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The Role of Religious Institutions

Hervé Maupeu

“The Bible furnishes Kenya’s shared national language of politics as much as it feeds its several ethnic imaginations. If Micere Mugo’s mother sang for her ethnic folktales, the Bible is a national store house of folktales. They may be told in different vernaculars but they are still the same stories. And it shows in everyday Kenyan culture.” J. Lonsdale, ‘Religion and Politics in Kenya.’ Cambridge, The Henry Martyn Lectures 2005.

- 1 Like elsewhere in Africa, the Kenyan clergy is intimately involved in politics. Nevertheless, clergymen hardly ever try to join politics. In the 2007 general elections, a popular leader of the Pentecostal movement, Bishop Pius Muiru, head of the Maximum Miracle Ministries, ran in the presidential elections but did not attract a large following. In the legislative elections, only two religious leaders were elected: Margaret Wanjiru (Starehe MP), who leads the Jesus Is Alive Ministries (JIAM), a Pentecostal outfit based in Nairobi and Rev. Mutava Musyimi (Gachoka MP), who was the NCKK (National Council of Churches of Kenya) secretary-general. On the other hand, the two religious leaders who were members of the previous parliament, Bishop Stephen Ondiek (member of a neo-traditional church, Legio Maria) and Pastor Akaranga, lost their seats.
- 2 Leading political parties can nominate parliamentarians. Only the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) nominated a religious leader, Sheikh Mohamed Dor (chairman of the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya), the first Imam to enter Parliament. The clergy is therefore not over-represented in politics. Their influence is elsewhere. This influence can be analyzed by examining religious pluralism in Kenya. The relationship between politics and Islam in Kenya alongside the neo-traditional movements is conditioned by the consanguinity between Christianity and the colonial. This is followed by a postcolonial State, which gives rise to an ambiguity of intimacy, collaboration, competition and a contradictory vision of social organization between Christian and politicians. During the colonial era, the State systematically used

Christian missions to penetrate communities and to legitimize itself. This relationship between politics and administration, on the one hand, and religion, on the other, was marked by frequent tension. However, the faithful have over the years seen proximity and complementary between the two. After independence, religious and State-controlled structures continued to work together in several projects on the ground. Moreover, they share the same development-oriented nation-building ideology through development. Thus, when the former Catholic bishop of Machakos, Bishop Kioko, died recently, journalists highlighted the fact that he was “*a churchman keen on development issues*,” who built a hospital and a leading secondary school in the area, not forgetting several projects run by the Diocesan Development Office. Statement after statement by politicians stressed the leadership role played by the late bishop in the diocese. In a country where religious metaphors deeply permeate common parlance¹, it is significant that they all used this term, which is linked to politics, rather than the term “shepherd,” which is more closely associated with religion.

- 3 The Christian clergy and politicians share common political ideologies and they also work together. However, this does not sufficiently explain the clergy's involvement in national politics. From John Lonsdale's point of view, this interest stems from theological reasons: “*Kenyan political theology, a local version (some would call it a local subversion) of liberation theory, has created a cyclic tendency in the State cult.*”² This outstanding analyst of the Kenyan political culture is right in asserting that religious leaders have a fascination with the State. Indeed, leaders of Christian organizations are currently experiencing the negative effects of one of these cycles where the clergy has difficulty clearly positioning themselves in relation to political leaders and politicians in general. To analyze this dynamic, churches will be considered as actors involved in the political game. It does not mean they are political actors like others but they are elements of political competition where there are winners and losers, even though it is not always easy to distinguish the gains from the losses.
- 4 Since the return of multiparty politics, the 2007 General Elections are the only ones in which religious institutions have been most discreet or the least decisive about. Election after election, religious actors appear increasingly marginalized. It can be said that Kenyan politics is getting in step with its constitution, which envisages a structure of an officially secular State. But what would be the sense of divorcing religion from electoral practices? Does it mean politicians have distanced themselves from the religious elite or at least become independent? Are Kenyans now denying their clergy the political role that they have played over the years? Are religious institutions ready to return to Caesar what belongs to him?
- 5 Contrary to the improbable hypothesis of separating religion from politics, it is important to understand the development of the political role Churches played within the confusion the Kibaki regime put on religious actors' perception of Kenyan politics. Under President Moi's regime, political divisions were clear-cut. Moral authority was clearly held by the opposition and despite unacceptable practices most of the clergy debated the modalities of negotiating with a legitimately-elected government with whom they had to work, regardless of disagreements. The Kibaki era blurred these boundaries.
- 6 Indeed, the 2002 political transition was achieved due to active support from the most influential churches. Once in power, the new ruling elite worked with the clergy. There was nothing surprising about that since a large part of public services, particularly

education and health, were managed by religious organizations. This collaboration became more intimate than before because churches tended to initially legitimize the new government they had endorsed, and in which they had big hopes. However, the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) split soon after winning elections. Even though churches did not intend to choose between the two camps, thereby losing touch with the majority, their stand was never clearly visible. Indeed, the main religious structures, which are the most involved in public services, continued to work with the ruling class and appeared to endorse the Kibaki camp. As the stakes increased and the polls approached (the 2005 referendum followed the 2007 general elections), this trend became more apparent. What needs to be established is whether this trend was deep-rooted or simply about comments on sensitive matters. Thus, in 2007, like in previous elections, churches seemed to have taken sides. Their rhetoric about neutrality and respect of human rights, at least at diocese level, was like grapevine leaves that cannot orient growth towards light.

- 7 After the 2007 elections, the Kibaki government and later the Odinga faction engaged in political activities that could hardly be considered Christian. But how could they criticize or denounce a group which they had previously supported? Was it even possible to say they were playing the referee or could be assumed to be neutral in negotiations aimed at resolving the crisis? It quickly became apparent that the clergy were not credible in the new role the incumbent sought to have them play. And what influence could they exercise over politicians who seemed irresponsible? The churches therefore had to reinvent their political role, especially because the faithful had clear and real expectations. After the elections the number of churchgoers reduced even further. Thus, religious institutions currently find themselves at a crossroads, grappling with issues and difficulties not experienced by human rights NGOs. Indeed, like the clergy, members of the bar in these NGOs, who contributed to the 2002 victory, often find it difficult to denounce erstwhile friends. Moreover, some human rights organizations had difficulty avoiding radical ethnicity in politics.³ Throughout the 1990s, Kenya was apparently endowed with a strong civil society which offered a viable alternative agenda. Is this still the case at a time when this country is in dire need of a unifying factor, a social contract and respect for human rights?
- 8 The Kenyan national political ethos is, above all, Christian and the other religions are more often than not marginalized. However, the 2007 election campaigns were deeply marked by actions and themes of a neo-traditional movement, Mungiki. Following the elections, this sect became one of the big actors in violence. In fact, most analysts only see militias in Mungiki youth. However, by ignoring its religious nature, it would be difficult to understand Mungiki's demands and the extent of its actions. Islam is also a religion whose political influence becomes evident during elections. Indeed, for politicians out to woo majorities, Muslim populations become particularly important communities.

Muslim population mostly in support of the opposition

- 9 During elections, the “useful” parts of Kenya (over 1300 metres above sea level) rediscovers its peripheries, areas that are often Muslim. The Coast, in particular, seems to be the province to woo by those with presidential ambitions.⁴ In fact, Muslim faithful

have traditionally voted for the presidential candidate who went on to win the elections... except in 2007, if the official results are anything to go by.

- 10 Throughout the election campaigns, political leaders spent long periods of time in the big towns along the Coast. The two main coalitions, ODM and Party of National Unity (PNU), demonstrated their influence and support in the region by holding massive rallies. Nevertheless, it soon appeared that government forces had difficulty in convincing voters. In August 2007, President Kibaki set aside one week to traverse the whole region. But speeches by pro-government figures were either lukewarm or highly critical. Even ministers from the region publicly stated that voters needed strong signals to be convinced by the incumbent.⁵
- 11 The *watu wa pwani* (Coastal people) stopped supporting the government for two main reasons. The Mijikenda and other African communities blamed the government over its land policies. Their community land or their right to land had been increasingly violated by environmental legislation on forests. Land speculation and corruption in particular, deprived them of the most productive areas. Squatters on public land had for several generations been demanding title deeds or recognition of their occupation. During elections, all politicians made pledges and Kibaki did this in 2002. Not content with forgetting their campaign pledges, those close to the head of state evicted people occupying several public parcels of land near Mombasa and Malindi and sub-divided them.
- 12 A second source of tension drove coastal residents to the opposition. Like other East African countries, Kenya adopted an anti-terrorist legislation linked to the post-September 11 attacks. Like elsewhere, this legislation enabled the police to justify practices that particularly violated human rights. Many youths belonging to Muslim organizations were arrested and handed over to American forces.⁶ Several suspects of Somali origin found themselves denouncing their Kenyan nationality. This miscarriage of justice involved scores of people but Muslims of Arabic or Somali origin felt directly targeted. In particular, these practices reactivated a two-fold feeling of citizenship. For a lot of Muslims, it was difficult to get identity cards or passports. And most coastal residents thought the state did not invest in their region to the level of their expectations. It is true that major infrastructure in the region (roads, water, and electricity) as well as public services (health, education, domestic waste management...) were far from satisfactory.
- 13 Faced with these accumulated frustrations, the ruling class resorted to quick fix solutions. A commission was set up to study the implementation of the anti-terrorist law and to propose solutions that would ensure the Muslims do not feel discriminated against.⁷ *Idd Ul Fitr*, the day that marks the end of Ramadan, became the 13th holiday recognized by the Kenyan Government.⁸ To address issues of Muslims living in Kibera, an area within Odinga's constituency, Kibaki officially declared Nubians one of the country's ethnic groups. All these announcements did not translate into a reversal of plummeting state popularity. The Kibaki government then resorted to denouncing an agreement (Memorandum of Understanding) the ODM signed with Namlef (the National Muslim Leaders Forum), saying it would divide the country along religious lines.⁹ This controversy mainly aimed to stimulate factionalism within the Muslim community, which has always had difficulty protecting its façade of unity. Even though the Muslims seem to vote as a relatively homogeneous bloc, they remain split sociologically between communities (Mijikenda, Bajuni, Somali, inside Muslims.), which

are only partly homogenized by the Swahili culture. Representative Muslim organizations do not share the same views and the ruling class easily managed to mobilize them against each other.¹⁰

- 14 Controversy over the agreement between ODM and Muslim organizations also sought to draw churches into the debate to the government's advantage. Catholic and Anglican leadership particularly denounced the MoU. Nevertheless, the Anglican Church denied rumours linking it to the dissemination of copies of the MoU.¹¹ Many positions expressed by Christian institutions were perceived by many Muslim leaders to reiterate their position as second fiddle in the life of a country that considers itself first and foremost Christian.
- 15 The election results from the Coast were clear. Out of 21 seats, the PNU only won three compared to ODM's 12. The opposition convinced voters by pledging high-level decentralization (*majimbo*) which bordered on federalism—R. Odinga managed to convince voters about his willingness to initiate a “Marshall Plan” to correct economic retardation in the Coast—through the establishment of a free trade area in the port of Mombasa. On the other hand, the Shirikisho Party of Kenya, which represented political interests of the Mijikenda, remained in the government coalition for too long. One month before the elections, some of its leaders said the party had withdrawn from the PNU, the coalition under whose banner Kibaki was seeking re-election. But their move came too late. Voters no longer wanted to be associated to the establishment. Shirikisho did not win any parliamentary seat, thus signing its death warrant, according to some analysts.
- 16 In North-Eastern Province, the PNU Waterloo was less clear than it appeared. Out of 10 seats, ODM won five. The Kenya African National Union (KANU) demonstrated its influence in this region by retaining four parliamentary seats. President Moi's networks were still at work and the fortunes of the Kenyatta family, which controlled the party, presumably enhanced this fidelity. The tenth constituency was taken by Abdikadir Hussein Mohamed, who ran on a Safina ticket. Half of the region's parliamentarians are therefore close to the Kikuyu leaders' spheres of influence though they do not necessarily belong to M. Kibaki's PNU.
- 17 Shortly after the election results were announced, there was tension in Mombasa. Like other towns that largely voted for the opposition, groups of youths, Luo against Kikuyu, clashed. These clashes led to only a few deaths and the police were not as viciously aggressive as they were in Kisumu. Moreover, Muslim organizations mobilized to calm down groups that were likely to engage in clashes. However, the situation remained particularly tense by the end of February 2008.¹²
- 18 Election campaigns were largely peaceful, except in urban areas. In the rest of the country, many tension zones emerged in the very places where ethnic cleansing had been experienced during the 1992 and 1997 elections. Analysts expressed fears of a repeat of the Likoni massacres, which had led to a bloodbath in the south of Mombasa in 1992 and, especially in 1997. ICG analysts expressed the view that the memory of police repression had left Digo leaders too permanently paralyzed to entertain any thoughts of violence. IRIN journalists¹³ viewed it differently. They particularly alluded to what they called the “Mulungunipa Forest Group”¹⁴, a militia group linked to a minister, which the police came across undergoing training (in June 2007). Apparently, the political leader IRIN mentioned was the former Likoni MP and minister of national heritage during M. Kibaki's first term in office, Rashid Suleiman Shakombo. His name

had often been mentioned in the commission of inquiry set up to investigate the Likoni massacres (refer to the Akiwumi Report). In 2007, he was not re-elected and he accused his opponents of having bewitched¹⁵ him. Some think that despite his age (over 75), he had not given up his political ambitions. Moreover, leaders who are keen to mobilize violence can comfortably pay former soldiers in such a region where arms smuggling is rampant, particularly from Somalia. On the other hand, the use of neo-traditional symbols and rituals, like in 1997, was more difficult since the infamous religious leaders, who had endorsed violence, were dead.

- 19 Finally, Muslim organizations came out of the post-2007 elections crisis relatively more strengthened in their political role. They demonstrated their capacity to influence the vote of their faithful. They controlled groups of youth which were ever ready to fight for a variety of causes. Thus, the streets of Mombasa did not experience the kind of violence linked with the emergence of the Islamic Party of Kenya¹⁶ in the 1990s. Muslim leaders managed to control their flock. On the other hand, the political direction taken by churches seemed to be headed for troubled waters.

Politically disoriented churches

- 20 During election campaigns, churches seemed particularly partial and did not behave like referees during the crisis. The prelates seemed too close to the political elite and not powerful enough to influence them. Thus, Christian organizations proved to be secondary actors in the political conflict. However, faced with the disaster, they did not bring themselves into disrepute like had happened in Rwanda. During the ethnic cleansing in the 1990s, they received internally displaced persons while the State appeared unable to act.¹⁷ The churches did not stop working with and within communities. Their political messages, at least at the national level, did not always seem discernible but they never lost contact with the people, nor did they lose confidence, which cannot be said of State leadership.
- 21 The Catholic Church was certainly the biggest loser in the political reconstitution. Close to a quarter of the Kenyan populace is Catholic, making the church the largest religious organization in the country. Since independence, it benefited from colonial land allocation to missions, which were not expected to compete but to homogeneously spread Western civilization throughout Kenya. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Catholic Church developed structures in many regions where it had been present. But for a long time it maintained the image of an organization that had been barely localized. This reputation was evident in the nationality of its missionaries (mostly Italian, Irish and American) during the colonial era and the large number of white priests working in the country after independence. So, until the 1980s, Catholics remained discreet over national debates. The church's political behaviour changed with the return of multiparty politics. Together with mainstream Protestant churches, it agitated for the multiparty system. Its politicization radicalized with the first ethnic cleansing between 1992 and 1993. In fact, Catholic parishes played a major role in receiving tens of thousands of internally displaced persons whose existence the State was trying to deny. The top echelons of the church was at the time very open to the theology of liberation and its major official statements on the political situation were written by Father Mejia, a Colombian Jesuit who became the regional head for East Africa towards the end of the 1990s. The prelate was at the time living within a community in the Kangemi area

(Nairobi) where he noted first hand the degeneration of public services in Nairobi slums. As the regime became more and more authoritarian, public services disappeared in most parts of the city and State presence shrunk in governance functions under the pressure of structural adjustment programs.

- 22 Throughout the 1990s, the Catholic Church leadership supported various initiatives to demand constitutional reforms. This was clearly in support of a democratic opposition, committed to defending human rights¹⁸ and which offered an alternative to the Moi regime. However, from 1992, Kibaki, a Catholic, seemed to be their favourite candidate. Its moderate and conservative stance were perceived as guarantees against excesses feared to be the hallmark of a ruling class that had difficulties in converting to democratic values. The top clergy knew the political elite very well and harboured distrust for its motivation and capacity. It therefore advocated for reduced powers of a Government that was increasingly absent.
- 23 Support for Kibaki from the Catholic leadership was nationwide. But today, this support is limited and conditional and is perceived to come from an ethnicized or even Kikuyu organization. However, the Catholic Church's political influence stems from its national reach. Apart from the Anglican Church, the Catholic Church is the only other religious organization with a presence throughout the country. However, the Anglican Church of Kenya operates more like a federation of dioceses that correspond closely to ethnic groups, which they have sometimes contributed to inventing, while the Catholic Church is a centralized bureaucracy. The Catholic Church is a structure of 24 dioceses distributed within four provinces: Nairobi (2,669,000 members), Kisumu (2,582,000), Nyeri (2,446,000) and Mombasa (225,000). Most priests work in the parishes often situated in different dioceses or regions.
- 24 Why did the Catholic Church appear particularly partial and specifically support the president after the 2007 elections despite the contested election results? This perception is less linked to its position in 2008 than to a dynamic that has been in place for a longer time. First, the 2002 political victory was felt to be closely associated with the Kikuyu clergy. In Central Province, the primary elections to nominate NARC candidates were held in parishes and were presided over by priests. It is true that the Catholic Church was the largest religious force in the region: in Nyeri District 41.21% of the population is Catholic.¹⁹ Like in 1997, the clergy endorsed M. Kibaki and members of his coalition. In no other region did the Catholic Church appear as involved in election campaigns. This commitment was not only related to the fact that M. Kibaki was an eminent representative of Nyeri and that many politicians from the region were Catholics. The clergy were also very involved in contemporary debates about Kikuyu ethnicity. Most publications in the Kikuyu language came from the Catholic printing press and the main intellectuals, thinkers on ethnic nationalism were Catholic. They were thus at the heart of reflections on what to expect of leaders. Their analyses were often critical but this did not stop them from actively supporting M. Kibaki. Local vicars were often vectors of rare social mobilization. This was the case in Thika at the beginning of the 1990s when slum residents demonstrated against pollution from industries and working conditions. Ten years later, a dispute involving coffee cooperatives received religious support. The Murang'a Catholic diocese newsletter, Mwihoko, was banned several times and reputed to be quite controversial both politically (during the Moi era) and socially (especially against multinationals). The clergy was therefore a very active socio-pluralist force and in local politics.

- 25 The Catholic Church was thus a champion of Kikuyu ethnicity and the clergy had an indisputable prescriptive power in Central Province. There is no such comparison in western Kenya, where Catholics represent less than a quarter of the population and are just one religious force among others. Their ties with the elite are a lot harder to pinpoint. Nevertheless, the church considers itself influential in the whole country and some prelates comment on important election campaign issues. Thus, Cardinal Njue, the Kenyan archbishop and former Nyeri bishop opposed the majimbo (decentralization) system, which was the cornerstone of the opposition's campaign agenda. The Catholic clergy from western Kenya, Odinga's stronghold, began to receive threats and announced that Cardinal Njue had expressed his own views and not the views of the church.
- 26 After the elections, the Catholic Church leadership held partisan positions. They called upon the two camps to talk and to share power. They supported all negotiations without trying to interfere. In the dioceses affected by violence, bishops courageously denounced those involved. Like in the 1990s, Catholic parishes received a number of displaced families. Nevertheless, the image of the church deteriorated because it was no longer considered an entity above ethnicity that could speak in the interest of everyone. This partly explains why its messages were ignored. This is the point of view expressed by Musambayi Katumanga, a political scientist from the University of Nairobi, who explained in an interview with the National Catholic Reporter (25 January 2008) that *"the churches were silent when we really needed them. We are harsher with our church leaders because they are the ones who are supposed to stick their neck out on questions of justice and honesty. That is their mission, and they have failed us."*
- 27 The Protestant churches came out of the crisis less weakened politically than the Catholics because the expectations on them were fewer. They disappointed many supporters but their self-criticism was harsher than that of the Catholics. During the election campaigns, leaders of churches created by colonial missionaries expressed themselves politically along ethnic lines even though national structures called for political neutrality and respect for democratic rules (rejection of vote-buying, rejection of election violence.). These religious organizations unanimously supported the PNU while the evangelical and Pentecostal churches supported the ODM camp. They sometimes aligned themselves with Musyoka, who often presented himself as "saved." After the vote, churches avoided partisan rhetoric with the exception of some Methodist and Presbyterian leaders who endorsed the head of state's re-election without consulting others. Members of the NCKC embarked on a repentance exercise (the "journey of repentance" led by the organization Secretary-General, Rev. Peter Karanja).²⁰ They stressed that their credibility had been terribly soiled by the crisis Kenya experienced. True to staunch Protestant principles, they criticized themselves publicly while Catholics remained silent on the topic, even though the blogs run by the clergy (particularly those hosted by expatriates) showed their concerns. The nature of the debate also differed between the two Christian denominations. Whereas Protestants speak of principles and morals, Catholics had a more technocratic approach: they sought bureaucratic solutions to avoid getting their structure entangled in partisan positions that could overwhelm them. Thus, some bloggers called for an end to dioceses based on ethnic boundaries. They called for an end to posting of bishops to minister among their own ethnic communities.²¹

- 28 Christian organizations were taken by surprise by the post-election crisis. Their response was to call for negotiations and to receive victims of massacres, mostly without discrimination. They also engaged in a reflection exercise on their role in breeding the causes of the disaster. Their part was actually quite minor. The conflict showed their helplessness and their inability to influence politics. It is likely that in the short-term their political voice will remain inaudible. This is not the case for Mungiki, contemporary Kenya's most infamous of the neo-traditional movements.

The tough politicization of Mungiki

- 29 In 2002, Makau Mutua, a Kenyan law professor in the State University of New York, dedicated two chapters (4 and 5) of his principal work²² to how differently the State and human rights organizations treat the Holy Book religions and the African traditional denominations. Both Christian and Muslim proselytism has demonized traditional religions and imposed the idea that pre-colonial cultures were not well-adapted to modernity. Both the colonial and the post-colonial State had a hand in this marginalization of African cultures.

In many African countries, there have been no national debates to evaluate and contextualize African customs and laws within the modern state. Many traditional practices, from polygamy to traditional healing and worship, which were discredited by the colonial state, are actively prohibited and punished by the new African-led governments. In this process of continued acculturation, African religions have been one of the major casualties of the culture of imitation (Mutua, 2002: 105).

- 30 Mutua, the multicultural activist, defends the idea of "*moral equivalence of cultures*" that contemporary human rights must actively set in motion.
- 31 At no moment does M. Mutua allude to Mungiki. Yet Mungiki seems to be the main theme of his two chapters. Kenyan readers familiar with his works associate his thoughts with the risks presented by the sect, which M. Mutua knows very well. Indeed, he actively participated in the creation and the development of the Kenya Human Rights Commission, and was one of the rare breed of lawyers who, towards the end of the Moi era, dared to take on cases involving members of Mungiki, who faced persecution by the ruling class which alternated arrests of members with political manipulation of the sect. In the beginning of the new millennium, the KHRC no longer wanted to deal with cases of young supporters of this neo-prophetic group. Release Political Prisoners, a much politicized and ethnicized NGO (essentially a Kikuyu movement) took over. Members of the KHRC shunned the Mungiki cases because they were afraid of being used by a sect that took advantage of the courts to try to gain publicity for its activities. However, Makau Mutua seems to politically disagree with this movement or at least he does not appreciate their political strategies. But Mungiki offered him a chance to reflect on the nature of the post-colonial State and the sense of crisis in this superstructure. According to him, "*the modern African State, right from its inception, has at best, relentlessly engaged in a campaign of marginalization, and at worst, eradicated African religion*" (p. 112). It has caused "*identity disorientation*" (p. 114), which explains in a deeper sense the post-colonial State's failure to adapt because it forgets or simply casts away its memory, and is set according to Eurocentric norms and values. Even though he refuses to talk of Mungiki, M. Mutua implicitly provides an analytical framework for the sect's political situation and the reactions it elicits. However,

Mungiki was at the heart of the 2007 election campaigns (not only in Central Province) and occupied a very special position. Both the media and politicians spoke of violence and the movement's practices, without dealing with the sense or the political message conveyed by these actions. Sanctions against Mungiki obscured its politicization. The elites refused to accept Mungiki's presence in the public space and in the same vein denied the relevance of social issues that the sect dramatically raised. However, since the first post-electoral violence, the ruling class has again woken up to the social reality that Mungiki has been exposing to them and which they rejected. At certain times of the crisis, it became difficult to deny deep-rooted movements in society.

- 32 Mungiki has made headlines in newspapers for the last ten years or so and researchers in social studies have come up with many analyses on this movement. Two trends have followed each other. Towards the end of the 1990s, Mungiki captured the interest of specialists on religion.²³ Protestant organizations (NCCCK) financed major research aimed at appreciating the extent of this phenomenon. After the wave of American-inspired Pentecostal movement, Protestant churches feared the success of neo-traditionalists. Thus, Mungiki captured their attention at a time when intense rumours circulated on devil worship entirely taking over social life in the Mount Kenya region. Devil worship was perceived as a contemporary form of ancient witchcraft from which many Kenyans, and in this case the Kikuyu, tried to protect themselves. In the face of this concern, mainstream Protestant churches felt disadvantaged and were incapable of finding practical answers when the Pentecostal movement and neo-traditionalists took full advantage of the faithful's fears. Thus, sociologists commissioned to study Mungiki took interest in the sect's background. They showed that it arose from of the widespread wave of prophetism that tends to be on the rise whenever the Kikuyu community considers itself in serious crisis and that it expects explanations to what it is experiencing. They also underscored the Mau Mau heritage on which Mungiki blossomed. Indeed, the contemporary sect portrays itself as having direct links with the movement of the 1950s from which it has borrowed its objectives, methods and rituals.
- 33 25 Since 2000, this religious sociology approach gave way to a more minimalist vision which from a social science perspective, denies the media doxanalysis. The majority of politicians and mostly the Kenyan middle class are frightened by this violent order to supposedly return to its roots, which the movement is carrying out effectively.²⁴ Mungiki is therefore exclusively perceived as a federation of groups of bloodthirsty youth: *"Apart from running extortion rings largely targeting the matatu industry, the Mungiki kill in the most gruesome manner, usually by beheading their victims."*²⁵ These analysts portray Mungiki as a more successful militia than others. However, by only looking at this aspect of Mungiki activities, they cannot find any explanation for the movement's unique success. Obviously, it is difficult to understand Mungiki without looking at the group in the context of a larger dynamic of privatization of violence, State withdrawal from a whole range of governance functions and take-over of security by communities themselves. Nevertheless, this movement is not only a militia group which extorts money wherever it operates. If Mungiki is simply a mafia, why then did the ruling class engage in a vendetta war against the group in 2007? ²⁶
- 34 Indeed, State leadership largely contributed to the focus of the 2007 election campaign on Mungiki. Their attempt to gag the sect politically failed and backfired on them. In the beginning of year, the family of the sect's founder announced that their organization would sponsor candidates in all Kikuyu constituencies. In 2002, Mungiki

made similar statements. At the time, politicians had effectively contained politicization of the movement. Why did the ruling class opt to engage the Njenga family in an open war five years down the line? It probably stemmed from the contents of a press conference that the media paid little attention to. Maina Njenga, the son of the Mungiki leader, announced that he was interested in one of Laikipia's two constituencies, his family's home town. However, the Kikuyu population in Laikipia is mostly from Nyeri District and the town's economic and political elite consider this part of the Rift Valley as an annex of their region. Thus, Kibaki considers Laikipia as part of his Nyeri stronghold. It was significant that in 1997, when he challenged the election results, the ruling class at the time triggered off ethnic cleansing in these two constituencies. The message was understood and Kibaki withdrew his petition. In 2007, the election results seemed too close and the President wanted to secure all the Kikuyu constituencies. Consequently, Laikipia West was taken by Ndirithu Muriithi, the head of state's nephew and brother to Kibaki's main spin doctor in the 1992, 1997 and 2002 election campaigns. The Njenga family therefore presented a threat to the interests of Kibaki's immediate family. This challenge was even more intolerable because the new candidate was not a politician and therefore faced great odds in winning the election. The reaction was fast: Maina Njenga was arrested together with his cousin for being in possession of weapons and consuming drugs (hashish). The judges sentenced Njenga to five years in jail and released Joseph Kimani Ruo. Apparently, the police rearrested the former, which they denied. He has since been reported killed. This case triggered off response strategies by Mungiki, which staged targeted attacks in constituencies represented by M. Kibaki's close allies. They especially targeted politicians with whom they had worked and who would have betrayed them (at least this is the consideration of Mungiki leaders). Thus, they concentrated on ruining the reputation of the two ministers of internal security under Kibaki, C. Murungaru and especially John Michuki. To hit the latter, Mungiki's destabilization methods took various forms: murder of local administrators in the minister's constituency, financing an opponent, threatening the bus service controlled by the politician's son, destruction of coffee plantations and assaulting patrons of the country club he owns near Nairobi. But the Kikuyu elite showed some paranoia and all risks suffered by J. Michuki's businesses were probably blamed unfairly on Mungiki.

- 35 The sect did not concentrate its violence exclusively on political targets. During the second quarter of 2007, in particular, it carried out several murders in the outskirts of Nairobi (Kiambu, Banana Hill), apparently to frighten supporters who attempted to jump ship in the face of mounting police persecution. Indeed, a new squad called Kwekwe was set up to specifically fight against Mungiki. Enjoying absolute immunity, it engaged in massacres. Human rights organizations estimate that close to 500 youths were killed between June and July.²⁷ During the entire summer, bodies were often recovered in the virtually-deserted precincts of the Nairobi National Park and in the rivers of Kamba districts. The security forces arrested very many lower-class ordinary Kenyans only because they were Kikuyu, poor and young. This was on the suspicion that they were possibly Mungiki adherents. The persecutions were particularly virulent in Michuki's constituency, where, for several weeks, young men opted to flee and seek shelter elsewhere in order to avoid police harassment.
- 36 Tension between Mungiki and the State leadership can be interpreted as a consequence of the wounded pride of senior authorities. Besides, this crisis, like the Mau Mau conflict, is some sort of civil war among the Kikuyu. In fact, sections of the Mount

Kenya populations read the confrontation between Mungiki and the State as a continuity of the violence that pitted loyalists against the Mau Mau in the 1950s. Thus, J. Michuki managed with difficulty to clear himself of accusations over his loyalist past. M. Kibaki himself made a lot of effort not to be bundled together with loyalists. Since his ascent to power, he has honoured the memory of Mau Mau heroes. There was even a disastrous tour in 2003, when a pompous welcome was organized for an Ethiopian peasant presented as General Mathenge, who was said to have taken refuge in the neighbouring country. The results of DNA tests on the Ethiopian were released four years later.²⁸ The President also promised to find the bones of Dedan Kimathi, the most famous Mau Mau leader. This is another failure that the regime attempted to erase from people's memory by installing a bronze statue of the hero in central Nairobi.

- 37 These efforts were hardly convincing because the Kibaki government had a policy that was radically hostile to Mau Mau ideals whereas Mungiki seemed to be a legacy (or offshoots) of the movement of the 1950s (even though former freedom fighters' associations contested this). Indeed, the sect, like the Mau Mau bush fighters, denounced all social obstacles that impeded achievement among young Kikuyu. However, the State is at the centre of an economic system in which the youth cannot obtain salaried employment, largely reserved for the older generation. Even young graduates have difficulty getting employed whereas there has been economic growth since 2003. They have gained nothing from an improved economic situation that has brought no hope to the most populous age groups in the country. They hence find themselves being approached for jobs as militias. It is the return of warrior ideals which makes violence the only hope of success for many young people. It creates conditions which are more prone to eruption of violence than factors of low life expectancy (at less than fifty years), which has considerably reduced the window of opportunity within which the youth can achieve (by starting a family based on sufficient income).
- 38 The State had no solution to this infernal equation (Malthusian economy + age groups before demographic transition + privatization of security), apart from the spectacle of widespread high-level corruption (Goldenberg scandal during the Moi era and the scandal of Anglo-Leasing companies during the Kibaki era), from which certain people benefit more than others. In this context, Christian morality and democratic values officially defended by all public personalities appear to be double-speak that gives little hope. The thought that the Mungiki message is yet to see better days is justifiable. The post-2007 crisis clearly demonstrated this.
- 39 Right from the initial violence that followed the announcement of official election results, Mungiki factions participated in ethnic cleansing that affected some parts of the sprawling Mathare Valley slums. In towns situated in Kikuyuland and Kikuyu-dominated towns in the Rift Valley (Nakuru, Naivasha, Nyahururu), Mungiki cells were reactivated. They administered oaths more and more openly and the police were asked to turn a blind eye. During the month of January, the sect remained rather discreet and many journalists thought that the summer massacres had completely disorganized Mungiki. But the second wave of violence in the Rift Valley discredited this analysis. Both in Nakuru and Naivasha many gangs of youth, some proclaiming their membership to the sect, carried out massacres of non-Kikuyu residents. They terrorized passengers on all roads from Nairobi to western Kenya.

- 40 This second wave of murderous fever was linked to the risks of ODM–PNU negotiations. State leadership wished to procrastinate and prolong the discussions for as long as possible while Western powers resorted to pressure and threats to force negotiators to reach a compromise. Some quarters close to the leadership perhaps funded or at least capitalized on the violence, which erupted very conveniently, to push their strategy. But Mungiki took advantage of this respite or prompt cooperation. Thus, in early March, the movement, under the banner of Kenya National Youth Alliance organized a protest march in downtown Nairobi bringing together several thousands of people. The demonstrators demanded the release of their leader Maina Njenga with slogans like “No Maina No Peace.” The police allowed the demonstrations to continue but announced the following day that a new, specialized police force to fight Mungiki would be created. It would replace the Kwekwe squad that had been disbanded in January 2008.²⁹ The mission of this police force was difficult to define as the leadership still needed the services of Mungiki. But the sect was not always going to allow itself to be used and to be denied space in public life.
- 41 The analysis of Mungiki’s political behaviour during the election period tends to consider this group as a political actor like any other. Taking its religious dimension into account makes it possible to qualify the image that attempts have been made to improve. First, Mungiki participates from a largely religious perspective where this sphere is subtly separated from the political and socio-cultural space. In this sense, this group positions itself at the centre of continuous production of the Kikuyu identity, notably to the level of its political organization. Like other prophets, it must explain what is expected of leaders in order to arrive at a certain understanding of society. Besides, and this is its originality in the grey prophetic sphere. It also portrays itself as a participant of the group called upon to govern. Indeed, Mungiki, like other Kikuyu social groups, positioned itself to welcome the election as *Ituika*, the moment where in the pre-colonial Kikuyu society, the generation in power (political and religious) handed over to a younger generation.³⁰ In this view, generations of social cadets must demand the exit of social elders. In the end, the youth take over the community’s leadership after a ceremony of purification, making a fresh start. Obviously Mungiki considers itself an embodiment of a fraction of the youth. As can be seen during elections, the period bears a strong meaning in the prophetic conception of the world that the sect promotes.
- 42 From the end of the 1990s, the Njenga family spread this doctrine of *Ituika* election that proves to be a rallying call among young adherents. But despite appearances that the sect founders cleverly protect, this vision is challenged by sections within it. Indeed, one of the reasons for the movement’s success is due to its means of communication which is both modern and very controlled. Until 2002, Mungiki’s external relations were managed by N. Waruinge, the founder’s highly-educated cousin with an impressive network of acquaintances in the political arena and in the media. This expert in communication managed to entrench the idea that Mungiki is a united mass movement, and whose followers are organized in a firm hierarchy (with model that is almost military), with a strong mobilizing or even revolutionary capacity. This rhetoric hardly created any illusions and it transpired that some Mungiki groups enjoyed a high degree of autonomy. This led to a distinction of the upcountry Mungiki, who operated differently from the Mungiki in town. Ties and numerous occasions for rituals made them meet. Nevertheless, it was clear that Nairobi communities carried out their own

(economic and political) activities and the interviews seemed to indicate that they were hardly accountable to anyone. Mungiki appeared like a federation of various groups, or like a trademark of an identity factory. However, during the elections, the Njenga family did not seem to stomach this situation any more and in 2007, sect members were murdered because they wished to leave the movement which was facing police persecution. These murders, whose aim was to instil more discipline in the ranks, were committed in accordance with rituals (severed heads displayed on a post facing a certain direction.). These killings were certainly necessary to ensure the fidelity to a religious movement which seemed to be fragmenting. Indeed, all research findings on Kikuyu prophetism underscored their difficulties to institutionalize and to limit continuous divisions.³¹ However, the contemporary Kikuyu prophetic field is currently dynamic and it readily offers alternatives to Mungiki's war and youth vision. Thus, the Akorino nebula proposes a pacifist, apolitical religious practice and away from a world³² that can act as refuge when Mungiki groups attempt to develop authoritarian oath-taking and conversion, which seems to be the case since January 2008. So much so that the recent Mungiki resurgence, which has apparently enjoyed high-level political patronage, was not unanimously embraced by sect elite itself. Ben Rawlence³³ thus thinks that the Njenga family was not directly involved in the post-election Mungiki reprisals. These forces were essentially manipulated by N. Waruinge. Thus, the sect found itself increasingly in the news but gradually lost its religious legitimacy. Mungiki became a label designed to instil fear but this political use of myth and symbols associated with the movement would neither dissipate Kikuyu prophetism nor political issues that this group so appropriately raised.

- 43 In the end, religious actors were only very secondary actors in the 2007 election campaigns and the crisis that followed the polls. This is probably regrettable because it reveals a political system that is closed by politicians, who lack new ideas and prevent the civil society (religious leaders) from genuinely engaging in the political processes. The political negation of Mungiki or at least the issues that the sect raises, reveal a system that ignores the majority of the people (the youth) and, in particular, the extremely poor sections of the population. It is dangerous when the society extols the virtues of wealth at the expense of principles of solidarity and social contract.

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NOTES

1. 'The people's bishop leaves a rich legacy.' *Daily Nation*, 5 March 2008.
2. J. Lonsdale, 2005, p. 4.
3. Thus, three months after the crisis began, reports by government structures and the Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) are yet to be released. However, change of heart by some intellectuals (notably Prof. Kibwana) during the Kibaki era raises suspicion among analysts.
4. In reality, Coast Province is a melting pot for various communities where Christianity and Islam are represented more or less equally. It is one of the regions with the highest number of Muslim voters.
5. 'Coast leaders draw up wish list for President,' *The Standard*, 14 August 2007.
6. Isaac Ongiri, 'Muslim lobbies take issue with Michuki's deportation denial.' *The Standard*, 24 October 2007 ; 'Ex-terror suspect's case withdrawn.' *The Daily Nation*, 27 October 2007; Sunguta West 'Political Repercussions of Somali Conflict Spread to Kenya.' The Jamestown Foundation, 7 November 2007, URL: <https://jamestown.org/>

brief/political-repercussions-of-somali-conflict-spread-to-kenya/ [archive]; 'Scores arrested in terror Hunt.' *The Daily Nation*, 15 December 2007.

7. Isaac Ongiri, 'Muslim lobbies take issue with Michuki's deportation denial.' *The Standard*, 24 October 2007; 'Muslim issues team picked.' *Daily Nation*, 16 October 2007.

8. 'Kibaki gives Muslims holiday.' *Daily Nation*, 6 November 2007.

9. In 2002, NARC, led by M. Kibaki, signed a similar agreement with organizations representing Muslims. What was in the interest of the country in 2002 no longer seemed to be five years later.

10. It is an old dynamic. For further reading, refer to F. Constantin, 1997.

11. These rumours were aimed at discrediting R. Odinga, who is Anglican. During election campaigns word went round that his church had excommunicated him and considered him apostate.

12. International Crisis Group, *Kenya in Crisis*, ICG Africa Report no. 137, 21 February 2008, p. 10.

13. Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 'Kenya: Armed and dangerous.' 22 February 2008.

14. Which is also mentioned in the ICG report.

15. 'Minister blames loss on witchcraft.' KTN report broadcast by YouTube.

16. Refer to A. Oded, 2000.

17. Even though the administration was more present on the ground than in the 1990s, under the Moi era, the State covered up displacement of people. The media are now more present and the international community continues to follow the situation.

18. Refer to H. Maupeu, 2004.

19. Official church statistics. Nyeri Province covers the whole of Mount Kenya region and beyond. Its 7 dioceses are Nyeri, Embu, Maralal, Marsabit, Meru, Murang'a, Nyahururu.

20. 'Church on a soul-searching journey.' *The Standard*, 2 March, 2008.

21. John L. Allen Jr, 'Church leaders faulted in Kenya.' *National Catholic Reporter*, 25 January 2008; Catholic Information Service for Africa (Nairobi), 'Catholic expert says Church is guilty of fanning tribalism.' Catholic Information Service for Africa (Nairobi) [archive], 29 February 2008.

22. M. Mutua, 2002.

23. G.N. Wamue, 2001.

24. D. Anderson 2002; P.M. Kagwanja, 2006; M. Katumanga, 2005; H. Maupeu, 2002a ; J.-C. Servant, 2005.

25. 'Mungiki storm city, stage demo.' 6 March 2008.

26. This makes specialists to adopt a policist approach which is strongly balanced against religious sociology analysis: P.M. Kagwanja, 2003; H. Maupeu, 2002b; H. Maupeu, 2003. For more on the Mungiki doctrine, see H. Maupeu, 2007.

27. IRIN, 8 June 2007, 'Police repression against the Mungiki sect intensifies'; Oscar Foundation, *Youth State Repression. The Killings Fields*, Nairobi, 2007.

28. 'Ethiopian Ayanu was not the Uhuru hero.' *The Standard*, 18 October 2007.

29. 'Mungiki storm city, stage demo.' *The Standard*, 6 March 2008; 'New squad formed to crack down on Mungiki.' *The Standard*, 7 March 2008.

30. On this subject, refer to H. Maupeu, 2003 and 2007.

31. Refer to Valeer Neckebrouck's work, *Le onzième commandement : étiologie d'une église indépendante au pied du Mont Kenya* (Immensee : Nouvelle revue de science missionnaire, 1978) and *Le peuple affligé : les déterminants de la fissiparité dans un mouvement religieux au Kenya central* (Immensee : Nouvelle revue de science missionnaire, 1983).

32. On this subject, Barbara Morovich is an authority. Refer especially to Morovitch, B., 2007. *The Tent of the Living God* is also a neo-traditional movement close to the Mungiki wave. Some even say that Mungiki stemmed from it. This group, which is pacifist, survived the death of its founder, Ngonya wa Gakonya and offers an alternative for Mungiki adherents.

33. He prepared the Human Rights Watch report on the Kenyan crisis, *Ballots to Bullets. Organized Political Violence and Kenya's Crisis of Governance*, March 2008, Vol. 20, no. 1 (A).

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