

The Role of Youth in Politics: The Social Praxis of Party Politics Among the Urban Lumpen in Kenya

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Abstract

In multi-ethnic urban areas of Kenya, competition for political power by different political groups often degenerates into ethnic conflict. Different political factions gather support from the urban youth (especially the lumpen) and, in some instances, involve the youth in violent ethnic confrontations. The ethnic elite have transformed this urban lumpen and mobilised them for support and for eroding, through "privatised violence", the social bases of rival factions. Accordingly, the success of any faction in the competition for political power tend to depend on the extent to which the ethnic elite mobilise the youth against their rivals.

This paper points out that multi-partyism has "re-ethnicised" rather than "detrified" the urban lumpen and the youth in general. This is a disturbing phenomenon given that the youth have acted as agents of "social detribalisation". The discussion examines the contradictions between "re-ethnisation" and democratisation and concludes that the ethnic identities of the youth and the urban lumpen have not prevented them from participating in directing political change. The paper also examines the social basis of political activism processes among the youth and their changing identities as influenced by ethnicity and other factors. The paper is based on a qualitative survey carried out in Nairobi regarding the second multi-party electoral politics and elections held in December 1997.

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Introduction

From the colonial period, ethnicity has continually informed the organisation of party politics and struggles of access to and control of state power in Kenya. Relatedly, the first and second generation of political elite view ethnicity as an ideological tool to galvanise social political support which they use in economic competition and political conflicts. In the urban areas, however, modernisation and increased involvement of the youth in politics, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, undermined ethnic-based interests. The urban youth provided political support to individuals on account of broad criteria unlike their rural counterparts who supported their respective ethnic elite on the grounds that they would bring "the developmental state home".

Re-introduction of multi-party politics from the early 1990s and the economic crisis related to the SAP tend to reactivate ethnic-based factions even in urban areas where "detrribalisation" is argued to have been concluded. Different political actors in both the 1992 and 1997 elections mobilised the urban lumpen on an ethnic basis; the urban lumpen became an-extension of the rural-based social-cultural cleavages. Significantly, mainstream political parties used the urban-lumpen to mobilise support and insulate their gains from erosion by their rivals. Within the ranks of the ruling party, Kenya African National Union (KANU), for instance, the youth wing, after introduction of multi-partyism, became the single most important "security organ" for the party, working alongside the formal state security. Elite members of the wing later constituted Youth for KANU (YK '92) comprising especially enterprising young business people eager to accumulate wealth and political power through the state.

YK '92 became the main avenue through which the state party disbursed patronage resources to mobilise support for President Moi and KANU in general. This organisation disbanded immediately after the elections. The second multi-party elections held in December 1997 saw the rise of another youth organisation, *Jeshi la Mzee* (the old man's army or gang), rooted in the city lumpen. The organisation operated as a private army or terror gang for senior ethnic elite; it occasionally discharged violence against opposition politicians and the pro-constitutional change actors (the main one at the time was the National Conventional Executive Council). Other parties formed similar groups as "privatised forms of violence" and increasingly filled the political space at the urging of senior political elite who incorporated the youth to complete their ethno-political projects.

This paper examines the socio-political processes leading to the rapid "ethnisation" of the youth and the urban lumpen. The paper shows that the parties created youth wings (factions) to, inter alia, mobilise political support

and erode the social bases of others through privatised political violence or "warlordism". Of concern is the question of why the youth in urban areas became ethnicised in the political struggle while absolving or overlooking ethnic identities in other spheres. The paper points out that although youth act as the main social force in political liberalisation and they have all along acted as "detrified" actors, multi-partyism has "detrified" them and eroded their "secular identities". This is a major challenge for democratisation given the crucial role that youth play in the struggle for socio-political change.

Ethnicity, Youth Identity and Politics in Urban Areas

Ethnicity as a factor that binds together a people sharing common cultural practices and language is one subject that has been extensively reviewed. Its centrality in the organisation of local politics has also received a great deal of scholarly attention. On the one hand, modernisation theorists generally treated ethnic identities as relics of a fading traditional society (Coleman and Rosberg, 1964). Critics of the modernisation school see ethnicity and the attendant cultural bondage as a mode of resistance to capitalist exploitation and state oppression. They stress that people re-invent ethnic identities to gain leverage in the competition for control. Ethnic identity, therefore, becomes a defence and survival mechanism for oppressed groups. A related argument falling within the dependency model suggests that the colonial state invented "political ethnicity" to consolidate its hold on political power by setting one ethnic group against another (Lonsdale, 1994; Ranger, 1994). Others note that ethnic identities are a bourgeois creation meant to blind the masses in their struggle to reorganise the state.

Ethnic identities also have a moral element in the sense that different groups prescribe different ways of doing things that make up their normative structure (Tylor, 1992). A people may hold on to such norms irrespective of their education, social status, age or even religion. Under such conditions, moral ethnicity becomes a tool for enhancing personal esteem and respect for all groups. Accordingly, ethnic identities do not take one single form; they have plural forms and may appear more in one sphere than in others. In Kenya, as already mentioned, ethnic identities dominate more in the organisation of competitive party politics than in other spheres because of the direct relationship between access to and control of the state and the concomitant rewards.

The deepening economic crises and effects of SAP, arguably, have occasioned tendencies towards "re-tribalisation" of even the initially "detrified" segments of the population since the vulnerable groups also see the solution to their problems in terms of assisting "one of their own" to accede to state power.

While this phenomenon has roots in the "rural sector", it has also increasingly developed in the urban areas, thereby surpassing class and ideology as bases for gathering political support.

Some of the large urban areas in Kenya have a long history and a similarly long political history. They began as centres for serving the colonial administration and a clientele comprising the settler community and colonial bureaucrats. The colonial administration restricted rural-urban movement to avoid the costs of providing essential services and to prevent the "civilised" sector from pollution by the "traditional" rural. Different forms of legislation applied to both the rural and the urban. As discussed by Mamdani (1996), customary law and the fused centralised authority applied to the rural, while modern law applied to the urban areas. The biased and dualised political and administrative structures gradually became the basis for political agitation. This resulted in the consolidation of social movements among urban workers demanding participation in the political processes and inclusion in the governance realm. Urban trade unions, together with the peasantry-based Mau Mau movement, forced the state to concede to several political demands, among which involvement of Africans in the Legislative Council (Legco) was key.

Urbanisation and Political Agitation

The urban sector provided the "cheering crowd" to the decolonisation movement. The urban youth, the middle class and the lumpen bolstered the trade union movements and provided cover to the peasant Mau Mau leaders whenever they came out of the forests to organise rebellions against the colonial state. Thus urbanisation tended to conflate urban and rural political demands and by that eroded ethnicity as an ideology of mobilising the masses against the oppressive state institutions. The post-colonial state inherited a related de-ethnicised urban sector. Ideology rather than ethnicity became the single most important capital for mobilising and recruiting political support. In urban centres such as Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu and Nakuru, leaders built their social bases through ideological persuasions, using the youth who formed the "cheering crowd".

Changing socio-economic conditions in the urban areas and the inability of "popular forces" to re-organise the state has meant changing the identity of youth even in the urban sector. In the post-colonial period, for instance, the city of Nairobi grew rapidly: with a population of 266,794 inhabitants and an area of about 80 square kilometres in 1963, the city now has a population of about 3 million people and an area of 860 square kilometres. Of this population, over 250,000 youth are unemployed and about 550,000 families have no suitable shelter (Obudho and Aduwo, 1992). A larger proportion comprises the

unemployed, the underemployed and the overworked youth who face numerous problems regarding access to basic services. Since the early 1980s, the city has witnessed rapid deterioration of infrastructure. Moreover, political and economic elite allied to the state party have taken over open land meant for the development of public utility services (even housing for the poor, play grounds, road reserves and parks). The state elite turned to land as a strategic resource because economic liberalisation exhausted the patronage base of parastatals.

From the mid-1980s, confronted by these problems and by the inability of the state to deliver services and create employment opportunities, the youthful and ambitious urban inhabitants began to "cheer" the movement for change. Being bitter that there had been a significant erosion of efficiency and effectiveness within the local authorities, they joined any spontaneous group that battled the state at the local level. They participated in "urban rebellion" against the state and provincial administration. Those operating small informal sector businesses (hawkers and *manambas* or public transport touts) mitigated the wrath of state security organs and the KANU youth wing in the urban centres. With crude weapons, they managed to keep the police and the youth wing at bay and, sometimes, forced the state to negotiate. They frequently paralysed public transport, organised street demonstrations against the state and meted "violence" against errant colleagues or loyalists. They turned their vengeance against Asian capital arguing that the political elite used Asian entrepreneurs to erode their survival bases. Insisting that the Asian-dominated formal business sector had been given the responsibility to undermine the burgeoning informal sector, the hawkers organised an "every day form of resistance" characterised by spreading their relatively cheap merchandise outside the doors of Asian shops. They also confronted the police who came to evacuate them from the streets. The hawker' issue-based rebellion against the state was more specifically a struggle for basic survival.

Increased Youth Involvement

The 1990s began with an increased role of the youth in issue-based politics in Nairobi. Their demands for an "expanded business space" slowly spilled over into the political sphere. They began to demand "de-militarisation" of the KANU youth wing, a faction that controlled and regulated the informal industry. Gradually, these demands became the basis for organising opposition politics such that by 1991, agents for multi-party democracy relied upon their numbers in organising political meetings and in fighting away the police and the party youth wing. Generally, the urban lumpen became a source of inspiration to those advocating for multi-partyism. This evolved two different forms of youth groups:

the lumpen in the opposition (the cheering crowd in the movement for multi-party democracy) and the KANU-led youth wing that sought to maintain the dominance of the party in the city's socio-political space. Both battled each other in the competition over political control and dominance of the city.

Several factors are responsible for the increased prominence of urban areas as centres of political activism. First, the city comprises an "informed" population and essentially one that does not wholly rely on information from the state-controlled mass media. The urban lumpen also preferred political change on the assumption that such a change would bring forth a responsive and accountable government. Further, the city population is multi-ethnic thus tending to organise politics around national issues. Many of the migrants are young, educated, ambitious and energetic; they are exposed to the glaring contrast between affluence and poverty, splendour and squalor, order and chaos (Southall, 1973; Muga, 1975). Yet the means for achieving the desired goals (goods and services) are limited. The actors find themselves in conditions without normative controls hence the propensity towards agitation and violence. The combined and interactive outcome of the above factors and processes take the form of social and behavioural atomisation, frustration and a sense of relative deprivation, all of which are likely to result in psychic violence among the youth as manifested in mob violence and crime. Political activism and re-ethnisation of the youth are thus entrenched within a volatile environment, but the increasing social roles and changing values brought about by the struggle for multi-partyism eroded this advantage. The youth now appear to assist "one from their tribe" to gain control of state power and the benefits attached to it.

Politics in Independent Kenya

The highly centralised bureaucracy inherited at independence was to play a key role in the social-economic and political process of independent Kenya (Barkan, 1992; Leys, 1974; Lamb, 1974). Little change was effected on the institutions of the police, military and provincial administration whose powers were gradually consolidated in the hands of the first President, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta. The provincial administration became the instrument through which the Kenyatta state maintained law and order and coordinated development. A multi-party political institution was inherited but gave way to a single-party structure in 1969. At the time, the political space was contested by two main political parties, Kenya African National Union (KANU) and Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU), and other smaller parties. In 1964, KADU literally dissolved itself to "enhance national unity". The winding up of KADU activated factionalism in KANU, eventually splitting the party into two factions led by Kenyatta and

Odinga. Odinga's faction founded the Kenya People's Union (KPU) in 1966, but the party was proscribed in 1969; its leaders detained. Between this time and 1991, Kenya operated a de facto single-party state (Gertzel, 1970; Lamb, 1974; Leys, 1974; Anyang Nyong'o, 1989; Throup, 1987).

The Kenyatta Regime

Lack of an official opposition party provided Kenyatta with an uncontested political space which enabled him and his Kikuyu confidants to acquire substantial political power. The Kenyatta regime was devoid of active party politics. KANU remained moribund throughout the 1970s and party officials remained virtually unchanged until the ascent of Daniel arap Moi to the presidency. The party's presence was visible only ceremonially in national day celebrations. Party functions such as political mobilisation, political communication and policy articulation increasingly became associated with the provincial administration and the civil service in general. In the absence of party politics and limited avenues of political participation, ethno-regional organisations, though limited in scale, provided the base for political activity. Only the Gikuyu, Embu and Meru Association (GEMA), founded in the early 1970s, assumed some significant political character essentially because some of its officials were members of Kenyatta's inner court. Activities of other organisations, such as the Luo Union and Akamba Union, were confined to ethnic mobilisation for welfare purposes.

More credence was given to the political significance of GEMA when the organisation's factionalists, alarmed by Kenyatta's old age and possible death, sought to have the constitutional provision on succession amended (Karimi and Ochieng, 1980). The constitution was clear that the vice-president should assume office in an acting capacity following the disability, resignation or death of the president, but the GEMA elite were uncertain of their continued political domination if the office was occupied by any person other than a member of GEMA or the Kiambu inner court clique for that matter. The move to change the constitution began in 1976 but was shelved by Kenyatta because it created huge political divisions among his associates. The move to change the constitution is the foundation of present-day Kenya politics. The move aimed ostensibly at barring the then vice-president, Daniel arap Moi, from assuming office. The move left an indelible impression on Moi. His later politics in Kenya should, therefore, be understood in this context.

The Moi Regime

It appears from the outset that Moi held the GEMA clique with suspicion for their attempts to bar him from taking the presidency and, above all, for excluding him from inner court state politics. The latter starved him of political expediency and specifically deprived him of the experience to hold high office. Nonetheless, he took office at a time when the economic growth rate was fair, having been serviced by the coffee boom of 1977/78 (however, the economy began to show signs of decline at the beginning of 1979 due to increased oil prices and reduced earnings from primary commodities in the international market).

Although Moi's main challenge was the containment of GEMA factionalists and managing the deteriorating economy, he lacked both political confidence and an established supportive political cabal to do so alone. The immediate option was to rely upon members of the Kikuyu group to manage politics and, in the meantime, chart a course to legitimise his leadership. Unsurprisingly, he distanced himself from GEMA architects of the move to change the constitution and took on board Charles Njonjo and Mwai Kibaki, Attorney-General and Vice-President, respectively. He recruited to his side Joseph Kamotho and G.G. Kariuki to create a nascent sycophancy. The new clique assisted in accessing parts of the non-receptive GEMA strongholds.

In order to mobilise the masses, Moi used populist pronouncements which became official government policy in many instances. Free primary education and state-sponsored milk feeding programmes for primary schools are some examples. The pronouncements raised huge public expectations concerning the state and Moi himself. Over time, it became increasingly difficult for the state to meet these obligations. This failure eventually had serious implications for the state's image at the public sphere. Disillusionment and disenchantment began to take hold in the districts.

Moi also began to mobilise the support of the Luo and Luhya ethnic groups in order to expand his power base through inclusion of numerically strong communities. These communities had throughout the 1970s abhorred Kikuyu political leadership, the latter of which used to allow the Kikuyu to dominate both political and economic activities. Promises of providing these two groups with equal political opportunities were welcomed and it was felt that a messiah had come. Thinking that corruption and Kikuyu politico-economic domination were the causes of super-hatred of the Kikuyu by these ethnic groups, Moi devised a strategy to end corruption. This was followed by a change of face in the police and provincial administration. Some Luo, Luhya and Kalenjin officers were appointed to fill positions vacated by the forcedly retired Kikuyus. The Kalenjin, Moi's kinsmen, were given the majority of new appointments.

Moi established an overall hegemony by playing one ethnic group against the other. This was accompanied by a more specific strategy of playing one politician against the other, for example, using a politician for specific missions, following that with dismissal, if necessary, recycling, i.e., a personality disengagement and recycling strategy. This became the practice from about 1983 when he sought Luhya assistance to disengage previously key Kikuyu politicians whom he accused of "selfishness" and "advancing foreign interests". The basis for this shift was the rising popular support enjoyed as a result of his populist pronouncements. The aim then was to discard Kikuyu followers and establish a favourable group composed of Kalenjins who were being gradually moulded. This ensued with a snap general election in which those seen as dissidents or disloyal lost.

The political party which was moribund during Kenyatta's time was rejuvenated in the early 1980s to garner political support from both grassroots and urban areas. District branches were revived and local party officials made full-time employees. Through the party machinery, the president deconstructed previous networks and moduled new ones linked directly to himself. Moi generally promoted new people who had little ambition, offered little political challenge and had no allegiance at the grassroots. Those who attempted to build a base on their own were discarded. This was a political ploy to incorporate previously neglected segments of the population: illiterates, former freedom fighters, women leaders and others.

Deconstruction of the Kenyatta hegemony did not end with disengagement of politicians but penetrated deep into the economic sphere when Moi began to build an economic base for his patronage networks. His lack of supportive indigenous capital to facilitate the process led him to seek alternative sources of "patronage capital". While Kenyatta relied on indigenous (Kikuyu) capital for support, Moi had an antagonistic relation to many of the Kikuyu bourgeoisie. Rather, he courted the Asian business community, many of whom had achieved entrepreneurial success independent of patronage and in spite of the competition and outright harassment from state-supported Kiambu businessmen during the Kenyatta era. Several political and economic concessions were advanced to the Asians, and as a result, many became successful in import and export business, banking, commerce and manufacturing industries. Moi and his close Kalenjin associates became key partners in many of these ventures. Consequently, Kikuyu influence in the economy greatly declined, leading to the collapse of several financial institutions and manufacturing industries in mid-1980s.

State land and public corporations were another source of patronage resources extended to the elite who lauded Moi's leadership or contributed to the constriction of Kikuyu political appetite. Public lands (commercial plots) were given to politicians who in turn sold them to state corporations, Asians and

European businessmen. The "amount of gratitude" was dependent upon ethno-regional identity, political stature and the existing elite power base.

The growth of dissent in the Moi regime was not confined to one factor or one ethnic group. Dissent was the result of varied concerns ranging from the state's inability to meet public expectations aroused by the populist trend to the legitimisation strategies adopted. Thus, every ethno-regional group and most segments of the people have had something to protest against. This dissent translated itself into pressure for political liberalisation in the early 1990s, following also the wave of change that swept across Eastern Europe.

Re-introduction of Multi-party Politics

The Forum for Restoration of Democracy (FORD) and Democratic Party of Kenya (DP) were the major parties formed after the re-introduction of multi-partyism in 1991. There were also other parties: Kenya Social Congress (KSC), Kenya Democratic Alliance (KENDA), Party for Independent Candidates of Kenya (PICK) and Kenya National Congress (KNC). FORD was an off-shoot of a pressure group founded by experienced politicians, business persons, lawyers and other professionals to lobby for political liberalisation. DP's main founders were the disengaged KANU politicians and GEMA factions.

There were no sharp ideological differences between the parties. Party policy objectives were the same but differed in approach and emphasis. For instance, while all parties addressed the excessive size of the local provincial administration and the personalisation of state institutions, FORD-Kenya suggested doing away with local administration as DP emphasised the need to improve these institutions. Divisions such as ethnic and class interests, personality cults and the composition of party leadership, however, tore the opposition movement apart. What initially appeared to be a united opposition with a common cause became factions with varied interests. The factionalism caused disenchantment with opposition in some grassroots constituencies.

Ethno-regional divisions within and between parties significantly contributed to their defeat in the 1992 elections. FORD was founded by people of varied interests but had a common purpose of fighting for restoration of multi-partyism. Differences of class, ideology, ethnicity, political experience, among others, were submerged in the party's organisation. These divisions later took their toll on the party. The Kikuyu, Luo and Luhya (the main three ethnic groups) factions demanded control of FORD and fronted their notables for leadership. The Kikuyu fronted a former Cabinet Minister and detainee, Kenneth Matiba; the Luo, Oginga Odinga; the Luhya, Masinde Muliro as a compromise when the first two disagreed further.

Leadership rivalry in FORD was accentuated by the failure to agree on party electoral procedures and the location of party head offices. This occasioned a split into "Agip house" and "Muthithi house" factions, the proposed head offices. Both factions claimed ownership of FORD as a result of which they were registered under the names FORD-Kenya (Odinga) and FORD-Asili (Matiba). This initiative by the government was meant to formalise the split and make it difficult for the party to unite or act as a broad-based movement.

A majority of DP's founder members were experienced and "disengaged" senior KANU politicians, some of whom were members of various GEMA factions. The Kenyatta family had several members in the party, and it was believed that the family provided the funding for party's organisation. DP membership included the wealthy elite from some GEMA areas, the Kamba, and the coastal region. There was a conspicuous presence of several Kalenjin and Maasai elite disengaged by Moi-supervised Kalenjin feuds. Even at the grassroots, membership of the party was confined to the educated, middle and high income groups, and generally well-to-do households. However, DP was a united group "demarcated" from others by its organisational acumen and sense of wealth and elitism which it portrayed at public functions and political rallies.

Ethno-regional concerns took charge in all opposition parties as each party leader appealed to the ethnic group for support. The influence of Odinga's FORD-Kenya spread in majority Luo areas, parts of the coast and western region. In the Luo areas, the support was generally homogeneous since Odinga was the "religion" that shaped local politics. Moreover, the Luo community resented Moi for using them to deconstruct Kikuyu domination and giving them little in return. The 1990 murder of Dr. Robert Ouko, Kenya's Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation, further distanced Luos from KANU and Moi: the looming opinion was that Ouko was eliminated because of his presidential potential which could have been a Luo blessing. Luhya support for the parties was divided along districts and sub-ethnic lines. This divide was exacerbated because they were pursuing the position of vice-president in separate parties.

KANU's advantage of incumbency, use of vast resources and backing by the provincial administration facilitated an expansion of the party's influence in several parts of the country, especially in the agro-pastoral and underdeveloped areas inhabited by smaller communities. KANU's conquest of these places was purely on "survival" grounds in that small ethnic groups were seeking ways of defending themselves against the dangers of domination by larger ethnic groups. KANU revived the KADU *majimbo* policy to entrench itself, spelling out to the small groups that the Luo and Kikuyu were out to dominate them through the opposition parties. The "fenced off" pattern that ensued, therefore, was a KANU confederation of the small and underdeveloped communities.

The Second Multi-party Elections—December 1997

The second multi-party elections held in December 1997 reproduced the 1992 pattern. KANU retained its control of regions populated by the numerically smaller ethnic communities while DP dominated the Kikuyu-inhabited Central Province and the diaspora. Ford-Kenya and KANU again shared the Luhya dominated western region: the revitalised National Development Party (NDP) won Luo Nyanza, while the Social Democratic Party (SDP) eroded KANU's Eastern Province base.

The background to the second multi-party elections, however, considerably differed from that in 1992. A movement for constitutional reforms began in earnest after the 1992 elections. Church organisations and the non-governmental sector continually pressed for constitutional reforms to provide for a level playing ground. Like the movement for multi-partyism that had consolidated in the period preceding the 1992 elections, the movement for constitutional reform pressed for repeal of the constitutional provisions that impeded consolidation of competitive politics and those upon which KANU depended to dominate the political space.

Beginning with the Citizen's Coalition for Constitutional Change (4Cs) and backed by the force of the religious organisations and opposition parties, the struggle for constitutional reforms spread from urban to rural areas. The state party (KANU), on the other hand, countered the pressure, observing that those advocating for change of the constitution had personal interests which they wanted advanced through constitutional reforms. But the 4Cs and other civil society organisations continued their pressure by organising seminars and workshops in the main urban centres where the unemployed youth and urban middle class easily got on board. The opposition political parties belatedly joined the struggle by organising political meetings to counter KANU's resistance against the struggle.

In the period between 1994 and 1995 the struggle by the opposition political parties evolved two distinct factions distinguished as much by their membership as for the belligerent character of their factional leaders. The liberal-minded DP and FORD-Kenya formed the United Democratic Alliance (UDA) while the radical factions in FORD-Kenya (led by Raila Odinga) and FORD-Asili (led by Kenneth Matiba) formed the Solidarity Coalition with the national slogan, "Moi Must Go". The Solidarity faction drew enormous support from the urban lumpen—the unemployed, the slum dwellers and the poor workers. The faction also appealed to the student movement, the peasantry and radical opposition activities. On the other hand, the liberal UDA faction maintained its hold on the middle class and the conservative segments of the business community. This faction emphasised the issue of economic decline while the radicals addressed a number of constitutional, administrative and economic issues. The radical Solidarity faction also blamed poverty and unemployment problems and the generally poor economic conditions in which the lumpen live on KANU and the Asians.

The Matiba-Odinga Solidarity Coalition frequently reiterated that Moi had rigged the 1992 elections and, therefore, was an "illegitimate office holder" hence the slogan "Moi Must Go". The result of this radical articulation of socio-political issues led to the party drawing enormous support from the urban youth and lumpen who were similarly convinced that "another term for KANU meant further marginalisation of the youth and the poor in general". They were critical of KANU's rhetoric on "youth as leaders of tomorrow". To them, the constitutional provision on presidential elections needed amending so that a winner must have over 50 per cent of the total votes cast or a run-off in case no one met this requirement. They were convinced that such an amendment would evolve a popular president, one with a broad ethno-regional political base.

The radical Solidarity Coalition also stressed the "Asian question", pointing out that the Asians had continually accumulated wealth through the state and that they were the conduits through which the political elite, allied to KANU, plundered and syphoned public resources out of the country. This, expectedly, earned them more support from the lumpen, most of whom depended upon Asian businesses for wage employment. Arguably, their support was the result of exploitative economic conditions in the urban labour market. They demonstrated their loyalty to the Solidarity faction by attending the unlicensed meetings and by providing security to the radical leaders, especially when the police came to disperse the meetings. Interestingly, although the Solidarity was led by certain members of the numerically large ethnic groups, the Kikuyu and the Luo, the youth lumpen transcended the ethnic divide and supported them because of their vision for the youth and society in general.

The Kibaki-Wamalwa UDA faction took a "middle-of-the-road" attitude and lacked the required radicalism. Although this alliance dealt largely on the issue of revitalising the economy and taking Kenya back to its initial "developmental height", the urban youth saw them as "politicians of no political means". To the youth, again, the economy could not be re-invigorated without first definitively settling the question of Moi and KANU leadership and designing strategies of preventing him from winning and/or rigging the 1997 elections. Moreover, the membership of UDA comprised the "propertied class", some of whom did business with the KANU elite. Their concern was protection of private property rights whenever established; the youth lumpen had no such property. The faction's influence waned: it lost hold of the city's political space. Significant also is that Michael Wamalwa, as the official leader of the opposition by virtue of his party having had a majority of opposition seats in the Parliament, compromised the opposition by agreeing to do business with certain Asians. Apparently, Wamalwa had cleared a politically influential Asian involved in what came to be known as the Goldenberg financial scam (the Treasury, under the export compensation

scheme, handsomely compensated an Asian-owned company for export of gold whereas the company had exported none) when other members in the Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee demanded prosecution of those involved. The Kibaki-Wamalwa faction, consequently, rapidly lost support even from the middle class and the African business community that supported them at the beginning.

In the meantime, civil society organisations continued to press for constitutional reforms as the divide between and among the opposition leaders deepened. The 4Cs produced a model constitution that increasingly “de-presidentialised” the state while giving powers to the electorate. Some of the KANU elite quickly responded, saying that it was a Kikuyu-based constitution to marginalise other ethnic groups, but the 4Cs and other bodies, such as the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC), continued to ask for a debate on the constitutional question before the elections. This resulted in the formation of the National Convention Planning Committee (NCPC) in late 1996 to lead the debate. Its membership included young professionals, intellectuals and others drawn from civil society organisations. Those from the civil organisations and who played a central role in articulating constitutional demands included Kivutha Kibwana, Willy Mutunga and David Lamba. They were joined by a group of parliamentarians who constituted the “Young Turks”, including Paul Muite, Maoka Maore, James Orenge and Anyang Nyong’o. Later, in 1997, the NCPC transformed into the National Convention Executive Council (NCEC) and established an executive organ to articulate its position.

In the first meeting of the Council, the youth hijacked the convention, radicalised its mission and agenda, and directed the proceedings from within. The young activists from the various political parties and those from the student organisations were quite vocal in articulating the demands for comprehensive constitutional, legal and administrative reforms. Through the pressure of the youth, the Convention resolved to fight against the elections until the government agreed to comprehensive constitutional reforms. Meanwhile, the NCEC had incorporated different actors, including some from the political alliances discussed above, and these actors had their own interests, suspicions and mistrusts. Radicals among them preferred comprehensive reforms while the liberal, middle-of-the-road group preferred minimum reforms or what they thought would provide a level playing field for all the political parties. The youth warned against “back tracking” and their militancy forced NCEC to adopt a radical position, demanding that KANU’s belligerent and uncompromising position be matched with a similarly inflexible position.

The different interests, suspicions and mistrusts accommodated in NCEC soon started to weigh down on the organisation. Concerned that KANU might

announce the election date before conceding to the constitutional demands, the liberal members in NCEC and the pro-reform faction in KANU began to court each other with a view to hijacking the reform process from the civil society. By this time, a deep division had developed within KANU over the succession question thereby evolving at least two feuding factions, KANU-A and KANU-B, which were distinguished as much for their distinct constituencies and material bases of support as for their relation to the President and his informal political cabal of State House operatives. KANU-A comprised elites with grassroots support while KANU-B comprised some of those who had lost in the 1992 elections but were still closely related to influential State House operatives and the President himself.

KANU-A had on its side, among others, Simon Nyachae, a former Chief Secretary; William Ntimama, a forceful Maasai politician; and Kipkalia Kones, a senior politician among the Kalenjin (Kipsigis). These and others in the faction had popular bases of support in their respective ethnic regions; they were apprehensive about KANU having at its centre political elite (see below) who lacked similar support. They were also concerned that this cabal was strategically placed to benefit from the President's "prebendalism". Some of them charged that Vice-President George Saitoti had no broad ethno-political base because of vague ethnic identity. The Nyachae-Ntimama-Kones faction had a political mission: they sought to change KANU from within through the party's elections: the faction looked to Nyachae for presidential succession.

KANU-B had three prominent and influential political elite on its side: James Kamotho, the party Secretary General; Nicholas Biwott, influential politician and a close presidential associate; and George Saitoti. The three, popularly referred to as KABISA (an acronym for Kamotho-Biwott-Saitoti but also a Kiswahili word for "finality" signifying the absolute conclusiveness of any decisions they made) were vicious in protecting Saitoti and other inner court members. From the time Nyachae entered parliament in 1992, the KABISA elite viewed him as a big threat and continually endeavoured to bring him down. Nonetheless, although the group was inclined to support and protect Saitoti as Vice-President, it was not clear whether they would back him to succeed Moi or whether they would get someone else or even Biwott for the presidency. The faction incorporated State House operatives who had close relations with the President and acted as gate keepers for accumulation. Although they lacked strong political constituencies, they had enormous political power, material resources patronage resources at their disposal which they used to construct an independent base.

In the backroom, KANU wooed the opposition members and produced the Inter-Parties Parliamentary Group (IPPG). The reform process was rapidly

removed from civil society to the state arena. The result was a minimum reform package which NCEC and the Matiba-Odinga faction declined to accept. To demonstrate his commitment to "No Reforms, No Elections," Matiba declined to register as a voter and called upon his allies to do the same or burn their voter cards.

The "No Reforms, No Election" radical movement supported by the urban lumpen allied to the Matiba-Odinga faction and NCEC lost momentum after KANU won over several opposition MPs. The youth became disenchanted with the minimal IPPG reforms and promises for a comprehensive constitutional review after the elections. The imminent withdrawal of Matiba left a political lacuna which resulted in ethnic competition for his constituency. All the mainstream political actors struggled to acquire it and his urban lumpen and specifically the cheering crowd. The lumpen youth were rapidly ethnicised. By the 1997 elections, ethnisation of the youth had crystallised, and the political elite used them to mobilise political support in the city.

Youth and Electoral Politics

In the early 1990s, the Moi regime made it clear that it did not welcome political liberalisation. As already mentioned, young professionals comprising a group of lawyers, intellectuals and business people continued to press for change. Their main tool was the urban crowd—the unemployed youth, the workers and many others in informal sector small business activities. Whether powerless or not, their numbers became the single most important weapon in the struggle. Demands for change and subsequent re-organisation of the state appealed to them and ideally insulated them from ethnic tendencies by the elderly or senior political elite. The pressure by the urban youth organised mainly by the "Young Turks", finally made the government concede to popular demands. Aware that political power was slowly slipping away, KANU organised parallel youth organisations to counter the militancy of those allied to opposition parties. Youth for KANU '92 (YK '92) and Operation Moi Win (OMW) became the main organs that facilitated KANU's campaigns. These organs bought opposition supporters with enormous amounts of resources put at their disposal. With the backing of the provincial administration, the youth organs conducted campaigns in opposition strongholds and fenced off the opposition from KANU strongholds. The opposition parties also formed youth organs to facilitate their campaigns. These were organised around national issues but lacked resources to boost their campaigns.

Youth for KANU '92 (YK '92)

The YK '92, led by a young businessman, Cyrus Jirongo, mobilised the youth all over the country, promising a KANU change from within and opportunities for unemployed youth and other marginalised groups. A lot of resources backed this rhetoric. With the support of the local provincial administration, the youth organ cut itself an image at both local and national levels. Jirongo, the youthful leader, assumed a bloated political image, elevating himself to a position higher than most senior and elderly politicians. People even named the new five-hundred shilling note "Jirongo" since it was introduced at the height of the campaigns and at a time when talk of KANU printing campaign money was rife. Some youth leaders also used their positions as a base for accumulation. Their interests centred around real estate and import/export contracts specially for government departments, but their accumulated wealth soon attracted uneasiness from senior politicians, including the President.

YK '92 withered after the 1992 elections: The President disbanded the organisation and Jirongo's tribulations began in earnest. The move to tame Jirongo and his youth group aimed specifically at deflating his inflated political image. Senior KANU politicians were worried about the torrent among the youth that the YK '92 had brought into fore; they arrested it before expectations rose too high. Some were also worried that Jirongo and associates occupied central political positions when they deserved to be put in the political cold for a while.

KANU did not resuscitate Youth for KANU in the 1997 elections. Instead, Jirongo and a few of the newly wealthy youth made attempts at KANU nominations. Jirongo and a few others won but only one was rewarded with an assistant ministerial position. Thus Moi benefited from youth support but gave them nothing in return.

Jeshi la Mzee and Others

The withering of YK '92 and the increasing militancy among the youth allied to NCEC and opposition parties prompted KANU to found a group to counter the growing militancy among the urban youth. Senior KANU politicians in the city, where the militancy was intense and where KANU's social bases had considerably declined, formed *Jeshi la Mzee* to discharge "privatised violence" against youth groups allied to the pro-reform movement.

Unlike YK '92, two factors limited the success of *Jeshi la Mzee*: the first was the popular base of urban opposition parties and their ethnicised character, and the second was the group's appropriation of violence. The pro-reform youth groups allied to the

radical Solidarity faction and NCEC were a majority; however, they lacked the structure evident in *Jeshi la Mzee*. They tended to react to rather than plot against the terror gang, and their numbers and militancy easily countered *Jeshi la Mzee*.

The political "terror gang" drew some members of the Luhya community based in the city. Although it was not essentially a Luhya youth organ, some of its leaders frequently consulted with Fred Gumo, a Luhya KANU politician who allegedly financed them for advancing his political interests in the Kikuyu-dominated city. He also used them to gain a leverage in the intra-KANU feuds accompanying the party nominations and later in the national elections. The ethnic character of the "terror gang" and its violent character eventually led to its loss of credibility. The gang was generally seen as another organ for KANU and the city-based KANU allied ethnic elite. It lacked a profile similar to that of YK '92 but nonetheless managed to recklessly discharge violence and halt or impend the pro-reform process. Its youth membership apparently received daily financial support and other promises which made them more tenacious and fanatical against the opposition who, despite lack of financial resources, stood in the frontline of the battle against them and the police.

In the 1992 elections, the youth allied to opposition parties mobilised support around the theme of change. They lacked the financial resources and mobility that characterised YK '92. Nonetheless, Ford-Kenya launched a lobby group, Operation Moi Out (OMO), while other parties formed similar organs to forestall YK '92 advances. All of them emphasised the need for change and saw the opposition parties as opportunities for active involvement and participation in politics. To the youth, KANU's rhetoric about youth as the leaders of tomorrow could not materialise because of the domination by senior and ethnicised KANU politicians.

In 1997, all the parties again re-activated their youth organs to facilitate their campaigns and to counter KANU's advances. Within the urban areas the youth became the avenues through which resources and party propaganda flowed. Further, given that the electronic media was biased in favour of KANU, the youth became the single most important and reliable source of information for the opposition political parties. Their mobility, literacy, militancy, idleness and ability to withstand the "terror gang" helped in this regard, but the party competition deeply ethnicised the youth and divided them along class and issue lines. The section below concludes this discussion by examining the factors that contributed to the ethnisation of youth and their limitation as an important social force in the liberalised political space.

Conclusion: Competition and Ethnisation of the Urban Lumpen

The defeat of the opposition political parties in the 1992 elections disenchanted popular forces. The defeat disillusioned the lumpen who aimed at removing Moi and KANU from power through the ballot box, restore hope in democracy and facilitate economic growth. They attributed the defeat to oppositional factionalism, leadership rivalry, ethnic divisions and lack of a hegemonic strategy among the opposition political parties. The defeat did not patch up the ethnic divide in the opposition which widened as each party blamed the other for the failure to dislodge KANU from power. On the other hand, KANU undertook to tinge the opposition parties as "ethnic associations" devoid of policies to steer Kenya forward.

Opposition factionalism and the struggle for control of the political parties continued even after the elections. FORD-Kenya split again into the Odinga and Wamalwa factions, while FORD-Asili split into Matiba and Shikuku factions. Reasons for this have been discussed elsewhere. Suffice it to note that FORD-Kenya split along ethnic lines. Each faction was backed by well organised groups of youth mobilised on an ethnic basis. In the struggle for leadership that ensued, the youth in each faction played an important role in advancing the interests of their ethnic elite.

Those allied to Raila Odinga (the Luo) argued that Wamalwa had failed to re-invigorate the party because he was non-aggressive and indecisive. To them, Raila was suited for the party's leadership because he was forceful, aggressive and decisive. Moreover, Raila Odinga was accustomed to the operation of the party since he was always on the side of his father, Oginga Odinga, when the latter served as Party Chairman. Raila Odinga's radicalism and aggressiveness were clearly seen as the necessary tools for the struggle for political change. Importantly, some of them preferred a Luo since the Kenyatta and Moi regimes had marginalised the community. To some of the leading Luo elite and youth, Raila Odinga was more suited to this role than Wamalwa, who they thought would fill party positions with rival Luo leaders. The politics of "re-distribution in arrears" for the marginalised Luo community, in the event of FORD-Kenya forming the government eclipsed other issues. Gradually, even the non-ethnicised youth moved towards Odinga as leader.

Those allied to Wamalwa's faction argued for the Luhya in the same way. They pointed out that FORD-Kenya was not a "dynasty", Raila Odinga should not automatically inherit his father's mantle. To them, Wamalwa was suited for the party's leadership as he would give the party a national outlook with Luo, Luhya and other ethnic groups in its membership. Others added that Raila Odinga's radicalism could prevent other communities from joining the party (note that KANU had all along packaged Raila, a former political detainee, as a violent contestant and as one who was behind violent political conflicts wherever his party was involved).

The two factions failed to agree on party election procedures. Each time elections were called, they mobilised their youth wings to prevent those not allied to them from participating. Change of election venues did not help: the youth in each faction would organise transportation to the venues to do battle. Unable to unseat Wamalwa through party elections, Raila Odinga withdrew from the party. He switched to the smaller and lesser known National Development Party (NDP), resuscitated it and established a political base for the Luo community. In the elections, NDP dominated Luo Nyanza and its wave swept aside even those who had strong social bases in other parties. In Kisumu rural constituency, for instance, Professor Peter Anyang' Nyong'o lost to a relatively unknown NDP candidate Ochoro Oyoki. Nyong'o had built a strong and secular social base even at the national level. Moreover, his party, the Social Democratic Party (SDP), had none of the leadership feuds that characterised other parties; it was generally seen as having a national outlook and therefore the most appropriate to root out Moi and KANU. But in this relatively conservative rural constituency, Nyong'o's support for a woman candidate from outside the Luo region was interpreted as a fight against Raila Odinga. Certain of the political elite invoked Luo customary values (e.g., *tero*, Dholuo for wife inheritance) to undermine Nyong'o, asking why he would support a woman (Charity Ngilu) from outside the Luo ethnic group. Nyong'o, on the other hand, maintained that SDP symbolised "a new beginning" (*mwanzo mpya*, the party slogan) for the country and argued against voting on ethnic lines. He consequently called upon them to vote for SDP candidates to help the new beginning. He lost: ethnicity swayed the voters towards "one of their own".

Odinga's bid to unseat Wamalwa was supported by Matiba and the urban lumpen alliance. Matiba and Odinga both demanded radical changes and were tenacious in their approach to the removal of Moi and KANU from political power. Nonetheless, Matiba had problems in his own party faction which was comparatively conservative and resource-poor. Matiba's wealth and fundamentalism against KANU gradually saw the urban crowd trickle to his and Odinga's side.

The Kikuyu Political el Niño

The entry of SDP and DP into the contest over the city eroded the lumpen base for NDP. DP, led by the Kikuyu propertied elite, emphasised that the withdrawal of Matiba meant that the Kikuyu had a better chance to win the presidency. SDP fielded a woman candidate, Charity Ngilu, a Kamba from eastern Kenya where KANU had a strong following in 1992. Her frequent confrontations with the provincial administration in her home area endeared her to the urban crowd to whom Matiba and Odinga also appealed. Her fanatical opposition to KANU led the middle class

to view her as an alternative candidate. She was thus seen as a compromise candidate. But due to the numeric strength of the Kikuyu in the city, the campaign catch phrase of "one more chance for the Kikuyu" led even to the pro-Matiba Kikuyu lumpen switching their support to DP. NDP retained its hold on the lumpen in Langata constituency where Raila Odinga vied for a parliamentary seat. Eventually the urban political space became deeply ethnicised.

Contrary to public expectations, Matiba and his Kikuyu lumpen did not switch to their natural ally: Raila Odinga and his NDP. Matiba kept a distance from the elections, insisting that Moi and KANU had rigged the elections earlier. Although he shared similar social bases with Raila, his supporters switched to DP with a view to improving the Kikuyu chances. A torrential Kikuyu ethnic flood finally caught up even with the urban youth, the middle class and the intelligentsia, who initially tended to support Ngilu. Some informants observed that the ethnic flood was similar to the real prevailing floods occasioned by the *el niño* weather conditions in that it swept away, with a devastating impact, the non-Kikuyu ethnic elite in the city where the Kikuyu are a majority. Due to these Kikuyu ethnic floods, DP won a majority of parliamentary and civic seats in the city. Out of the total votes cast, DP got about 44 per cent, KANU 21 per cent, NDP 16 per cent, SDP 11 per cent and FORD-Kenya 7 per cent. The opposition got hold of close to 80 per cent of the total votes cast in the city and had a clear majority in the Nairobi City Council.

One important question that needs answering at this point is why the senior KANU and opposition ethnic elite ethnicised the youth with ease yet the youth appeared insulated from averse ethnicity. One reason for this is that the state had neither been reorganised nor democratised prior to multi-party elections and, therefore, continued to be seen as a base for developing constituencies that controlled it. The youth thus supported their own communities and expected later rewards. Attempts by popular forces to reorganise and democratise the state failed due to obstruction by the state and ethnic elite who viewed the state as an arena of accumulation and protection of particular interests. The failed attempts by the NCEC and other popular forces are examples; the state and ethnic elite in both KANU and the opposition parties hijacked the reform process and constituted it with the IPPG which they could regulate and control. This they did after realising that they could neither control nor regulate a process located in the non-ethnicised NCEC (yet in a polarised civil society). On the other hand, the popular forces could not reclaim the reform process from IPPG because diverse interests weighed down on the NCEC.

Certain political and economic expectations attended the process of ethnisation of the urban lumpen. Changing identities of the youth were thus predicated on

the political and economic promises made by the ethnic élite. The youth may not have had the financial resources to direct the political change but their fanaticism and numeric strength ensured that they became a vital social force over which the ethnicised politicians competed. Also, poor social conditions of the youth have continually intensified amidst a deepening economic crisis. This has made them vulnerable to manipulations by the ethnic elite who provided them with material and financial rewards. Such rewards sustained Jeshi la Mzee in the group battles with the pro-reform movement.

Democratisation or De-ethnisation

A number of observations arise from this discussion. First, ethnicity and party politics in Kenya have an organic relationship whose roots reach deep into the colonial situation. The reasons for this are not difficult to trace. As Mamdani (1996) points out with regard to Africa in general, the colonial state forged as a common centre around which all ethnic groups related and competed for rewards. The state also became the single most important actor in the development space and was transformed into an institution for rewarding loyal ethnic groups and punishing dissident groups (also see, Lonsdale, 1994). Secondly, democratisation of the state did not accompany decolonisation; the postcolonial state is still a colonial one. Decolonisation put into motion a process through which different groups competed for control of state power since it meant control of enormous amounts of patronage resources which the various ethnic elite required to maintain their hold on political power. The elite continually tightened this grip by discriminating against or excluding rival and politically non-strategic ethnic groups. The single-party institutional framework heightened and reinforced this tendency. Similarly, multi-partyism and the deepening economic crisis have re-activated parochial interests and tend to re-ethnicise even the youth. Although lacking resources to consolidate their central position in the movement for change, their numbers and ability to direct and cheer violent political conflicts in the urban areas have transformed them into a powerful force relied upon by the ethnicised elderly political elite. The youth have, all the same, played an active role in directing political change. It is this contradiction in re-ethnisation and democratisation that need to be addressed in studies on identities and popular struggles against the state in Africa.

Youth identity does not take a single form; the youth have a plural identity reflecting the pluralised social political sphere in which they find themselves. Their identity shifts now and then depending on the critical issues at hand—be it ethnicity, class, status or power. Democratisation of the state and the society must then construct a parallel project to “de-ethnicise” especially the youth because of the central role they play in directing political change. The current

democratisation process has internal contradictions that tend to undermine it; ethnisation of this process is one project that elderly politicians have re-constructed to maintain control of the state and to prevent the youth from directing the change.

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