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

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ABSTRACT

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.

INTRODUCTION

Recent events across the African continent, including, dramatically and tragically, the eruption of violent resistant conflicts and massacres, have brought the question of citizenship and identity to the fore of intellectual discourses and policy reflection. The combination of factors which has posed the citizenship and identity question anew, range from the economic and the social to the political and demographic. Matters have not been helped by the crisis of state legitimacy as well as the project of state retrenchment that has taken a severe toll on governance capacity in most parts of the continent. As can be expected, a broad range of contestations and resistance have been organised around the multidimensional citizenship and identity issues that have been thrown up.

These contestations and resistance have both been generated by and have helped bring to the fore, the disjuncture between formal rules of citizenship and daily practice as it actually takes place; the shifting spatial (re)distribution of population within and between states and the unchanging rules by which rights and entitlement are defined and allocated; the high ideals of the social contract between state and society and the non-justice ability of most citizen rights at a time of the retrenchment of the social state and the collapse of state capacity; the patriarchal foundations of the construction/practice of citizen rights and the growing challenges of accommodating women's rights; the promise of nation-building founded on multiculturalism (as projected by the slogan of unity in diversity) and the increasing parochial politics of settlers/residents vs. natives/indigenes; the growing cosmopolitanism associated, in part, with a rapid process of urbanization and the intensification of xenophobia and xenophobic practices; and the tension between civic law and the colonially-constructed realm of "tradition" and "custom".

Considering the (sometimes violent) emotions which it has aroused and the toll which it has already taken, it is right to suggest that the citizenship and identity question has, easily, become the most important political question in Africa today. It is a question that carries serious implications for policy-making and the continuing stability, even viability of many a polity. With many countries across the continent facing serious intra-state challenges from disaffected groups that define themselves as the victims of long-term exclusion, the time is right for a painstaking comparative research on citizenship and identity in Africa to be carried

out which could be both educative in its own right but also serve as a useful basis for policy dialogue and advocacy for reform. Such a study is made all the more necessary as some of the intra-state challenges have already resulted in genocidal violence and the fragmentation and collapse of central governmental authority. Moreover, there is a distinct danger that state legitimacy and viability are likely to continue to be eroded if a balanced framework for the exercise of citizenship and the projection of identity is not established. It's imperative to understand contemporary dynamics of citizenship and identity in the continent, in ways that can provide a basis for possible pro-active policy and advocacy work at the local, national, sub-regional and continental levels.

Over ten years after the Rwandan genocide and the onset of the round of crises that consumed the entire Great Lakes region – developments which have served as the most eloquent symbol of the citizenship and identity question, it is appropriate that such a study be undertaken with clear and strategic policy reform objectives in mind.

HISTORICAL AND CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

The nationalist anti-colonial coalition that inherited state power at independence faced many challenges, not least among them the need to define an adequate framework for managing ethno-regional diversity, preserving the territorial integrity of the countries, expanding the framework for the provisioning of the broad social welfare needs of the populace, promoting the basic rights and civil liberties that had been denied to all but a few, and instituting a balanced framework for national development. [1]

Most of the first generation independence governments went about the broad-ranging socio-economic and political challenges which they confronted through a heavy investment in nation-building and a project of state-led development. The task of welding multi-ethnic, multi-religious countries into a nation against the backdrop of the colonial legacy of divide to rule was never going to be easy; the approach adopted by governments without exception consisted of the adoption of national unity projects that were, to say the least, distrustful of autonomous ethnic identities. Even in cases where the notion of "unity in diversity" was embraced as official policy, practice was more attuned to the idea of unity and distrustful of diversity. The slogan of "one nation, one destiny, one God" that was adopted in a several

[1] See for example, Watson, Mary Ann (ed.). *Modern Kenya: Social Issues and Perspectives.* Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2000. and Widner, Jennifer A. *The Rise of a Party-state in Kenya: From "Harambee" to "Nyayo!"* Berkeley: University of California, 1992.

countries spoke more directly and accurately to the desire to suppress ethno-regional identities that were considered to be parochial and, therefore, obstructive of the particular vision of national unity that was being pursued. This, in many cases, included the suppression of the rights and aspirations of ethnic and religious minorities.

In time, the dominant policy frame translated into the erosion of political pluralism, the institutionalisation of single party/military rule or civilian-military diarchies, and the rise of the cult of the personal ruler. The monopoly on power which the single party/military governments claimed was tragic enough for the abridgement of civil liberties, minority interests and human rights that went with it but worse still, it was itself, in many cases, founded on narrow ethnic pillars although it was justified in the first place on the basis of the need to transcend ethnicity in the task of developing a new national identity framework for the exercise of citizenship rights. Resistance to this version of nation-building and the disaffection associated with its failure truly to advance the boundaries of national unity elicited high handed responses from the authorities which fed into the political authoritarianism that became a feature of post-independence governance.[2]

The zeal with which the national unity project was pursued and the monopoly on power that was part of it was justified partially on the grounds that all national energies needed to be mobilised and focused on the task of national development. There were many aspects to the agenda of national development which the nationalists pursued but perhaps the most crucial centred on the realisation of the goals that constituted the key pillars of the post-colonial social contract whose articulation during the anti-colonial struggle was critical to the mobilisation of popular support for independence. Where the colonial authorities denied Africans access to the amenities that were deemed necessary

for the modernisation and full citizenship for which many yearned, and while the state had a narrow social agenda which privileged the colonial officials themselves and was incapable of responding to the growing needs of the broad populace, the nationalist politicians who led the independence campaign promised an all-round better life in socio- economic terms, with freedom and dignity serving as the icing on the cake. The construction of a national identity was, therefore, as important a priority of post-independence policy-making as the promotion of a project of social citizenship that served as the frame within which expectations about the services which the state could be expected to offer were defined. In practice, given the

[2] Kanyinga, K., 1998, "Contestation over political space: The state and demobilization of opposition politics in Kenya". In Olukoshi (ed.), 1998.

magnitude of the needs at hand, the state was not able to meet all the demands and expectations that built up; the exercise of policy discretion in the designation of priorities became a central part of the politics of resource allocation in post-independence Africa. The contestations that built up around resource allocation were refracted into the broader dialectic of state-society relations given the dominant role of the state in the economy; these contestations also fed into the politics of inclusion and exclusion that became a prominent part of post-independence politics of citizenship and identity. The dialectics of inclusion and exclusion intensified with the growth of scarcity and austerity in the political economy; it underpinned the bitterness with which the citizenship and identity question was posed and fought out in the 1980s and 1990s. It also partly explains the intensity of the competition for access to and control of the state.

Groups which felt themselves excluded in the emerging post-colonial political economy served generally as the support base for the organisation of oppositional politics; their disaffection also coalesced into silent and open challenges to the entire post-colonial nation-building project. The absence of effective mechanisms for responding to the challenges and the authoritarian manner in which they were handled meant that layers of grievances cumulated within the polity, waiting for a time and an avenue to burst into the open. Disaffection and the challenges which they generated often took ethno-regional and religious forms; however, importantly, there were also generational challenges as captured by youth alienation and disaffection, and gender challenges as represented by growing agitation by women for a bigger voice in governance. There were also rural-based protests which were linked to the concerns of the rural working poor and pressures mounted by the urban working class as represented by the trade union movement. Furthermore, a variety of social movements and civic associations emerged to canvass different concerns, acting sometimes underground or in exile, and in some cases openly in the domestic context.[3]

In the context of the economic crises which was later to grip most African countries at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, the various disaffected groups were to take a prominent role in the struggle for the opening up the local political space as the post-colonial state-led model of development collapsed and the system of political governance erected around it ceased to be tenable. The subsequent political reform agenda that was

[3] Olukoshi A. 1998, "Economic crisis, Multipartism and opposition politics in contemporary Africa. In Olukoshi (ed.), The politics of opposition in contemporary Africa. Stockholm: Elanders Gotab.

launched in many countries during the 1990s is part of the recent history of the continent that is still fresh and very well known and so we need not discuss it in detail here. Suffice it to note that it encompassed a broad-ranging process of soul-searching and stock- taking that culminated in the abandonment of single party/military rule, the embrace of multiparty politics and elections, the adoption of constitutional reforms, and the implementation of political decentralization measures, among others.

MAU MAU AND THE COLONIAL STATE

It is not the intention of this paper to discuss in detail the scope and nature of Mau Mau insurrection. This has been done extensively by many African and Africanists scholars. However, in this study, I try to look at those elements of Mau Mau that were carried on throughout the Kenyan history and manifested in Mungiki which has become one of the major forms of the intrastate challenge to the nation-State project in Kenya.

Historians still find it difficult to understand the nature of the Mau Mau insurrection, with the obscurity of its origins and the apparently indiscriminate direction of its violence. Anthropologists, seeing that the violence was a product of present grievances rather than of any atavistic past, interpreted Mau Mau as 'not a reversion to ancient rituals but a regression deriving power from the breach of universal taboos' some Africans hailed it a as a national struggle for land and freedom; but since participation was largely confined to Kikuyu (with the neighbouring Embu and Meru) – and since nearly 2,000 African civilians were killed, as against thirty-two Europeans and twenty-six Asians – such a view raises problems about the nature of the modern Kenyan nation.. Later commentators gave more weight to the socio-political context; by 1960 even a hostile official could discern to violent manifestation of a limited nationalistic revolutionary movement' (Rosberg and Nortingham: Nairobi, 1966:23).

This inability to place Mau Mau in its place in the political developments in Kenya, gives room for general conclusions that it was to a large extent, a tribal revolt contesting for the political space-or a peasant revolt developing on the fringe of nationalist politics. Some historians, such as Bethwell Ogot, have dismissed Mau Mau as a narrow tribalist affair. Although it must be admitted that with Mau Mau, a truly radical nationalist movement emerged. Because of its sudden break with middle-class nationalism, Mau Mau failed to develop a distinct political programme and an ideology. Even nationalism as a principle remained diffuse and ill-defined. The aim of most activists was winning access to land. Kikuyu squatters fought and died for land and not for some abstract conception of

nationhood. Be it as it may, it would be ideal to conclude that the later similar developments in Kenya therefore, took the form of Mungiki.

The Mau Mau movement was itself part of the process of the construction of an objective Kikuyu identity premised on a shared culture and a shared structural predicament. The hymn texts which are integral part of the movement were carried forth to the Mwakenya and Mungiki sects. These hymns strongly emphasize[d] land (Kikuyuland) and Kikuyu traditional regime. One line reads: God will send a sword from Kiringaga *(Mt. Kenya). The hymns constantly echo the necessity of recovering land for example:*

Mumbi's household …has been disturbed
They will be asked by the kikuyu….
Why did you sell our land?
We shall get our land which was sold for chieftainship[4]

The application of these symbols from Kikuyu legends and history had an integrafunction in binding many Kikuyu to the Mungiki movement. The movement was essentially an ad hoc response to changing conditions. It was born of a common experience of economic insecurity, land hunger, a feeling of frustration born of racial oppression and resentment of the Kikuyu establishment. These sentiments developed spontaneously; nobody had to teach a Kikuyu squatter or a shantytown dweller to hate the colonial police or the Kikuyu authorities. The main catalysts behind the explosion were the unmediated tensions that prevailed in Nairobi and the European settled areas in the rift valley and in the Kikuyu reserves. In these regions, tensions were always liable to boil over into conflict (Guy, 1978:14).

It is a well attested fact that Mau Mau was not merely directed against the colonial authorities but also against the Kenyatta regime. This was illustrated by the fact that after independence it took nearly four years before the Kenyatta government was able to establish stability on the land. During this period, the conflict between the ex-squatters and the state took on a class character, as those without land tried to fight the new group of African capitalist farmers. The emergence of the protests in the late 1920s which matured into a mass movement in the 1940s and armed struggle in the early 1950s was finally destroyed by the Kenyan African ruling class in the late 1960s.

Civil disobedience became the norm as landless Africans organized to defend their interests. Thousands of landless peasants were determined to acquire land, and they were joined by thousands of migrants who poured into the Rift Valley in search of land. Indeed,

[4] (Ogot: 1956:78).

the neutralization and repression of the KPU can be compared to the containment of Mau Mau. In different ways and under different conditions Mau Mau and the KPU sought to give organizational expression to the grievances of the urban and landless proletariat. Both Mau Mau and the KPU faced state repression, the difference being that for Mau Mau it was by the British and for the KPU it was the Kenyatta regime. In reality Kenyatta and his class hated Mau Mau. As he argued in 1967:

> *'We are determined to have independence in peace, and we shall not allow hooligans to rule Kenya. We must have no hatred towards one another. Mau Mau was a disease which had been eradicated, and must never be remembered again.'*

I argue that the Mau Mau activities therefore, and the resilient resistance to social, economic, political and even religious domination in Kenya did not stop at independence. The same ex-Mau Mau soldiers-landless whom Kenyatta never rewarded except by just a mere handshake, continued to struggle for basic resources which they did not have in both Kenyatta and Moi regimes. .

However I'm convinced that the peasants and workers who fought and died did so not only for the sake of culture but also to cement a unity of purpose-putting a Kikuyu leader into power -Mau Mau greatest strength was its organizational independence. The split with moderate nationalists allowed radical activists to promote the aspirations of the masses and thus challenge the very foundations of the colonial order. The problem was that this challenge remained diffuse because Mau Mau did not develop its own independent ideology. The failure to evolve a coherent class-based social programme meant that Mau Mau was simply the militant wing of a nationalist movement. The fundamental conflict of interest between those who supported militant nationalism and those who advocated moderation was never clarified.

Mau Mau brought the question of social change out into the open which was later quickly to be picked by the Mungiki organization. Once Mau Mau was defeated, an all-class nationalist party could be created, one that precisely because it was undifferentiated would be responsive only to the interests of the new African bourgeoisie. Writing in 1977, the Kenyan historian Ben Kipkorir noted that the Mau Mau emergency was 'certainly responsible for the precise timing of the conclusion of British rule in Kenya but he implies that Mau Mau was in fact responsible for delaying the decolonization process.

RESISTANCE, ETHNICITY, IDENTITY AND END OF COLD WAR

In the advent of multi –party politics in Kenya there occurred many fundamental changes, which had not been witnessed for along time in the history of Kenya. They were both positive and negative. Positive in the sense that, the changes brought into fruition a wide space of political expression which was unfortunately abused and brought good elements of multi party politics into test. For instance it negatively ushered a wave of political violence that was fuelled by tribal and sectarian interests. This spate of violence in Rift-Valley province[5] is what came to be called land clashes witnessed prior to and after the first two multi- party general elections in Kenya's in 1991/92 and 1997/98 periods.

The two protagonist parties in the province exercised politics of the time that brought forward the land clashes differently. The Kalenjins and Kikuyus who had co-existed well for long time until the onset of multi-partism in Kenya in 1991 were profoundly polarized along political lines and hence different interests and opinions. Kikuyus joined Democratic Party and FORD Asili whereas Kalenjins remained in Kenya African National Union (KANU).[6] Similarly in the national arena the 'Young Turks' who came to represent the 'second liberation' resorted to demonstrations among other strategies to dislodge the ruling party from power. Meanwhile those on the government the so-called 'KANU Hawks' who represented the status quo resorted to ethnic chauvinism and threats to secure power. The meeting point of these two groups was violence that was camouflaged in the name of land clashes although it had nothing to do with land issues.

Those supporting the single party predicted that the country would disintegrate along tribal lines a situation that would lead to chaos.[7] Consequently, the hawkish government MPs from KANU and its party cadres openly called for the removal of other ethnic groups from the province as they were viewed as opposition adherents.[8] In addition they called for *majimbo* system (federal) of governance so as to protect their regional interests from outsiders. This debate saw the revival of tribal organisations which had been found useful in the past like KAMATUSA an acronym of Kalenjin Maasai, Turkana and Samburu as a tool of advancing tribal politics. It is in this relation that Nnoli observes that the selfish ambition of the ruling elite and the petty bourgeois are often presented as ethnic interests and as a

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[5] Kenya is divided to 8 administrative provinces, namely Rift Valley, Eastern, Coast, Nyanza, Western, North Eastern, Central and Nairobi. With exception of Nairobi others are largely defined along ethnic groups

[6] Centre forConflict Resolution, Ethnic Conflicts in Nakuru District a Report of the Current Conflicts in Mau Narok, Mauche and Likia Areas and the Situational Analysis. October, 2004, P.2

[7] President Moi was a popular advocate of this prophecy.

[8] Kagwanja, peter, *killing the vote: state sponsored violence and flawed elections in Kenya* human Rights Commission, 1998, p.2

general struggle for the survival and well being of the community.[9] Thus the struggle for political power is seen in ethnic terms hence it inevitably heightens ethnicity and ethnic consciousness.

In short, Kenyan politics have encompassed an interlinked chain of constitutional, economic and violent events, which came before and after the election campaigns and polling time. These events form the basis of analysing Kenya's political transition from a single party state to a multi party state. They include pre electoral events such as a spate of mass meetings, demonstrations and rallies to advance the cause of constitutional and electoral reform; seemingly violent attempts to ethnically cleanse population in the rift valley province and elsewhere; and suspension of loan by IMF and WB as a condition of asserting the needs of good governance, transparency and accountability.[10]

The above developments prompted the international community to call on the Kenyan government to act swiftly and save lives of innocent Kenyans who had been caught up in the transition crisis. The opposition groups, which had taken shape in the name of political parties, joined hands with the international community to call for political tolerance. This was based on the assumption that land clashes were state sponsored violence. With reluctance from the Kenyan government few political and constitutional amendments were implemented to levelise the ground for free and fair elections. This unfortunately saw the twenty five percent, five-province rule coming into birth. This meant that a presidential candidate could only be declared elected by garnering 25% of total cast votes in each of the five provinces of Kenya out of the total eight provinces.

This rule is widely thought to have intensified the *Majimboism* (federalism) debate which was led by the hawkish government ministers. The hot bed of this debate shifted to Rift Valley province, which occupies 40% of Kenya's landmass. Rift valley incidentally is occupied largely by the Kalenjin communities who were pro government as opposed to pockets of Diaspora communities like the Kikuyu, Luo, Gusii and Luhya who were perceived to be anti government.[11] Therefore *majimbo* debate was used to instill fear that unless they

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[9] Nnoli Okwudiba, *Ethnic Politics in Africa*, Ibadan: Vintage Books, 1989, P.4

[10] Michael Cowen and Karuti Kanyinga, 'The 1997 Elections in Kenya: The Politics of Communality and Locality', PP 128—171 in Michael Cowen and Liisa Laakso, *Multi-Party Elections in Africa*,Oxford: James Currey

[11] The considered diaspora communities of Rift Valley were largely settled in the Rift Valley through government settlement schemes and other African land buying companies immediately after independence when the so called white highlands were vacated by the whites. The Kalenjins have always believed that they were short changed by the Kenyatta Government.

supported the government of the day they will be expelled to their home provinces. One minister was quoted saying figuratively 'let them lie low like envelopes' meaning that the Diaspora community was only to be seen and not be heard as far the political debate of political pluralism was concerned. This and many sentiments witnessed organised groups unleashing terror by torching houses and other property destruction finally leading to a full-scale war. This spate of violence came to be dubiously called the land clashes which are the subject of this study. Such that between 1991 and 2001 this violence led to the deaths of over 4,000 pope and almost 600,000 displaced. [12]

The issue of land clashes has not been given enough scholarly attention particularly by examining how it was a function of a transition from single party state to a multi-party state of politics. And why it only occurred at the eve of the first two multi-party general elections. Instead it has been left to politicians and peace advocacy groups who have largely called for a truth and reconciliation commission akin to that of South Africa to look onto the evils of the land clashes. While these horrors are not new necessarily in the annals of human history, they were systematically hidden and trivialized by the state powers that sometimes played a role in entrenching them. This study therefore aims at interrogating academically the violence that accompanied political pluralism in Kenya as exhibited in Rift Valley land clashes between 1990 and 2000.

VIOLENT RESISTANCE AND BEING A KENYAN CITIZEN: GIKUYU AND MUNGIKI ETHNIC IDENTITY

Public concern that the police had failed to take adequate steps to prevent the violence was deepened by reports of police heavy-handedness, insensitivity and general incompetence in rounding-up supposed 'suspects' when they finally arrived in Kariobangi some hours following the attack. What protection would the police offer the teeming populations of the estates and shanties of Nairobi's Eastlands and Southlands against further attacks of a similar nature? Underlying these fears was the suspicion that the slaughter had been politically motivated.[13] There was widespread speculation, reported in all the 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

[12] Kenya Human Rights Commission, 'Quarterly Human Rights Report', Vol.3, No.4, 2001
[13] 'Police ignored my three massacre alerts, says MP', Daily Nation, 6 March 2002.

police. 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 election campaigns of 1992 and 1997. [14]

Grace Wamue has described the nature of Mungiki 'in relation to the traditional religion and cultural practice of the Gikuyu people'. She traces its origins to an evangelical sect known as the 'Tent of the Living God', founded in the Laikipia district, in 1987, under the leadership of the charismatic 58-year old Gikuyu preacher Ngonya wa Gakonya.[15] The movement initially drew upon Gikuyu traditional values in establishing an indigenous alternative to the materialism of the many evangelical Pentecostal churches that have flourished in central Kenya from the 1980s. Mungiki appears to have emerged as a splinter movement within the 'Tent of the Living God' before 1990, coming to prominence when its members sought registration as a political party in order to contest seats at the 1992 elections – an aim in which they were not successful.

Mungiki's supporters were initially predominantly young (under 30), many having left the established Christian churches to join the movement. As the movement has grown, it has attracted a high proportion of Kikuyu displaced from the Rift Valley districts by violence around the elections of 1992 and1997, and it has become firmly embedded among the urban poor of Nairobi's slum estates. Mungiki philosophy espouses a mixture of Kikuyu traditionalism, harking back to a mythologized pre-colonial image of egalitarianism and social order, with biblical references drawn from Old Testament texts, all of this turned toward a moralistic critique of the failings of the modern state in Kenya.[16]

Mungiki claims to speak for the poor and dispossessed, but with a distinctively Gikuyu voice. The influence of the preacher Gakonya would appear now to be minimal and it is Ibrahim Ndura Waruinge, who first joined the movement in 1987 when only 15 years of age, who is identified as Mungiki's leader and principal spokesperson. This shift from Gakonya, the charismatic hermit preacher of Gikuyu traditionalism, to Waruinge, the 27 year-old radical Gikuyu political activist, is more significant than Wamue's analysis of the movement has allowed. Though Waruinge strongly promotes Gikuyu heritage and the

[14] For a review of Kenya's current politics, see Rok Ajulu, 'Kenya: One step forward, three steps back – the succession dilemma', Review of African Political Economy, 88 (2001), pp.197- 21.

[15] See, for example, reports of the arrest of Gakonya at a meeting of 'The Tent of the Living God': Kurgat Marindany, 'Chaos as sect leader is nabbed', East African Standard, 1 May 2002.

[16] Grace Nyatugah Wamue, 'Revisiting our indigenous shrines through Mungiki', African Affairs, 100 (2001), pp. 453-67.

foundation of what he terms 'the Kirinyaga kingdom', in both rhetoric and deed Mungiki has become increasingly politicised. As Wamue herself acknowledges, Mungiki adherents can barely manage five minutes of conversation 'without spontaneously deviating into the politics of contemporary Kenya…. They … criticize the widespread political oppression, poverty and violence experienced by Kenyans at the hands of government agents in the same breath as they condemn cultural and religious imperialism'.[17] Wamue's conclusion that Mungiki's 'core values'remain essentially rooted in an apolitical and passive rural support base is difficult to reconcile with the strident, violent, criminal and increasingly intimidatory tactics employed by the movement in Nairobi's slums over the past two years.

Whatever Mungiki may once have been on the distant farms of Laikipia, it has transformed into a radically different movement in the estates, shanties and slums of the city. In contrast with Wamue's portrayal, Terisa Turner and Leigh Brownhill have emphasized Mungiki's radicalism, placing the movement in the Kenyan vanguard of the international campaign 'for globalization from below to rebuild the civil commons alternative to corporate rule'.[18]

This interpretation links Mungiki with Nairobi-based Muungano wa Wanavijiji ('The Organisation of the Villagers'), established among the slum-dwellers of the city to fight evictions and protect tenants. Taken together, the two movements are seen to represent a 'rebirth' of the Mau Mau struggle of the 1950s for 'land and freedom'. Turner and Brownhill thus describe Mungiki support for Rift Valley farmers displaced in the ethnic clashes of 1992 and 1997 (from whose numbers Mungiki obtained many recruits), and emphasize the growing role of Mungiki in urban protests against oppressive landlords and corrupt urban 'land-grabbers'.[19] The involvement of women in these protests is stressed by Turner and Brownhill, as is support for the struggles of the poor, the dispossessed, and the landless. While these accounts indicate that Mungiki is clearly a more complex and multi-faceted organisation than Wamue suggests, the materialist, instrumentalist and ethnocentric character of local Kenyan politics and of the Mungiki movement is glossed over. Nor is there any sense

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[17] See Kimani Njogu, 'The culture of politics and ethnic nationalism in Central Province and Nairobi', in Marcel Rutten, Alamin Mazrui and Francois Grignon (eds), Out for the Count: The 1997 General Elections and Prospects for Democracy in Kenya (Kampala, 2001), pp.381-404.

[18] Terisa E. Turner & Leigh S. Brownhill, 'African jubilee: Mau Mau resurgence and the fightfor fertility in Kenya, 1986-2002', Canadian Journal of Development Studies, 22 (2001), pp.1037.

[19] Turner & Brownhill, 'African jubilee', pp.1037-1088; Terisa E. Turner & Leigh S. Brownhill, '"Women never surrender": the Mau Mau and globalization from below in Kenya 1980-2000', in Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, Nicholas G. Faraclas & Claudia von Werlhof (eds), There is an Alternative; Subsistence and Worldwide Resistance to Corporate Globalization (London, New York & Victoria, 2001), pp.106-32.

that the Mungiki movement may have undergone significant changessince its' founding. These aspects of Mungiki require closer scrutiny.

Under the national leadership of Waruinge, Mungiki have become stridently ethnocentric. He has declared that Mungiki will fulfil the prophecies of Mugo wa Kibiro, the Gikuyu diviner and seer of the late nineteenth century. Reading Mugo wa Kibiro through the writings of Jomo Kenyatta,[20] but also with heavy influences from Ngugi wa Thiongo's presentation of the prophet's words in the novel Weep Not, Child,

Waruinge places responsibility for the 'decay' of Gikuyu traditions squarely on the shoulders of European colonialism.The present Gikuyu generation should now throw off the shackles of colonialism, neo-colonialism and Christianity, which presented the greatest challenge to Gikuyu cultural values, and seek redemption, as Mugo wa Kibiro had predicted they must: 'We have come together and purified ourselves to avoid God's curse', [21] The revival of Gikuyu values in the 'kingdom of Kirinyaga' also implies a political restoration of Gikuyu power through the removal of the oppressive 'Nyayo regime' of President Moi.

And even among the Gikuyu communities, many view Mungiki as 'backward-looking' and dangerously subversive. Mungiki's threatening character is accentuated by its unpredictability. This was perhaps most vividly to be seen when several prominent Mungiki leaders declared intention to become Muslims in June 2000. The announcement of this brought considerable publicity, but to the embarrassment of Muslim leaders it soon became apparent that Mungiki members did not see that embracing Islam in any way implied a challenge to their beliefs in Gikuyu traditional religion and cultural practice.

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[21] For a full discussion of the historical significance of Mugo wa Kibiru, see John Lonsdale, 'The prayers of Waiyaki: political uses of the Kikuyu past', in David M. Anderson and Douglas H. Johnson (eds), Revealing Prophets: Prophecy in Eastern African History (London, Nairobi, Kampala & Athens OH, 1995), pp.240-4, 263-82.

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