

DETRIBALISING THE NATION: LESSONS FROM THE RIFT VALLEY

PROVINCE IN KENYA.

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Democracy is innocent. There have been several phases of liberation in Africa. In Kenya these phases can be identified as three: the first involved the struggle against British colonialism culminating in the grant of independence in 1963; the second was the struggle against single party dictatorship which took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s which resulted in the re-introduction of multi-party democracy in 1991 (Waki 2008); and the third may be seen as the fight against institutionalised grand corruption, impunity, and arrogance of a few political elite, even in the context of multi-party democracy. This has been the fight against the few political elite's predilection, having managed to manipulate the political system in their favour, to lord it over the rest of the country while at the same time giving some semblance of adherence to the basic principles of democracy. We can rightfully argue that in the three phases of the quest for liberation, democracy has always been central to the struggle. Central to the struggle was the desire to see a government of the people, for the people, and by the people which is the clichéd definition of democracy.

African leaders have however not all been enthusiastic about democracy and especially of its multi-party variety. They have instead expressed preference for other varying types of governance and representation which are more amenable to the big man syndrome so prevalent especially in regimes controlled by the earlier crop of leaders who emerged out of the heavily colonially controlled education system. I call these leaders products of the unjust and autocratic colonial school of governance. In essence the only thing that changed was the colour of the leaders but their attitude to the governed and their perception of their own responsibilities remained largely colonial. The resistance to democracy in Africa therefore is not unrelated to

colonialism and western powers should accept of a measure of responsibility for these leaders who emerged during the struggle against colonialism and in the early years of independence in Africa. These leaders have invented all kinds of arguments against democracy, and specifically the multi-party variety, as a tool of governance in the region. In Uganda, president Yoweri Museveni has argued that multi-party democracy as practiced in the west is unsuitable for Uganda because of her multi-ethnic composition. Instead he has argued that a movement or a non-party system (Kabeberi, 2007) is the best for the country where individuals present themselves to an electorate in their capacity as themselves as opposed to selling the policies or ideologies of a political party.

Kenya's longest serving president, Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi, was given to arguing that Kenya was not ready for multi-party democracy because the country is too polarised along ethnic lines. In reference to multi-party democracy Moi was basically making the same arguments that colonialists made against the independence of African countries: they were not ready for self-governance and they needed to be given more time to undergo sufficient evolutionary mutations to the extent of being sophisticated enough to embrace multiparty-democracy. It is interesting that every time the elections neared, ethnic tension and violence would erupt in president Moi's Rift Valley province and other areas where his supporters presided over multi-ethnic communities. It is not actually true that democracy has failed in Africa because of the continent's multi-ethnicity. In East Africa, for example, the best practice of democracy has been in Tanzania. And Tanzania is the largest, most populous and with the largest diversity in terms of multi-ethnicity. Ironically Somalia, to the north of Kenya and which has only one ethnic community has not only failed to embrace

democracy but has in fact degenerated into a failed state. Indeed we need to be cognisant of the fact that multi-party democracy has not been largely successful in the western democracies such as the United States of America, The United Kingdom, or Germany because of lack of diverse ethnic groups in those countries. In the UK, for example, we have the English, the Welsh, the Scots, and the Irish as the dominant tribes but there also large numbers of other ethnic groups such as Asians, continental Africans, African Caribbeans, and other migrants from various countries from within and outside Europe. Those democracies have just worked hard to create a political culture of "...tolerance of dissent, representation, consultation and consensus" for such a critical mass of people that those who do not subscribe to the values get sidelined. This why in spite of the vile racism inherent in the US to the extent of a religious leader making public prayers for the death of their president, Barack Obama, a man of colour whose father was a black Kenyan, was elected by the majority as the president of the United States and continues to occupy that seat.

In respect of the foregoing, this paper suggests that democracy, however defined, is not responsible for the flare up of negative ethnocentrism in Kenya and other African countries. Instead, negative ethnocentrism was deliberately politically engineered and to counter it we must deliberately, politically and otherwise, re-engineer a sense of nationalism in Kenya. In the 1990s when the clamour for multi-party democracy was at its height, I was a student at Moi University in the Rift Valley province in Kenya. I had already spent three peaceful years in the region during which I amicably interacted with Kalenjins without ever fearing for my life. One of my pass times was to carry a pillow, a bedcover and snacks to the bushes near the university and spend the whole day lying on the grass reading. Kalenjin herders, farmers, and other workers

would pass by and offer greetings. I never felt threatened. After 1990, however, things changed. I began hearing four-to-five year old children asking me “*na wewe ni kabila gain?*” (*And which tribe are you?*). By the time the first multi-party elections since the return to a multi-party democracy were held in 1992, I could not venture out into the forests for fear of being killed simply for being a Kikuyu. In 1992 I watched as University students, from all ethnic communities including Kalenjins, were subjected to violence with the simple aim of ensuring that they did not vote in the region. I was one of those that were successfully evicted from the region and therefore did not vote in that year.

One of the things that still remains a puzzle for me since we carried out research in Nakuru early this year is the relation of events during the post-election violence by some of the participants in the focus group discussions that seem to suggest deliberate creation of armies in the Rift Valley to cause chaos. In one such group discussion, one of the participants related how he had travelled deep into the forest for a burial of one of his church members where he found small boys of less than 10 years old practising with bows and arrows on trees. The boy was apparently very accurate in hitting his targets suggesting that he had been engaged in continuous training and practice. This incident could have been interpreted as merely cultural as some of the communities have been using bows and arrows for hunting wild animals and that that therefore it should not be seen as unusual for such small boys to practice shooting with arrows. However, a second participant said that he had witnessed a Kikuyu business man who used to transport material for making bows and arrows at the height of the post-election violence to the same forest to supply them to Kalenjin warriors. A third participant told of a story where one of the Kalenjins from the forest had come down

from the mountains to sell charcoal and how the Kikuyus attacked him and robbed of money and valuables. The Kalenjin went home and reported the matter upon which word was sent to the Kikuyus that they would be attacked. When the Kikuyu elders heard about it, they sent Kalenjin emissaries, who lived in between the Kikuyus and the Kalenjins in the forest, to plead with them for clemency. The Kikuyu elders also collected money to pay back and sent it via the emissaries. An eminent attack was therefore averted. Eventually the focus group concluded that there was a difference between the Kalenjins who lived down the slopes of the mountains and those that lived in the mountains. Those living in the mountains were viewed as the attackers or warriors and those living down the mountains as settled farmers who were not interested in war. This is interesting given that the mountain we are talking about is the Mau forest where it's on record that the settlers were given land as political gifts by Moi's government. One cannot help but wonder if these were not settled deliberately as a training ground for an army to cause havoc in the neighbouring lands seen to have been grabbed and occupied by foreigners. Likia, one of the hot spots of the post-election violence is on the slopes of the Mau forests.

IS AFRICA INIMICAL TO MULTI-PARTY DEMOCRACY?

Kabeberi (2007) has demonstrated that contrary to what some of the leaders in Africa would like the rest of the world to believe, most people in Africa prefer a competitive multi-party democracy. According to Kabeberi, a report based on research carried out on the continent, Afrobarometer, reveals that about two-thirds of Africans feel that democracy is always preferable to authoritarian rule and that a similar number reject alternatives to democracy such as one party rule, military rule, and one man rule. She says that even those who were dissatisfied with democracy still felt that it was the best

form of governance. This research, which is also supported by others, seems to question the view that Africa is ethnographically hostile or inhospitable to the democracy of the multi-party variety where politics are competitive and the rule of the majority prevails.

There may be an element of truth in the argument that competitive politics cannot succeed in Africa given the continent's plague of tribalism. If, for example, we were to simply look at voting patterns in Kenya in the last general elections since the re-introduction of competitive politics in 1992, the elections have always been marred by conflict between different ethnic communities in the country. The results indicate that different regions, almost to a man, vote in a unidirectional manner depending on the preference of their tribal leaders. Some people have argued that in 2002 Kenya managed to transcend and break away from that pattern. I beg to differ. There was simply a united affront against president Moi and by extension his community by the other communities. The only difference was that the ethnic leaders were able to marshal their supporters to vote for one candidate: President Mwai Kibaki. The Luos however did not vote for Kibaki because they believed in what he stood for or because they did not care which tribe Kibaki came from, they only voted for him because their tribal leader, Raila Odinga, told them to do so. If Raila Odinga had remained in Kanu and supported Kanu's presidential candidate, Uhuru Kenyatta, the Luos, almost to a man, would have definitely voted for Uhuru Kenyatta. The same argument holds true for the voting pattern in Kamba land under Kalonzo Musyoka just as it does for other regions. This is explicit if we look at the 2007 voting patterns. Whichever direction the tribal leaders took, the followers similarly followed: the Luos voted for Raila, the Kambas for Kalonzo, and the Kikuyus for Kibaki. This is in spite

of the fact that it was still the same Kibaki running for the presidency. It may be argued that the rest of the communities' members had come to learn Kibaki and detest him but I would like to suggest that that does not hold water otherwise there should have been a substantial number of Kikuyus who would have seen the same logic that the other Kenyans were seeing. Indeed given that Kibaki had managed to revive the economy from negative growth in terms of GDP to more than seven percent, the obvious infrastructure improvement, introduction of free primary education, improvement of access to health services and others, facts substantiated by independent institutions such as the UN and the World Bank, it is mind boggling that nearly all his earlier supporters in Luo and Kamba land failed to see any sense in re-electing him. In my opinion the 2007 general elections, just like the one in 2002, simply saw the triumph of ethnocentric politics: the only difference being that in 2007 that triumph meant violence and blood shed while that of 2002 resulted in a peaceful transition of government. I would like to submit that the lesson we need to learn here is that democracy is innocent and that multi-ethnicity is neither negative nor positive; it all depends on what we as Africans make use of it.

RESEARCH IN THE RIFT VALLEY PROVINCE OF KENYA

Research that we carried out in the Rift Valley of Kenya seems to validate this position. We interviewed 573 people from three different locations that experienced intense fighting during the 2007 post-election violence. Structured questionnaires were administered but we also held focus group discussions in the same places. We deliberately targeted the three regions because of two main reasons: we wanted to hear the views of both Kalenjins and Kikuyus and therefore we chose both Likia and

Mauche, dominated by the Kikuyu and the Kalenjin respectively; and we also wanted to know if the cosmopolitan and more mixed areas would have different perspective and therefore we interviewed people in Nakuru Town. The final distribution was 178 from Nakuru town, 208 from Likia and 187 from Mauche. In terms of ethnic distribution 39.1% were Kalenjins, 44.0% Kikuyus, 5.8% were of mixed blood though not disaggregated in terms what kind of mix in terms of ethnicity, 11.0% were from other tribes other than either Kikuyu or Kalenjin and 0.2% did not indicate their ethnicity. In terms of gender 59.3% were male while 40.5% were female. A small number, 0.2%, did not indicate their gender. We asked them a range of questions ranging from who they would most likely obey if they told them to do something, who they held most responsible for the post-election violence, if they would be willing to vote for someone from another community, if they believed it was possible for the communities to live harmoniously after the experience of 2007, if they would attend trainings on peace building, conflict resolution and what other subjects they would like included, and who they would like to run the courses and where, amongst other questions. The results indicate, for us, that the people on the ground are ready and willing to constructively engage each other with a view to harmoniously co-existing in the region.

WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE POST ELECTION VIOLENCE?

The respondents were given several options and asked to say if they thought the people mentioned were responsible for the post-election violence. Among the suggestions included politicians, elders, presidential candidates, business people, NGOs, elders, the media- TV stations, vernacular radio stations and church leaders

amongst others. The results indicate that top on the list were politicians where 93.1% of those polled said that the politicians were either responsible or mildly responsible for the violence. The presidential candidates came second with 89.7% holding them responsible for the violence. The media played a key role according to the survey with the TV scoring 55.3% in the affirmative, newspapers 55.7%, and vernacular radio stations at 61.1%. This is as opposed to church leaders who scored 12.5%, NGOs 4.0%, and teachers at 3.5%. Teachers and NGOs were seen to have been the least culpable in the violence. What this suggests, in my opinion, is that the problem is bad politics rather than anything else, including democracy that is at the centre of the political problems in Kenya. This to my mind validates the argument that ethnic animosity was fuelled by politicians, in other words bad leadership. In one of the focus group discussions a young man made what in my opinion succinctly captures this perspective. He argued that peace will only come to the Rift Valley and the rest of the country if we get leaders as opposed to politicians. In that one statement, the young man made a distinction between leadership and politics. Leadership is selfless, while politics is self-serving.

THE PARADOX OF AGGRESSORS

The focus group discussions revealed a very interesting scenario. The Kikuyu regard the Kalenjins as the aggressors. The Kalenjins also view the Kikuyus as aggressors and each side accused the other of starting the ethnic post-election conflict in 2007 as well as earlier. This is in spite of the fact that Kalenjins argue that their side reacted spontaneously after their election victory was stolen by the Kikuyu. There is strong bitterness on both sides of the communities with the Kalenjin arguing that the Kikuyus will never allow one of their own to take leadership in the country or even

anywhere where the Kikuyu have the majority. The Kikuyus on the other hand argue that they are accused of stealing what they have earned through hard work. Indeed they argue that the Kalenjins perceive them as having been given free land by Kenyatta when in fact they had formed self help groups through which they raised money and bought the land they occupy from white settlers. Interestingly enough both communities expressed a strong desire for a peaceful co-existence but seemed to believe that this could only be possible if the other community stopped being aggressive. In essence then the two groups only need to be brought together and be demonstrated to that they indeed have more things that unite them than those that divide them.

FOSTERING PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE THROUGH EDUCATION

The objective of bringing together the communities with a view to demonstrating to them that each of them desires peaceful co-existence cannot be achieved through the current structures and systems that are being touted as solutions to the ethnocentric malaise in Kenya. Key stakeholders, including ordinary citizens seem to have their priorities wrong. The international community seems to think that the solution to Kenya's problems lies with politicians. It is perhaps in this regard that the Americans and their key partners are focused on politicians, denying them visas and hoping that these will make the politicians change and embrace progressing ideas. This is perhaps based on the accurate reading that politicians are at the root of Kenya's negative ethnicity problems. While this diagnosis is correct, it is impractical- in my view- to expect that the same politicians who benefit from a negatively ethnicised nation will be committed to the dismantling of the institution (of negative ethnicity) or even the structures that sustain it. I think our hope lies somewhere else. It lies in educating the

masses to be discriminative and to punish, through the vote, those that subscribe to or encourage negative ethnicity.

This was indeed captured by one of the participants in the focus group discussions who argued that:

You see if it were possible it would be nice for the leaders to unite, because everything falls on leadership. So that they begin to ask what has that young person done? If it were possible, really people should be meeting once per month, to talk one with another. We also see like it looks like its is better to train our children when they are still young, because they are those who until now know nothing about nationalism and patriotism. Yeah that is a true saying. We do not want when we stay together in peace then when they go aside they undo what we have said or worse still misappropriate the intentions.

In the above quote, the participant suggested two possibilities: first that leaders should unite and hence cease to incite Kenyans against Kenyans; and secondly that the people train their children to be nationalistic and patriotic. In spite of the formation of the grand coalition government, it's clear that it is a tall order to expect that the leaders will unite against negative ethnocentricity. That would be the same things a cutting of the hand that feeds them. The only thing that seems to unite Kenyan leaders is their appetite for self-aggrandisement and plundering the nation's resources. The second option therefore seems the most practical one even though its fruits may take a much longer time to reap but its impact is bound to be beyond the contemporary generations.

One of our hypotheses was that there is a need for deliberate engineering of peaceful co-existence between tribes through workshops and training on peace. We therefore asked the respondents if they would attend a course on peace if it were offered in their region. The results were very encouraging. Eighty three percent of the respondents said that a course on peaceful co-existence is necessary and although 18.1% felt it was

not necessary, when we asked if they would attend such a course if it were offered, 89.2% said that they would attend. The respondents were also asked what should be the subject of such training. They were given several choices: conflict resolution, history of the rift valley, what it means to be Kenyan, living with people from other cultures and an option to state any other subject not listed as one of the options. Conflict resolution was the highest with a score of 32.7%, followed by what it means to be Kenya at 23.1% and how to live with people from other cultures at 17.9%. When asked where such a course should be held, the majority said it should either be held in the open or a community hall suggesting that they want it held in a neutral place. This is as opposed to having it in a school or a church. My thinking is that this also indicates that they want it held in a place where all would be embraced: the church going as well as those who do not go to church, the educated as well as the uneducated. It is also an indication that the training should be community based rather than related to a specific institution such as the church or the school.

Given the foregoing, this paper recommends systematic, structured and sustained programs of civic education to be carried out across the country, preferably beginning in the hot spots of ethnocentric conflict targeting residents, young and old, with messages of patriotism and nationalism, conflict resolution, and how to live with members of other communities. The training should be conducted by NGOs and the church. This is because when we asked who the participants would like to run the courses, the two top contenders were NGOs and the church with scores of 35.2% and 26.4%. The other contenders were teachers, MPs, government officials and councillors amongst others. All the others, except teachers with 18.3%, scored less than 15%. We asked the respondents to tell us who they were most likely to obey if

they were to tell them to do something. The results are interesting because politicians do not feature very high on that list. Only 6%, for example, say they are likely to obey the M.P and only 2.8% would listen to their local councillor. Instead the elders are highest on the list with 32.4% of the respondents saying they were likely to obey them; these are followed by pastors with a 25.0% approval rating. This suggests that to effect positive behaviour change, it would be appropriate to make use of pastors and elders and that any program aimed at reaching the people should at the very least seek the approval and support of pastors and elders. This is also interesting because the respondents felt the elders and church leaders were responsible for the post election violence at 37.0% and 38.8% respectively. This suggests that had the elders and church leaders been more proactive in trying to discourage ethnic violence there is a strong likelihood that the violence would have been at a much lower scale than it was in 2007. It seems to me that one of the ways to discourage violence in the grass roots would be to make pastors and elders critical of political activism and to be able to advice against negative messages spread by politicians.

In order for courses aimed at bringing about unity to be effective then, they should have the backing both the church and the elders. Faith based institutions of higher learning, because of their close links to the church, should therefore partner with churches and the elders of the target communities to develop training manuals on nationalism and patriotism, conflict resolution and living with people of other cultures and have communities trained and rewarded for attending. I think this would begin and sustain both short term and long term debates on positive ethnicity and also help citizens see through the manipulation of politicians. I am convinced this would contribute towards deethnicising democracy in Africa.

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