

We Are the True Sons of Mau Mau! Re-Assessing the Historiography of Resistance in Kenya, 1924-2010.

Mwangi Joseph Macharia¹

¹ Egerton University, Department of Philosophy, History and Religion, Njoro, Kenya

mwangijm2003@yahoo.com

Mungiki is a politico-religious group and a banned criminal organization in Kenya. The organisation, which originated in the late 1980s, is secretive and bears similarity to mystery religions. Specifics of their origin and doctrines are unclear. What is clear is that they favour a return to indigenous African traditions and reject Westernisation and all trappings of colonialism. They reject Christianity, and force women to undergo circumcision. The ideology of the group is characterised by revolutionary rhetoric, Kikuyu traditions, and a disdain for Kenyan modernization, which they see as immoral corruption. They engage in violent crimes and vigilantism as a way of responding to ambivalence and show discontent about state authority and impotent democratic processes. Their violent 'modus operandi' has tremendously effected the social-economic and political landscape in Kenya. The group comprises unemployed youths from poor families of the Kikuyu community. They engage in extreme violence such as beheading and dismembering their victims and forced female circumcision (FGM). They also engage in extortion in the matatu sector and levying of "protection fees" in the Nairobi's slums. Their popularity among the political elites and some wananchi, reveal complexities and contradictions that characterize the contours of social-political organization and democratization in Kenya. This paper demonstrates that violent crimes and vigilantism are the "fashionable" reaction to disappointments of Kenya's neoliberal economic reforms and the yet-to-succeed democratization process. Paradoxically, popular justification for violent crimes, criminality and vigilantism draws on ideals of democracy and development. Popular perceptions of the Mungiki and their violent approach to political issues and co-opting of vigilantism by politicians, serve to obscure the responsibility of the state for maintenance of inequality and spearheading democratization, even as violent crimes and vigilantism are, simultaneously, forceful reaction to institutionalized social-political injustice. The paper argues that the government security agencies and other stakeholders cannot ignore the Mungiki in their efforts to solve or manage security in Nairobi. Their participation in recent ethnic wars in Kenya has evoked serious academic concerns on the group. What is interesting is that the Mungiki sect, see themselves as "the true sons of the Mau Mau". Using interdisciplinary approaches, I explore the myriad ways in which youth in Kenya construct their own identity and how they derive power and inspirations from the past (Mau Mau). I also examine the problems surrounding conceptions of mungiki as well as how conflicts between the young (mungiki) and old (Mau Mau) generations reconfigure power in society.