possible for the church to ignore politics an aspect of the all-encompassing culture.
- 193 It seems obvious that there is a thin line between politics and religion because individuals in leadership belong to both, as the AICs seemed to indicate. The AICs were involved in politics through their prayers for the nation (through the Holy Spirit) for peace to prevail, building of churches and schools (e.g. by members like Bishop Ondiek). Some of the AICs like AIPC involved in the fight for independence and paid dearly. They fought for freedom from the colonialists and to date continues to fight for freedom from any kind of bondage. The church developed many schools and health facilities, although they were later taken over by the government. Today they continue to participate in the construction of schools, health facilities, and agitation against the government's evils. Recently the AIPC demanded for the return of their schools, which were handed over to mainline churches when the colonial government banned AIPC in the 1950s. Apart from prayer for the government many of their members are business people and this helps the economy. The members of the AIPC participated in the constitution review and their members contributed mainly on issues that affect the minorities. The wrangles in the church over power and finances over the years have affected the churches from participation in major issues. Similar to the AIPC, *Legio Maria* had also participated by building several churches in Alego, Ugenya, South Nyanza and even in Nairobi. There are those who said that although the church was in the minority it had participated socially and economically through starting projects aimed at improving member's welfare e.g. schools.
- 194 Suggestions abound on how their marginalisation could be eliminated. This could be done by establishment of a ministry for religions or spiritual affairs so as to accommodate all religious identities including minority religious groups or the position of a permanent secretary in charge of religious affairs in the Ministry of Culture and Social Services. Still others recommended that the government should create a state office for the churches, to cater for their political interests. It was also necessary for the government to aid in the formation of religious regional groupings and national associations to ease the interaction between the minorities and the government. Arrangement for financial support through a consolidated fund by the government would serve as means of closing the gap between it and the minority religious groups.

From the responses it was clear that the onus was on the government to establish a feature that would make it conscious of the existence and survival of these groups be they a permanent presidential religious commission or department within a ministry accommodate the minorities.

- 195 This would enable the members of the African-instituted churches religious groups to fully participate. It was requisite for the government to recognise them, discourage the discrimination against smaller churches, support them financially to enable them do their work effectively and start projects to help empower the members economically, provide equal funding for all the independent churches and offer good government posts for members, encourage dialogue and equity. It was important for them to be sensitised on the need for education, encourage them to open up and stop keeping to themselves and integrate them into government development projects.

Summary and conclusions

- 196 The state in Africa is often regarded as a powerful force in relations to the society. Yet as Hyden (1983) among others has argued society's ability to organise itself beyond the states jurisdiction suggests that the states power have sometimes been overestimated. Sanneh for example claims the omnipotence of the state, with a wide channel of power, not just content to restrain and arbitrate but to prescribe the faith of a fundamental kind and conformity of an absolute form (1991: 212).¹²⁰ This is an overstatement, concerning the states capacity to secure obedience from its people. Given that the post-colonial Kenyan state inherited the colonial political, economic and social entities and frameworks then it is not surprising that it would attempt to govern in the same authoritarian hegemonic fashion. But such an attempt was also an indication of the states inability to achieve its objectives.
- 197 To assess the relations between religions and the state in independent Africa, the framework of government religious policies on religion follow a number of different models. Some African states are confessional states with very conservative approaches to religion, such states include in their constitution faith in God but without committing themselves to a particular religious confession (e.g. Lybia). The secular states are characterised by lack of any reference to God in their constitutions. This position was clearly summarised by Nyerere when he said "*Tanzania has no religion, the party has no religion. But most Tanzanians are religious people and the party and government guarantee to each citizen the right to choose his or her own religion.*"¹²¹ Tanzanian model was a liberal version of a secular state. Mozambique initially followed a strict Marxist approach, but appears to have relaxed this and adopted more liberal policies towards religion.
- 198 On the eve of independence because of the bitter struggle between the colonial government and the Africans and particularly the MauMau movement, all movements whose activities and levels seemed a threat to the state were deregistered and prescribed. Discussion on the state- religion relations in contemporary society tends to limit themselves to mainstream religious establishments. This is a rather constrictive approach since there were so many other organisations that attract a large number of people and exercise their own distinct pressure and impact.
- 199 The arguments of Collin Leys, Goran Hyden and Robert T. Bates state that in East Africa states emerged from colonialism which means that governments have to cope with

contrasting values, ideals and representations inherited from both the African heritage and from European colonial legacies.¹²² They have to cope with disrupted economic systems in which subtle links connect capitalist export oriented structures with local producers and markets within a global situation of dependence and underdevelopment. Problems of political stability, economic growth and social improvement are still severe and various social groupings actively compete for better material and/or spiritual (ideological) conditions while foreign private and public groups intervene according to their interests.

- 200 Kenya has held ambivalent position regarding religious identity. Kenya has generally been a stable state and political changes have occurred through a legal process, gradually reinforcing respect for the rule of law among the populations. Until 1990 this did not mean pluralistic democracy. In Weberian terms the bureaucratic state system is necessarily secular and hence with no state religion. Freedom of worship is protected by law and churches, sect; associations are proliferating all over the region. Such developments are usually accepted without opposition, except where they create serious unrest. More important the secular character of the state does not preclude open religious references in state rituals (oathings and festivals) and the openly religious style of some leaders for example Daniel arap Moi who publicly and actively participated in Christian rituals on Sundays. Such religiosity is prompted by Christian references inherited from European missionaries. Religion is one of the cultural references employed by political leaders to strengthen their legitimacy among the people. A secular state in Kenya should mean a balanced attitude towards the various denominations within a global ambience of piety. Religion is a political resource for politicians who are concerned with mobilisation and social control. Heads of state and members of parliament, party leaders are not reluctant to mix religion and politics and one important part of their policy is to create and control social organisations, which might simplify the structuralisation of the society.
- 201 Indigenous churches and AICs have prospered in Kenya, becoming more assertive each day. The leaders of these churches, which may have as many as ten people or several hundreds, have asked Kenyans not to take them for granted since they are serving a major role.
- 202 But some bishops from the mainstream churches in Kenya urged the government to look into the beliefs of some of the traditional religious orders, to see if their teachings were right. Careful not to hurt the existing freedom of worship in the country, the bishops recalled the Kanungu tragedy in Uganda, where 1,000 people were killed by sect leaders about five years ago. They warned that the emerging denominations should not be taken for granted. The Rt. Rev Peter Njoka, the Anglican bishop of Nairobi said *"If the behaviour of these groups is suspect, then they should be investigated."* But Archbishop Ndingi Mwana a'Nzeki, the then head of the Catholic Church in Kenya maintained that all these groups were acceptable since everyone was free to worship the way they chose given the freedom of worship. He noted that the emerging religious sects might not have been a threat to the mainstream churches. He further stated that the Catholic Church encouraged enculturation of some good aspects of the African traditions and this would enable them to make African values part of the Catholic Church teachings. *"It would be wrong to see these churches as serving no purpose at all. We may be small in number but some of us now command a large following,"* says Reverend Michael Kamau of the Universal Prayer Group, one of the indigenous churches. Early in

2005 more than 50 indigenous churches in Kenya formed a council, the Indigenous Churches Council of Kenya (ICCK). Convinced that they had a mass following, the leaders said they would be talking for their faithful. They even promised to forward views to the on-going constitutional review process in the country. But while they continue to be branded the religion of a minority, the soul soup for the helpless, and abodes of “Satanism” by some Pentecostal charismatic leaders, experts have explained that these churches are likely to find a massive following among impoverished groups. The main reason for this is that they are able to offer “quick answers” to problems that the mainstream churches may guardedly solve.

- 203 Experts in religious affairs however say it is no surprise that these churches are growing that fast. Gilbert Ogutu, asserts that African people desire to reach God in the shortest way possible. He observes that because Africa is challenged with catastrophes, the society seeks solutions through worship. “Moreover, they are a big business,” Ogutu adds.(OI, March 4, 2004). The churches that are sampled in this paper can be categorised as the Holy Spirit/prophetic churches whose activities in the recent past have shown their struggle for political space.
- 204 In Kenya, ethnicity is a major feature of these churches. *Legio Maria*, for instance, accommodates mainly the Luo ethnic community while the African Independent Pentecostal Church has mostly the Kikuyu. But the most recent ones have chosen names that bring them closer to the mainstream churches. Some of the indigenous churches maintain controversial beliefs, which the originators choose to keep with their faithful only. Ardent followers of Africa indigenous churches believe that their priests teach them what is right.
- 205 According to a Tent of The Living God faithful, John Kihui, as long as there is social, economic and political dissatisfaction, there is going to be trends of increasing diversion from the mainstream churches. The fascinating thing about these groups, however, is that despite the uproar from the mainstream churches, they have survived the test of time. As evidenced by the survival of African Independent Pentecostal Church from early colonial times and more fascinating is that poorly educated priests lead them.
- 206 The relationship between the government and these religious movements has been ambivalent. Sometimes the state embarks on the policy of total harassment, systematic extermination of the group and “*demonisation of the religious movement.*” They even encouraged members to defect to other religions. This raises the questions related to democracy, human rights and citizenship. These are key factors that become very challenging because the members of these movements may not understand the meanings.
- 207 Democracy implies the acceptance of religious pluralism and tolerance at the very least, but it also requires that people of different faiths learn to cooperate in bringing about the just democratic transformation of society. The way forward is invariably not as much as the level of etiological debate, but in practical co-operation particularly in the area of human rights advocacy. Indeed the minority religions have participated in democratic agitation and politics.
- 208 Whether conscious or unconscious the state has marginalised the minority religious groups and from evidence it is clear that the minorities desire the government action on marginalisation. Participation and marginalization are matters relate to power and access and therefore it was significant to know about the accessibility of certain

services to the minority religious members. Kenyan nation-state needs to rethink its position on these religions. Possibly the initiation of true dialogue would sort out many relational issues. Conscious opening of the space would be very important. This can only be done through the realisation of plural space and provide equal chance for players with clear rules and instruction. Freedom of association must be recognised and implemented as the minorities also realise the significance of the human rights of other Kenyans who are not their adherents. The creation of a free and conducive environment for participation and provision of civic education for all would ensure that they were aware of what was going on in the land and gain power to participate without fear.

209 The conclusions of this paper are as follows:

- Kenya portrays a homogenous disposition of nation state narration. However, in reality, there is heterogeneity with some people being excluded from the nation state narration. Most members of the minority religious identities, for example, operate on the margins of that narration.
- Some minority religious identities are occasionally accommodated in the nation-state narration to counter the views raised by majority religious identities on matters of concern like national security, politics and economic state of the nation.
- The indigenous minority religious identities are perceived as a threat to national security in Kenya. Such religious identities are feared as possible springboards for political rebellion based on the role that was played by the *Mau Mau* movement in the liberation struggle.
- There is increased demand for democracy, human rights and citizenship resulting from pleas from minority religious identities to be granted space in the nation state narration. Consequently, many civil communities and NGOs are demanding the respect of the dignity of all people in the nation-state including those of minority religious identities.

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NOTES

1. Haynes (1996).
2. Berman (1990).
3. Kisiang'ani (2003).
4. Amoko (2000: 1).
5. Prakash (1998: 8).
6. Linda Hutcheon (1995: 10).
7. Achille Mbembe (1992: 4).
8. Castoriadis (1975: 475) and Foucault (1989).
9. Mbembe (1982, 1991); Geoffrey (1990).
10. Fanon (1967: 30–71).
11. Peter Kagwanja (2002); Several issues of the *Daily Nation*, *Sunday Nation* papers in June 2004.
12. Constantin (1993: 36).
13. *Ibid.*: 37.
14. *Ibid.*: 37.
15. Boyle (1992).
16. Gertzel (1970: 1).
17. Haynes (1996: 2).
18. Spencer (1989: 116).
19. Frost (1997: 173).
20. Githiga (2001: 29).
21. *Ibid.*: 28
22. *Ibid.*: 28.
23. Welbourn (1965: 171).
24. Throup (1995: 144).
25. Strayer (1972: 100).
26. Githiga (2001: 30).

27. Githiga (2001: 30); Lonsdale (1978b: 25); George Bennet (1963: 161).
28. Lonsdale (1978b: 17).
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*
32. Kenyatta (1970: 331).
33. Okullu (1974: 74–75).
34. DeGruchy (1995).
35. Gitari (1996: 13–21).
36. Githiga (2001: 147).
37. Sabar-Friedman (1996: 377–378).
38. Throup (1995).
39. *Ibid.*: 145.
40. Githiga (2001: 49).
41. Baur (1990: 221).
42. Lonsdale (1978a: 171).
43. Githiga (2001: 51).
44. Okullu (1974: 51).
45. Sabar-Friedman (1996: 383).
46. Sabar-Friedman (1997).
47. *Ibid.*: 30.
48. Shariff Nassir, as quoted in *Finance*, February 1990: 38.
49. Baur (1990: 222).
50. *The Standard*, November 8, 1988.
51. *Weekly Review*, October 14, 1988.
52. *Daily Nation*, September, 30, 1988.
53. The repeal of section 2(A) of the constitution that made Kenya a one party state by law.
54. Gitari (1991: 5).
55. See *Daily Nation*, October 3, 1988.
56. Bishop Alexander Muge died in mysterious circumstances on August 14, 1990. He had been forewarned by a cabinet minister that if he dared go to Busia he would not return alive but he defied the threat and went to Busia on his Episcopal duties. During the return journey his car crashed and he passed on. The coincidence of death and the actual threat of death created suspicion amongst Kenyans who felt that it was stage-managed.
57. Walker (1995: 456).
58. *Ibid.*
59. Githiga (2001: 106).
60. *Ibid.*: 111.
61. National Council of Churches in Kenya (1992: 17).

62. Githiga (2001: 121).
63. Ranger (1986).
64. *Ibid.*: 2.
65. *Ibid.*: 3
66. Were (1972: 88).
67. *Ibid.*: 89.
68. *Ibid.*: 99.
69. Wipper (1977: 269).
70. *East African Standard*, January 3, 1962.
71. *East African Standard*, May 13, 1962.
72. Wipper (1977: 271).
73. *Ibid.*: 273.
74. *Ibid.*: 279.
75. *East African Standard*, Dec. 1, 1966.
76. *Ibid.*
77. *Ibid.*, October 25, 1968.
78. Wipper: 286.
79. Wamue (2001: 453).
80. *Ibid.*
81. Kenya defines itself as a secular state and insists on the separation between religion and the state. The establishment of political parties based on religion.
82. Wamue (2001).
83. *Ibid.*: 459–460.
84. *Ibid.*: 460.
85. *Ibid.*: 462.
86. *Daily Nation*, Wednesday, March 13, 2002.
87. *Daily Nation*, Friday, March 8, 2002.
88. *Daily Nation*, March 13, 2002.
89. *The Nation*, August 10, 2001.
90. *The Nation*, August 6, 2001.
91. Francis Ayieko, *The East African*, Monday December 29, 2003.
92. NCKK report: “Mungiki Movement in Kenya: Religion Political Analysis 2002.” After Mungiki members were implicated in the massacre of 28 people in Nairobi’s Kariobangi Estate.
93. Gleaned from some of his followers during the introductory proceedings of the outdoor service and from the subsequent “sermon.”
94. These cultures were captured in the Kenyan National Flag.
95. OI, Ngonya, March 27, 2004.
96. Mbiti (1990).
97. A.F. Wallis.

98. Githieya (1977): 66.
99. *Ibid.*: 67.
100. *Muthirigu* were tainting songs meant to embarrass and shame those who were obedient to the Christianity.
101. McIntosh (1969): 141.
102. *The Standard*, Monday June 12, 2006: 8 and 9.
103. McIntosh (1969): 148.
104. Githeiya (1977: 109).
105. OI, Archbishop Gaitho, June 12, 2004.
106. Harris *et al.*, 1994: 140.
107. Barrett and Padwick, 1998: 66.
108. O.I Okech Ambasa, July 4, 2004.
109. *Daily Nation*, 20th June 1960.
110. *Ibid.*
111. *Daily Nation*, August 8, 1964.
112. *Kenya Times*, September 16, 1991.
113. *Kenya Times*, September 16, 1991.
114. *Daily Nation*, March 19, 2003.
115. *Kenya Times*, September 16, 1991.
116. Gertzel, Goldschmidt & Rothchild (1969: 69).
117. Melkio had a mentor in the person of a lady known only as Maria, she exhibited the same powers as his holiness Messiah Melkio Ondeto, they soon joined forces in the *Legio Maria*. During the time His Holiness Ondeto was alive, Maria was the second command to Messiah Ondeto until she finally died. She is still revered as Mary the Mother.
118. *KenyaTimes*, July 1, 2004.
119. Public fund-raising.
120. Sanneh (1991); Hyden (1983).
121. Peterson (1987: 64).
122. Leys (1975); Hyden (1983) and Bates (1989).

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