

# FACING MOUNT KENYA OR FACING MECCA? THE *MUNGIKI*, ETHNIC VIOLENCE AND THE POLITICS OF THE MOI SUCCESSION IN KENYA, 1987–2002

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## ABSTRACT

Kenya's return to pluralist politics in the early 1990s saw the eruption of political violence that has since laid siege to human rights and democracy. This article discusses the *Mungiki* movement which, like the Mau Mau movement that waged armed struggle against the British in the 1950s, has sprouted among the Kikuyu. It examines *Mungiki* within the broader theoretical context of competitive electoral politics and political violence in contemporary Kenya. In addition to tracing the movement's religious and ideological roots, the article shows how 'informal repression' or quasi-legitimization of sectarian violence for political ends by the state, has transformed a 'moral ethnic' movement into a 'politically tribal' one. As a contribution to the academic debate on *Mungiki*, the article draws on the rich public debate in Kenya and the author's close study of the movement in 2001–2.

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POLITICAL VIOLENCE MARRED KENYA'S MULTIPARTY ELECTIONS IN 1992 and 1997, and has since mined the road to the 2002 elections and the decisive transition to a post-Moi era. Over a decade after 'ethnic clashes' erupted in 1991, Kenya has become a cesspool of all genres of political violence that have effectively confined its embryonic democracy to cold storage. Against the political backdrop of mounting domestic and international pressure for political pluralism, the beleaguered one-party elite warned that the introduction of a multiparty system would trigger cataclysmic tribal violence that would destroy the Kenyan nation. In the intervening period, politicians from President Moi's own Kalenjin ethnic group publicly demanded the return of *majimbo*,<sup>1</sup> a federal system based on the notion of ethnic purity

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1. A Kiswahili term that is loosely translated as 'federalism' or 'regionalism', *Majimbo* allows for multi-ethnic federalism, but when used in a narrow sense it has insisted on ethnic purity and exclusivity with regard to access to resources and citizenship rights within ethnic territories, often leading to ethnic cleansing.

which required the expulsion of all other ethnic groups from land occupied by the Kalenjin and the Maasai before colonialism. Mysterious Kalenjin 'warriors' and Maasai 'morans' clad in traditional attire, their faces painted with red ochre, descended on non-Kalenjin populations in parts of the Rift Valley, Nyanza and Western Kenya. When researchers came face-to-face with this violence, they understood its logic as a new phenomenon of informal repression, a strategy by the ruling elite to employ violence covertly to undermine political opposition, counter multiparty democracy, and regain the political initiative.<sup>2</sup>

At the beginning of the decade, political scientists warned of an emerging trend in which African states, facing determined opposition, were resorting to recruiting surrogates and clients to organize violence against citizens. Mohamed Salih revealed how the state in the Sudan recruited tribal militias to terrorize and rob the civilian population, thus contributing to the 'retribalization' of politics.<sup>3</sup> In the same vein, the dynamics of informal repression were aptly described by the notion of 'marionette politics' which underlined the pervasive use of 'tribal authorities, institutions and militias in as diverse countries as Nigeria, Cameroon, Malawi, South Africa and Kenya to repress the opposition'.<sup>4</sup> One way in which the African state generally carried out informal repression was to 'play the communal card' or cynically to exploit latent ethnic grievances and conflicts over resources and opportunities in the modern sector to split political opinion or divide-and-rule various ethnic groups.<sup>5</sup> Violence was particularly masked as 'communal' or 'criminal' and attributed to traditional warrior bands, ethnic militias, vigilantes, bandits or simply gangs of thugs. In fact, the language used to describe this phenomenon has also tended to reinforce the image of primitive violence stoked by primordial sensibilities and clashing inter- and intra-ethnic claims to diminishing resources. Euphemistically described as 'cattle rustling', 'ethnic', 'land' or 'border' *clashes*, this violence was at once shorn of its underpinning political character and motives and naturalized as a localized and primitive version of Samuel Huntington's global 'clash of civilizations'.<sup>6</sup>

2. Linda Kirschke, 'Informal repression: zero-sum politics and the later third wave transitions', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 38, 3 (2000), pp. 383–405.

3. M. A. Mohamed Salih, "New wine in old bottles": tribal militias and the Sudanese state', *Review of African Political Economy* 45/46 (1989), pp. 168–74.

4. Peter Mwangi Kagwanja, 'Politics of marionettes: extra-legal violence and the 1997 elections in Kenya', in Marcel Rutten, Alamin Mazrui and François Grignon (eds), *Out for the Count: The 1997 general elections and prospects for democracy in Kenya* (Fountain Publishers, Kampala, 2001); Article 19, *Deadly Marionettes: State-sponsored violence in Africa* (Article 19, London, October 1997).

5. According to the 1989 census, the latest to provide an ethnic breakdown of Kenya's population, there are 42 ethnic groups in Kenya. Ethnic politics has revolved around the largest groups, including the Kikuyu (21 percent), Luhya (14 percent), Luo (13 percent) Kalenjin (11 percent), Kamba (11 percent), Kisii (8 percent), Meru (5 percent) and Miji Kenda (5 percent).

6. Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (Simon and Schuster, New York, 1996).

Even more ominous, violence associated with informal repression was depoliticized and excluded from the prevailing moral discourse on political violence.<sup>7</sup> It neither corresponds to Frantz Fanon's<sup>8</sup> 'humanizing native violence' against an equally violent (colonial) state nor to Hannah Arendt's<sup>9</sup> 'dehumanizing' state violence against its citizens typified by the Nazi Holocaust or, more recently, ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia under Slobodan Milosevic or the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Instead, it exculpated the state and its surrogates and clients from charges of human rights violations against citizens. Moreover, the informal character of this violence has allowed the state to claim the status of a victim caught between the smouldering rock of divisive pluralist democracy and the heavy hammer of 'primordial' or 'criminal' violence. The state has effectively crippled political opposition by mobilizing militias to disrupt its public meetings, and intimidate, displace, and disenfranchise ethnic populations suspected of being sympathetic to the opposition. During the 1992 and 1997 general elections, the Kenyan state came under heavy criticism for sponsoring violence to manipulate electoral outcomes, win the elections and sustain itself in power at the exorbitant cost of the 'retribalization' of politics and the erosion of civic nationhood.<sup>10</sup> This strategy has not only undermined democracy, but also produced what Carol Sicherman rightly characterizes as the 'window-dressing of multiparty democracy'.<sup>11</sup>

The 'retribalization' of the public sphere has sharpened the tension between civic or state citizenship and ethnic citizenship. While the former is based on liberal notions of civic citizenship and individual rights inscribed in the national constitution, the latter is predicated upon membership of an ethnic group or clan through which one accesses social and economic rights, especially the right to land.<sup>12</sup> This tension has been aggravated by what experts have viewed as the tendency of globalization to reinforce parochial identities and sensibilities.<sup>13</sup> Globalization enabled ethnic militias to acquire arms from expanding cross-border smuggling and illegal gunrunning and to use them in local conflicts. Nonetheless, theorists

7. Human Rights Watch, *Playing the Communal Card: Communal violence and human rights* (Human Rights Watch, New York, 1997), pp. viii–xi.

8. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Penguin Publishers, London, 1967).

9. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Harcourt Brace, New York, 1975).

10. David Throup and Charles Hornsby, *Multi-Party Politics in Kenya: The Kenyatta and Moi states and the triumph of the system in the 1992 election* (James Currey, Oxford; EAEP, Nairobi; Ohio University Press, Athens, OH, 1998). Peter Kagwanja, *Killing the Vote: State-sponsored violence and the flawed elections in Kenya* (Kenya Human Rights Commission, Nairobi, 1998).

11. Carol Sicherman, 'Kenya: creativity and political repression: the confusion of fact and fiction', *Race & Class* 37, 4 (1995/96), pp. 61–71.

12. Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, nativism, and the genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2001), pp. 28–31.

13. Arjun Appadurai, 'Dead certainty: ethnic violence in the era of globalization', *Public Culture* 10, 2 (1998), pp. 225–47.

cautioned against the wholesale depiction of ethnic identity as a disruptive force. Ethnic identity, they averred, is 'an ordinary aspect of selfhood and a basic social relation' which has in the past provided a space of relative autonomy from the centralizing ambitions of the postcolonial African state, moral community for cultural citizenship, and the focal point of resistance against tyranny.<sup>14</sup>

The 'emancipatory' qualities that Dickson Eyoh identifies with ethnicity differ analytically from the disruptive potential of what John Lonsdale calls 'political tribalism'.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, some academics have celebrated this 'moral ethnicity'<sup>16</sup> not only as an antidote to political tribalism, but also as an anchor of the burgeoning social movement for social justice and human rights. By challenging the tyranny of the state and the orthodoxy of the international financial institutions and expanding the space of civic citizenship, this coalition has served as a veritable agent of globalization 'from below'.<sup>17</sup> However, David Anderson, who has carried out a close analysis of the *Mungiki* religio-political movement in Kenya, has recently raised doubts about the empirical basis of this optimism. Turning Terisa Turner and Leigh Brownhill's view of *Mungiki* as a paragon of 'moral ethnicity' on its head, Anderson sketches the sect's descent to political tribalism and how its programmes and activities have accentuated insecurity, violated human rights, and disrupted public order.<sup>18</sup>

This article examines the *Mungiki* movement within the broad context of the culture of violence that has characterized political life in multiparty Kenya. Depicting *Mungiki* as a movement that was forged on the anvil of informal repression signified by the ethnic cleansing in the 1990s, it traces this largely Kikuyu-based religio-political movement to the long history of resistance by civic and religious organizations. However, the case of *Mungiki* demonstrates the way the state, through the logic of informal repression, has managed to penetrate, co-opt and fragment a movement

14. Dickson Eyoh, 'Community, citizenship and the politics of ethnicity in post-colonial Africa', in Ezekiel Kalipeni and Paul Zeleza (eds), *Sacred Spaces and Public Quarrels* (Africa World Press, Trenton, NJ and Asmara, 1999), p. 273.

15. John Lonsdale, 'Moral ethnicity and political tribalism', in Preben Kaarsholm and Jan Hultin (eds), *Inventions and Boundaries: Historical and anthropological approaches to the study of ethnicity and nationalism* (Roskilde University Press, Roskilde, 1994), p. 131.

16. The concept of 'moral ethnicity' has its intellectual origins in the historical observation that ethnic ways or systems have almost always been disputed and/or disrupted by forces from within, in contrast to inter-ethnic division which has almost always, at least in modern Africa, been imposed from above or without. In this article, it is used to capture the benign and emancipatory sense that also challenges the orthodox social science view of ethnicity as a disruptive force through and through.

17. Jacqueline M. Klopp, 'Can moral ethnicity trump political tribalism? The struggle for land in Kenya', *African Studies*, (forthcoming); Terisa E. Turner and Leigh S. Brownhill, 'African jubilee: Mau Mau resurgence and the fight for fertility in Kenya, 1986-2002', *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* 22, Special Issue (2001), pp. 1037-88.

18. David M. Anderson, 'Vigilantes, violence and the politics of public order in Kenya', *African Affairs* 101, 405 (2002), pp. 531-55.

based on moral ethnicity and to transform it into a disruptive force espousing political tribalism. In the tempestuous politics of the Moi succession in 2002, a 'criminal' or 'pseudo-*Mungiki*' under the control of the ruling elite has been responsible for human rights violation, and insecurity in Nairobi and Central Kenya.

### *The making of the Mungiki*

Analyses of the historical origins of the *Mungiki* tend to give pride of place to its religious character. Yet, information on the ideological and political dimensions and heritage of *Mungiki* is still scanty, hazy and often glossed over by analysts. Founded in the late 1980s, *Mungiki*, coupled with its radical brand of politics, is routinely perceived as following in the footsteps of the militancy of the Mau Mau during the colonial era and an array of intellectual, civic and religious organizations in the postcolonial epoch. *Mungiki* is also heir to a long tradition of religio-political revivalism that dates back to the early stages of anti-colonial resistance. Recently, it has also been portrayed as an important focal point for the burgeoning movement for 'globalization from below', a crusade for the rights of the poor in the face of domestic corruption and extreme policies of globalization. Indeed, its founders purposely adopted the term *Mungiki*, which is etymologically derived from the archaic Gikuyu word *irindi* (crowds), to claim its rightful place in the pantheon of radical movements. The term *Mungiki* implies that all 'people are entitled to a particular place of their own in the ontological world'.<sup>19</sup> Also translated as 'we are the public',<sup>20</sup> the term is an assertion of the rights of a social class that feels acutely deprived and marginalized in a rapidly globalizing world.

Recent research traces *Mungiki*'s ideological pedigree to the radicalism of the Mau Mau anti-colonial war for 'land and freedom' in the 1950s. Terisa Turner and Leigh Brownhill glorify *Mungiki* as a rebirth of the Mau Mau spirit of resistance.<sup>21</sup> There are striking parallels between the two movements. While Mau Mau drew the bulk of its support from squatters disenchanted with the agrarian tyranny in colonial Rift Valley,<sup>22</sup> *Mungiki* draws its support from thousands of people displaced by ethnic clashes. Just as Mau Mau mobilized its support among the urban lumpenproletariat against colonial social and economic injustices, Turner and Brownhill stress the role of women in *Mungiki* to qualify it as a protest movement of the poor, the dispossessed and the landless against oppressive landlords,

19. Grace Nyatugah Wamue, 'Revisiting our indigenous shrines through Mungiki', *African Affairs* 100, 400 (2001), pp. 453–67.

20. John Githongo, 'Why won't the state clip them dreadlocks?', *The East African*, 15 November 2000.

21. Turner and Brownhill, 'African Jubilee'.

22. Tabitha Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau* (James Currey, London, 1987).

corrupt urban 'land-grabbers' and the tyranny of the ruling elite. Not only does this laudatory view of *Mungiki* fail to come to terms with its wild ideological shifts in recent years; it also drags the movement through the intellectual minefield of the rancorous Mau Mau debate.

For their part, *Mungiki* leaders also lay claim to the Mau Mau mantle. *Mungiki*'s National Co-ordinator, Ibrahim Ndura Waruinge, robustly asserts that: 'We [*Mungiki*] have Mau Mau blood in us and our objectives are similar. The Mau Mau fought for land, freedom and religion . . . and so do we.'<sup>23</sup> Waruinge, who also claims to have co-founded the sect with six other youths in 1987 while he was still in Molo High School, is a grandson of the Mau Mau fighter, General Waruinge. There is evidence that *Mungiki* has made deliberate efforts to link itself to Mau Mau. Grace Wamue informs us that the group of six that founded *Mungiki* consulted ex-Mau Mau generals in Laikipia and Nyandarua districts in the Rift Valley and Central Province, respectively.<sup>24</sup>

While making the most of the bliss of Mau Mau's heroic past, *Mungiki* leaders believe that the movement did not achieve its goals. Indeed, they contend that the Mau Mau mission is still 'incomplete'. It is because of this that Kenya is defenceless in the face of re-colonization by the forces of international capital: 'Kenya today is controlled by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Americans, the British and the Freemasons. It can't initiate its own development and has sold all its properties to Westerners in the name of liberalization.'<sup>25</sup> *Mungiki*'s anti-globalization stance has its mould in the critical reading of the social and economic effects of the excessive restructuring and fiscal policies engendered by the forces of globalization, and the inefficiency and corruption of the ruling elite. These policies have wiped out welfarism and social services, created mass urban unemployment, escalated poverty, amplified intra- and inter-ethnic exploitation and competition, and reinforced the narrow and often recidivistic forces of ethnicity. As one academic has aptly put it, *Mungiki* is 'a pseudo-religious, pseudo-political and quasi-military organization which expresses the hopelessness that has been created by the deteriorating economic situation'.<sup>26</sup> Not only have some *Mungiki* followers doubled-up as members of the more militant Kimathi Movement,<sup>27</sup> but *Mungiki* has also forged working relations with the movement for the purpose of 'completing' the Mau Mau mission.

23. Muthui Mwai, 'What makes Mungiki tick', *The Daily Nation*, 23 October 2000.

24. Wamue, 'Revisiting our indigenous shrines', p. 456.

25. *The Daily Nation*, 23 October 2000.

26. See Dr Edward Kisiangani, cited in David Mageria, 'Kenyan sect banned by State but defiant', Reuters, 19 April 2002.

27. The Kimathi movement upholds the ideals of the Mau Mau struggle and over the years has staged public demonstrations every 14 February demanding a decent burial for the Mau Mau leader, Dedan Kimathi, executed on that day in 1957.

Other accounts have traced the origins of *Mungiki* to the heady days of resistance during 1985 against political despotism under the Kenyatta and Moi states. Specifically, there have been attempts to link *Mungiki* with *Mwakenya*, a left-wing civic movement founded in 1979 to challenge the one-party orthodoxy. *Mwakenya* members, among them university lecturers, students, journalists, teachers, and workers, were jailed, detained or forced into exile after the Moi state came down hard on dissenters in the wake of the attempted coup of August 1982.<sup>28</sup> As Atieno-Odhiambo clearly shows, the clampdown on political dissent in the 1980s went hand in hand with acute 'tribalization' of politics.<sup>29</sup> Whereas *Mwakenya* was overwhelmingly multi-ethnic, the state, in line with its 'divide and repress' strategy of tribalizing dissent, portrayed it as a Kikuyu tribal movement. Dissenting Gikuyu intellectuals and politicians like Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Koigi wa Wamwere, Maina wa Kinyatti, Mukaru Ngángá, and Wanyiri Kihoro were hunted down by government agents as treasonous 'communist agents' and unrepentant 'tribalists' and detained or forced into exile. Recently, Kihika Kimani, a Gikuyu politician allied to the ruling elite, has claimed that *Mungiki* is financed and coordinated by former members of *Mwakenya* now living in exile, including Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Maina wa Kinyatti. Searching through the publications of these clandestine movements, one comes across hardly any mention of *Mungiki*, raising doubts about its linkages with *Mwakenya*. While none of the former *Mwakenya* members now serving as leaders of civic organizations and parliamentarians in Kenya have claimed any linkage to *Mungiki*, those in exile such as Maina wa Kinyatti have discounted the claims that they are coordinating and financing *Mungiki*.<sup>30</sup> This effort to link *Mungiki* to *Mwakenya* serves more to demonize the sect by depicting it as a resurrected ghost of the 'tribalized' resistance of the 1980s than to demonstrate any direct connection between the two movements.<sup>31</sup> However, the resistance of earlier social movements has not only inspired *Mungiki*, but the movement also evokes the continuities and discontinuities between the earlier and later patterns of resistance.

Some of the continuities in the struggle are on the cultural front with which *Mungiki* is indelibly linked. As Wamue points out, *Mungiki* signifies the resurgence of a Gikuyu identity, traditional culture, religion and sense

28. Mwakenya, 'Democratization in Kenya: should the left participate or not?', *Review of African Political Economy* 21, 61 (September 1994), pp. 475–8. 'Mwakenya: Moi told to apologize', *Daily Nation*, 14 March 2000.

29. E. S. Atieno-Odhiambo, 'Reconditioning the terms of fact: ethnicity, nationalism and democracy in Africa', in B. A. Ogot (ed.), *Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Democracy in Africa* (University Desktop Press, Maseno, Kenya, 1997). See also Atieno-Odhiambo, *Ethnicity and Democracy in Kenya* (International Human Rights and Human Diversity Initiative, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1998).

30. Interview with Willy Mutunga, May 2002.

31. 'A sect shrouded in mystery', *The Weekly Review*, 12 March 2002.

of belonging, which Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first President, celebrated over six decades ago.<sup>32</sup> Yet, it is ethnic exclusivity rather than the redemptive aspects that dominate the debate on *Mungiki*. It has been argued that the glorification of the Gikuyu culture in the writings and activities of Gikuyu intellectuals, particularly Jomo Kenyatta and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, has conferred on *Mungiki* an ethnically exclusive cultural radicalism. One commentator has ascribed Ngugi's influence on *Mungiki* to his peasant-based theatre at Kamirithu Village in Limuru, which, in a twist of irony, was violently disbanded by the Kenyatta government, and Ngugi himself detained, in 1978.<sup>33</sup> Others have attributed this influence to Ngugi's literary works, chiefly *The River Between* and *Weep Not Child* which give a distinct ideological slant to Kikuyu culture.

Anderson isolates the portrayal of the prophecy of Mugo wa Kiburu, the Gikuyu diviner and seer of the late nineteenth century, as the ideological wind that drives *Mungiki* to a 'stridently ethnocentric' corner. Through reading Mugo wa Kiburu as depicted in Kenyatta's and wa Thiong'o's writings, the *Mungiki* leadership has become radicalized. As a result, *Mungiki* has blamed Kenya's woes on European colonialism and virulently advocated the restoration of Gikuyu traditional practices as an indigenous refuge in the face of 'the yoke of colonial mental slavery' of the mainstream churches and marginalization by the corrupt and materialistic evangelical churches.<sup>34</sup> Anderson sees in the writings of Kenyatta and wa Thiong'o a trigger of *Mungiki*'s bifurcated vision: that of re-establishing a 'Kirinyaga Kingdom' and the 'restoration of Gikuyu power through the removal of the Moi regime and capturing state power'. Anderson's account does not shed light on how these two visions, one 'primordial' the other 'modernist', are to be reconciled. Further, it casts a larger-than-life image of Waruinge who also appears as *Mungiki*'s undisputed ideological Czar and *Mungiki* as a homogenous movement driven by a singular traditional vision encapsulated in Mugo's prophecy.

Evidence points to the fact that Mugo wa Kibiro occupies a less central place in *Mungiki*'s ideology than Anderson suggests. As Wamue states, 'the educated *Mungiki* members consult books on Gikuyu history as well as other writings by heroes like Marcus Garvey and Martin Luther [King]'.<sup>35</sup> As a research associate with the Kenya Human Rights Commission, I interacted in meetings, public demonstrations and private intellectual discussions with *Mungiki* members who fervently identified with a range of radical viewpoints, ranging from Marxist ideas to those of Marcus Garvey, Kwame

32. Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (Secker and Warburg, London, 1938). See also Atieno-Odhiambo, 'Reconditioning the terms of fact'.

33. Simiyu Barasa, 'The Mungiki prodigy and Ngugi's literary adventures', *The East African Standard*, 31 March 2002.

34. Anderson, 'Vigilantes, violence and the politics of public order in Kenya'.

35. Wamue, 'Revisiting our indigenous shrines', p. 456.



Nkrumah, Steve Biko, and more pervasively Che Guevara.<sup>36</sup> Aside from the ideas derived from these sources, most *Mungiki* members read newspapers and magazines, watch films, video shows, and interact with university students and activists in Kenya's vibrant civic society.

More importantly, *Mungiki*'s idea of a 'Kirinyaga Kingdom' is less a reflection of Mugo wa Kibiru's prophecy than a distillation of a decade of debate in the public media and locally published books on the prospects of an 'ethnic based' federalism in East Africa.<sup>37</sup> This becomes clear from a close analysis of *Mungiki*'s vision of a new social contract that will form the basis of a Kenyan nation. The hypothetical 'Kirinyaga Kingdom' is envisioned as one of the 42 autonomous ethnic movements based on the distinct cultural heritage of these groups that will form the building blocks of a new Kenyan nation. Each 'ethnic kingdom' will select a council of elders who will appoint representatives to sit in a 'national house of representatives'. The elders will govern the Kenyan nation of ethnic kingdoms according to an agreed 'national cultural code' that will unite all Kenyans.<sup>38</sup> In a sense, this vision of autonomous ethnic entities as the touchstone of Kenyan nationhood underpinned the now defunct '*Majimbo*' or 'federal constitution' that the British and Kenyan nationalists hammered out at the second Lancaster House Conference in 1962 to allay the fears and secure the rights of ethnic minorities after independence.<sup>39</sup> An idea of *majimbo-ism* cast in provincially exclusive ethnicity is largely responsible for ethnic cleansing in multiparty Kenya.

The *Mungiki*'s ideological bloodline can also be traced from such revivalist movements as *Dini Ya Msambwa*, *Legio Maria*, *Akorino* and, more recently, *Hema ya Ngai wi Mwoyo* (the Tent of the Living God). The common thread that joins these movements is that they have rallied their followers behind traditional values to challenge the orthodoxy of the mainstream churches as well as injustices by the state.<sup>40</sup> The latter factor has put some of these movements on a collision course with the state, sometimes leading to their being outlawed. The *Mungiki* itself is said to have risen from the ashes of *Hema ya Ngai wi Mwoyo* (the Tent of the Living God), a Kikuyu-based religio-political movement, which was founded by Ngonywa wa Gakonya in 1987. In 1987–92, the heyday of the clamour for political

36. I served as a consultant with the Kenya Human Rights Commission in 1996–98 and as a Research Associate, between February 2001 and August 2002.

37. The best articulation of this ethnic path to a new Kenyan nation is by a former Cabinet Minister in Moi's government, Peter Habenga Okondo in his book *A Commentary on the Constitution of Kenya in Kenya* (Phoenix Publishers, Nairobi, 1995).

38. Interview with Ibrahim Ndura Waruinge, by Mutuma Ruteere, February 2002; Wamue, 'Revisiting our indigenous shrines', pp. 459–60.

39. Peter Kagwanja and Willy Mutunga, 'Is Majimbo federalism? Constitutional debate in a tribal shark-tank', *Daily Nation*, 20 May 2001.

40. James Bandi Shimanyula, *Elijah Masinde and the Dini Ya Msambwa* (Transafrica Publishers, Nairobi, 1978).

pluralism, the sect became the voice and protector of Nairobi's urban poor whose shanty homes and kiosks were frequently demolished by the City Council *askaris* at the behest of the state.<sup>41</sup> After Kenya's return to a multi-party system in 1992, Ngonya transformed the sect into a political party, the Democratic Movement (DEMO), that the government declined to register. Shortly after, the sect was wound up when its members stormed out following Ngonya's short-lived *détente* with the ruling elite. It would appear that the youthful members of the Tent joined the *Mungiki*, expanding its growing rank and file in the Rift Valley, Central Province and Nairobi.

While the Tent's followers were largely older Kikuyus, *Mungiki* started as a more radical and vibrant movement of the youth between the ages of 18 and 40.<sup>42</sup> It draws the bulk of its followers from the lower classes, mostly former street children, unemployed youths, hawkers, artisans, small traders in the *Jua Kali* (the informal sector) and the alarmingly growing army of urban poor in Nairobi's slums of Githurai, Dandora, Korogocho, Kariobangi, Kawangware, Kibera, Mathare and Kangemi. It also has a strong constituency among the landless, squatters and internally displaced persons in areas in the Rift Valley such as Londiani, Eldoret, Molo, Olenguruone, Elburgon, Subukia, Narok, Nakuru, Laikipia and Nyahururu. It is estimated that *Mungiki* has between 1.5 and 2 million dues-paying members, with at least 400,000 of these being women.<sup>43</sup> Existing knowledge of *Mungiki*'s organizational structure is incomplete.<sup>44</sup> What is known is that it has a National Coordinating Committee, which is headed by Ibrahim Ndura Waruinge and hundreds of coordinating units from the national to provincial, district, locational and village level.<sup>45</sup> *Mungiki* derives its funding from membership dues, although donations from politicians and businesspersons cannot be ruled out. Each *Mungiki* member pays a token Ksh3 (\$0.0375) a month, which according to Waruinge adds up to a total monthly income of KS4.5 million (\$57,000). This awesome, by local standards, income makes *Mungiki* far and away one of the most financially stable indigenous organizations.

41. G. R. Mulunga, 'Urban violence in Kenya's transition to pluralist politics, 1982-1992', *African Development* 24, 1 & 2 (1999).

42. Recent police crackdown on the movement has revealed that it has followers among primary school children and elderly people. See 'Six pupils in court over Mungiki chaos', *The Nation*, 13 March 2002.

43. Wamue, 'Revisiting our indigenous shrines', p. 454. In the wake of *Mungiki*'s entry into active electoral politics, it has revised these numbers upward to a largely inflated figure of between 3.5 and 4 million.

44. As a movement inspired by the Mau Mau and which has recently joined the fold of Kenya's Muslim activists, it is likely that it has adopted a cell structure.

45. Administratively, Kenya is divided into 8 provinces, over 50 Districts, hundreds of Divisions and thousands of Locations, Sub-Locations and Villages.

*Mungiki and the search for moral order after the 1991–98 ethnic clashes*

Ethnic violence broke out in Kenya in November 1991 when mysterious ‘Kalenjin warriors’ attacked Miteitei Farm on the border between Western, Nyanza and the Rift Valley provinces. Throughout the 1992 pre-election period, these warriors, wielding such traditional Kalenjin weapons as bows and arrows and with their half-naked bodies painted with red ochre, attacked the homes and farms of migrant non-Kalenjin groups in the Rift Valley and Western province. Among the groups attacked were the Luo, Gusii, Luhya, Kamba and Kikuyu, who also supported the nascent opposition movement. By November 1993, over 1,500 people had died in the orgy of violence and 300,000 were displaced.<sup>46</sup> In October 1993, ‘Maasai morans’ attacked and killed at least 30 people and displaced 30,000 in Enoosupukia, Narok, in a post-election punitive attack on Kikuyus who had voted against the government party (KANU).<sup>47</sup> In August 1997, ahead of the general elections that year, ‘Digo warriors’ at the Coast killed 100 people and displaced 100,000 upcountry people, after invading the Likoni police station, killing five police officers and making away with guns and ammunition.<sup>48</sup> Again, in January–February 1998, ‘Maasai morans’ and ‘Kalenjin warriors’ simultaneously attacked Kikuyu farms in Njoro, Nakuru and Laikipia in another spate of post-election punitive violence.<sup>49</sup>

Between 1999 and 2002, communal violence escalated ahead of the Moi succession after the 2002 general elections. The Kenya Human Rights Commission estimates that state-sponsored or state-condoned violence in Kenya in the period 1991–2001 killed 4,000 people and displaced 600,000 others.<sup>50</sup> Most of the internally displaced have been unable to return to their homes and communities because of insecurity. They live either in makeshift camps or as street families, hawkers and even petty prostitutes and pickpockets in towns such as Eldoret, Nakuru, Nyahururu and Nairobi. The Kikuyu population affected by the clashes in Molo, Elburgon, Rongai, Narok and Eldoret in 1991–93 and Njoro and Laikipia in 1998 forms the core of *Mungiki*’s rural and urban following within the Rift Valley.

Although Kenya’s ruling elite projected the clashes as ‘the spontaneous result of the return to political pluralism’, many analysts have discounted

46. Human Rights Watch, *Divide and Rule: State-sponsored ethnic violence in Kenya* (Human Rights Watch, New York, 1993), p. 71.

47. Jacqueline Klopp, ‘Ethnic clashes and winning elections: the case of Kenya’s electoral despotism’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 35, 2 (2001).

48. Alamin Mazrui, *Kayas of Deprivation, Kayas of Blood: Violence, ethnicity and the state in Coastal Kenya* (Kenya Human Rights Commission, Nairobi, 1997).

49. Marcel Rutten, ‘Fresh killings: the Njoro and Laikipia violence in the 1997 Kenya election aftermath’, in Rutten *et al.*, *Out for the Count*, pp. 536–82.

50. Kenya Human Rights Commission, *The Right to Return: The internally displaced persons and the culture of impunity in Kenya* (Kenya Human Rights Commission, Nairobi, 2001). Human Rights Watch in *Playing With Fire* puts the figures of dead and displaced by purely political violence during the period at 2,000 and 400,000, respectively.

this theory and insisted that it constitutes 'informal repression', a ploy by the elite to use ethnic violence as a tool for winning elections. Far from being spontaneous, 'there is clear evidence that the government was involved in provoking this ethnic violence for political purposes and has taken no adequate steps to prevent it from spiralling out of control'.<sup>51</sup> As part of the 'informal repression' strategy, the elite relied on extra-legal intimidation and violence to silence and disempower critics and to intimidate, displace and disenfranchise hostile voters in multi-ethnic electoral zones. Instigation of ethnic violence has also been used as a political tactic to consolidate its ethnic base by allowing the Kalenjin and Maasai to occupy land abandoned by displaced groups and to drive a wedge between this core vote and other groups in order to ensure that the former do not join the opposition band-wagon.<sup>52</sup> The change of tactics from formal to informal repression is a deliberate move on the part of the government to avoid international censorship, stem pressure from donors and win the sympathy of this important constituency. The chilling aspect of the clashes is that the government has consistently denied any knowledge of or responsibility for it, attributing it instead to unknown vigilantes.<sup>53</sup> In 1993, the government strongly rejected a report of a committee established by Parliament to investigate the 1991–3 clashes. It has also declined to release the Report of the Akiwumi Commission, another Government Commission set up in 1999 and headed by an Appeal Court judge, Mr Justice Akilano Akiwumi, to probe the ethnic clashes in the 1991–8 period. Existing research seems strongly to support the conclusion that the government has used informal repression extensively in the 1998–2002 period to reclaim the political initiative in urban areas, especially in Nairobi where the opposition has held sway since 1992. As a result, violence attributed to ethnic vigilantes and militias has alarmingly spiralled in urban zones, especially in Nairobi's suburbs.

As a radical movement, *Mungiki* appears to have been forged on the anvil of the 1991–8 ethnic clashes in the Rift Valley. While the movement seemed not to have a clearly spelt out programme and agenda, its plan in the early 1990s was to mobilize its members against the government, which it accused of starting and fuelling the clashes. Reminiscent of the Mau Mau style of mobilization in the 1950s, *Mungiki* reportedly began administering oaths as a way of uniting its members politically for the purpose of repulsing ethnic attacks. The immediate impact of this oathing was to jolt the government into taking the movement rather more seriously and dispatching security officers to all its public and private meetings and rituals. Partly because of *Mungiki*'s presence, the clashes abated in Kikuyu areas in the

51. Human Rights Watch, *Divide and Rule*, p. 1.

52. Kagwanja, 'Politics of marionettes'.

53. Human Rights Watch, *Divide and Rule*, p. 11.

Rift Valley. There is clear evidence that, with the outbreak of the Njoro and Laikipia violence in January 1998, *Mungiki* vigilantes fought and sometimes repulsed the invaders, protecting the innocent people and maintaining a sense of order in the affected areas. The role of Kikuyu politicians in financing retaliatory violence has also come to the fore. For instance, testimony given before the Akiwumi Commission linked Kihika Kimani, a legislator from Molo, with some belligerent talk during the Njoro and Laikipia violence. Furthermore, the legislator is reported to have admitted before the Commission that he had organized 500 Kikuyu youths in January 1998 to counter what he described as planned raids by members of the Kalenjin community.<sup>54</sup> Throughout the period after 1998, *Mungiki* youths have been on the alert, especially in parts of Laikipia where low-key attacks have continued.

Aside from its task of defending the displaced, *Mungiki* has revitalized the traditional value of generosity and charity to facilitate the return, rehabilitation and social support of its displaced members. Turner and Brownhill have lauded *Mungiki* for the part it played in supporting the displaced farmers in the Rift Valley in 1992 and 1998. One way in which *Mungiki* has supported its members is to help them acquire and establish farms in a number of areas in the Rift valley such as Ng'arua where they grow maize and potatoes, and keep livestock. Beyond the sinister ring of unbridled radicalism that surrounds the movement, we are told that, in *Mungiki* farms, 'the spirit of harmony, hard work and unity is evident'.<sup>55</sup>

After 1997, *Mungiki* intensified its moral crusade aimed at restoring justice and rebuilding wrecked communities, especially in Nairobi's suburbs and shanties where its members live. As a result, even its most ardent critics concede that its crusade against drunkenness, drug addiction, broken families, prostitution, VD, and HIV-AIDS has been highly successful.<sup>56</sup> It has also flushed out thugs and eliminated criminal activities such as theft, rape, the sale of drugs and murder in some of Nairobi's suburbs such as the Kasarani area where it has virtual control. *Mungiki* has allied itself with community-based movements in Nairobi such as *Muungano wa Wanavijiji* (Movement of the Villagers) in organizing protests against corrupt land-grabbers and oppressive landlords who arbitrarily raise rents. It has also supported people-driven constitutional reform since 1997. In view of its largely effective struggle for social justice, *Mungiki* is celebrated by Turner

54. *The Weekly Review*, 12 March 2002.

55. Wamue, 'Revisiting our indigenous shrines', p. 466.

56. David Mageria, 'Kenyan sect banned by state but defiant', Reuters, 19 April 2002; *Daily Nation*, 23 October 2000.

and Brownhill as one of the groups that are the anchors of ‘globalization from below’.<sup>57</sup>

However, these laudatory accounts of *Mungiki* obscure the fact that some of its unorthodox approaches to social justice have worsened rather than lessened social disorder. *Mungiki*’s takeover of *Matatu* (private taxis) routes in Nairobi, which its leaders defend as a way of restoring order, rooting out extortionist cartels and stabilizing fares for the benefit of the poor, has been immensely successful on the Githurai and Kamiti routes. But this has not always been the case. In October 2000, *Mungiki*’s attempt to take over the Dandora route in Nairobi’s Eastlands provoked bloody clashes between its members and vested interests such as the *Kanjesh* militia, sparking a public outcry and demands on the government to rein in the militias, including the *Mungiki*.<sup>58</sup> Turner and Brownhill create a glowing picture of *Mungiki* as Robin Hood, stealing from the rich landlords and land grabbers to give to the poor. To the contrary, on several occasions *Mungiki* has defended the interests of landlords in Kibera and Kariobangi. This has been the case where it regards demands for rent reduction as being politically driven.

#### *Facing Mecca: Islam and the ‘dis-closing’ of Mungiki*

In the post-1998 period, *Mungiki* worked closely with scores of ideologically divergent community-based groups, which became both its strength and its undoing. It is a mark of its hybridity that *Mungiki* followers glean books on Gikuyu history and literature as well as other writings by heroes like Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King and Che Guevara, and borrow freely from the relevant texts in the Bible and the Koran. This has brought it to the heart of the market of identities and homogenized global values. Wamue reveals that in 1998–2000 *Mungiki* attracted small groups of non-Kikuyu members, notably Maasai, Luo and Pokot.<sup>59</sup> It turned increasingly flexible in respect to Gikuyu traditions, ‘inventing’ and reformulating some Gikuyu traditions for the purpose of mobilizing and creating harmony and unity among its members. A preserve of elders in traditional Gikuyu society, the taking of snuff was adopted by some of its youthful followers

57. Terisa Turner and Leigh S. Brownhill, ‘“Women never surrender”: Mau Mau and globalization from below in Kenya, 1980–2000’, in Veronika Bennhioldt-Thomsen, Nicholas Faraclas and Claudia Von Werlhof (eds), *There is an Alternative: Subsistence and worldwide resistance to corporate globalization* (Zed Books Ltd. London, 2001), pp. 106–32.

58. Bob Odalo, ‘Mungiki members jailed’, *The Daily Nation*, 5 October 2000.

59. Wamue, ‘Revisiting our indigenous shrines’. In a follow-up discussion, Wamue confirmed this view, but stated that the numbers are very small and largely confined to urban areas and multi-ethnic settlement especially in the Rift Valley. According to one *Mungiki* informant, although *Mungiki*’s activities are conducted in the Kikuyu language, when non-Kikuyu followers are involved Kiswahili is used. Interview with Nahashon Gacheke, Nairobi, 7 August 2002.

to strengthen their social bonds and as a sign of protest against their elders for failing to stand up for social justice and meaningful social change.

It is in this broad context of a 'dis-closing'<sup>60</sup> movement, to borrow Jean-Loup Amselle's term, that *Mungiki* started gravitating towards Islam from mid-2000 onwards.<sup>61</sup> Eventually, on 2 September 2000, 13 of its leaders, among them Ndura Waruinge (renamed Ibrahim), converted to Islam. Others who adopted Islam during a ceremony held at Mombasa's Sakina mosque included founder member Mohammed Njenga, provincial coordinators Hassan Waithaka Wagacha, Mohammed Kamau Mwathi (Nairobi), Kimani Ruo Hussein (Rift Valley) and Khadija Wangari, representing women.<sup>62</sup> In the next few months, hundreds of ordinary *Mungiki* members, especially in Nakuru (Rift Valley), converted to Islam, enrolled in Islamic classes and received books and other materials containing the basic messages on Islam from Kenya's Muslim community. *Mungiki* members claim that there are common grounds between their beliefs and Islamic tenets that made their conversion easy: 'Islam means submission to God, while *Mungiki* means the masses'. Like some *Mungiki* followers who take snuff, 'Muslims smoke and those who wish to chew tobacco do so freely'. They also believed that conversion to Islam would 'hasten the realization of the movement's goal' of fighting against corruption, bad governance, poverty, immorality and diseases such as AIDS among Kenyans.<sup>63</sup> Besides these goals and *Mungiki's* strong anti-Christian stance, the other reason why these leaders converted to Islam was to gain inclusion in a more universalized non-communitarian faith and to shed the 'tribal' stigma that the state was using to rationalize its harassment of *Mungiki* followers.<sup>64</sup> This fact becomes clear from Waruinge's statement during the ceremony when he asked the government to stop harassing *Mungiki* members now that they had converted to Islam. In turn, Muslim Imams warned that the harassment of *Mungiki* members would now be seen as an insult to Muslims worldwide.<sup>65</sup> *Mungiki's* conversion to Islam provoked strong resistance

60. Some authors have used the term 'dis-closed' to capture the processes through which societies classified as 'closed' and 'primitive' have reached out strategically for aspects of other cultures, thus challenging long-held Western social thought. It is used in this article to capture the 'islamization' or strategic alliance between *Mungiki* and political Islam in Kenya, which tends to challenge the pervasive view of the movement as 'closed'. See Jean-Loup Amselle, 'Globalization and the future of anthropology', *African Affairs* 101, 403 (2002), pp. 219–21.

61. Michael Njuguna, '*Mungiki* men in bid to join Islam', *Daily Nation*, 1 June 2000.

62. '*Mungiki* leaders convert to Islam', *The Nation* (Nairobi), 3 September 2000.

63. *Daily Nation*, 6 September 2000.

64. This strategy of converting to Islam to escape state repression dates back to the days of the Mau Mau in the 1950s. During the emergency many members of the Kikuyu community, facing a blistering repression from the colonial state, converted to Islam in large numbers and migrated from their villages to separate settlements for Muslims (*Mjimi*) in Nyeri, Murang'a, Maragua and other towns in Central Province.

65. Patrick Mayoyo, 'Outcry on *Mungiki* converts', *Daily Nation*, 6 September 2000.

from moderate Muslims as well as supporters of the ruling elite from the Coast who accused the movement of using Islam as a 'hideout'.<sup>66</sup>

A closer scrutiny of Kenya's history reveals that resistance movements have resorted to Islam as a strategy of self-camouflage in the face of repression. In the high noon of blistering repression during the Emergency in the 1950s, many ordinary Kikuyu and Mau Mau leaders converted to Islam and migrated in large numbers from their villages to *Mijini* (separate settlements for Muslims) strewn throughout Central Province. In the light of this, and *Mungiki's* claim to the Mau Mau mantle, it is tempting to attribute a degree of historical self-knowledge to the recent 'islamization' of *Mungiki*. However, interviews with its leaders tend to support the view that this was a circumstantial and natural political choice available to the sect for self-camouflage in Kenya's radical Islamic wing which has also been facing similar political repression by the Kenyan state. Indeed, many *Mungiki* informants tended to accent the political rather than the cultural/religious motive behind *Mungiki's* 'islamization'.<sup>67</sup> It is instructive that *Mungiki* converted to the radical Shiite order of the Kenyan Islamic movement. In multiparty politics, Sheikh Balala, the fiery preacher of the Shia branch of the Islamic movement, emerged as the icon of radical Islam and its political flagship, the Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK).<sup>68</sup> Like the *Mungiki*, IPK and its members have encountered severe repression by the Kenyan state.<sup>69</sup>

### *Intensified state repression*

The story of state-*Mungiki* relations right from the time the movement was formed is one of persecution, intimidation, jailing of its followers and gross human rights abuse that increased after 1997. From the outset, the Moi state considered *Mungiki* to be a clandestine movement consisting of 'anti-Christian criminals' who were sworn to destabilize the government. For instance, on 7 February 1999, 81 *Mungiki* members were arrested and refused bail on charges of taking an illegal oath. Local human rights organizations and lawyers called on the government to respect *Mungiki's* freedom of worship and of assembly and on the Kenyan public and the

66. 'Mungiki members censured', *Daily Nation*, 21 December 2000.

67. Interviews carried out in July–August 2002.

68. The majority of Kenyan Muslims adhere to the Sunni branch of Islam. Other branches of Kenyan Muslims include the Agha Khan, Bola and Almadia orders. The Shiites, who are also connected with Shiites in Iran, consist of a small but politically active segment of Kenyan Muslims. I am indebted to Willy Mutunga and Hassan Mazrui for this information on Islam in Kenya.

69. Since Kenya's return to multiparty politics, this group has been quite controversial. The controversy reached its height when the government stripped Sheikh Balala of his Kenyan citizenship while he was on a trip to Germany, creating a diplomatic stand-off with Yemen, his alleged country of citizenship.



press to exercise religious tolerance.<sup>70</sup> In its December 1994 report, Amnesty International protested against the torture of a *Mungiki* member, Ngungu Gichuki, and over 150 others who were arrested as they prepared to celebrate Kenya's Independence day on 12 December.<sup>71</sup> In the same vein, the US State Department's 1999 report on religious freedom issued a scathing criticism of the Moi government for not doing enough to stop its security agencies carrying out periodic arrests, torturing and violating the human rights of *Mungiki* followers among other religious groups.<sup>72</sup>

After nearly a decade of state harassment, *Mungiki* members began taking the law into their own hands. The line of counter-attack was to use their strength of numbers to raid police stations and rescue some of their own people held in police cells. For example, in April 2000, nearly 3,000 *Mungiki* men staged a daring morning raid on Nyahururu police station to free three of their colleagues. At one point an estimated 700 *Mungiki* members reportedly snatched a gun — a G3 rifle — from the police after a fierce battle in Kianjai Village, Mathioya Division. The police had gone there to disperse a prayer meeting in the village.<sup>73</sup> By resorting to confrontational methods, *Mungiki* unwittingly provoked further confrontations with the police, drew negative coverage from the press and opened itself to further repression from the state. In October 2000 alone, 51 *Mungiki* members were jailed.<sup>74</sup> On 2 April 2001, police fired live bullets at 200 members of *Mungiki* in a prayer meeting at Githurai, Nairobi, killing one person.<sup>75</sup> Since 2001, not a single month has passed without a *Mungiki* member being arrested or its prayer meetings being violently dispersed. However, as the politics of the Moi succession gathered momentum in the run-up to the 2002 elections, KANU's policy towards *Mungiki* roller-coasted between the old formal repression by state security agents and a new comprehensive and more effective tactic of penetrating the movement and using it to serve its electoral agenda in Kikuyu-dominated parts of Nairobi, Central and Rift Valley provinces.

#### *Djà vu: The Moi succession and state penetration of Mungiki*

Recent research indicates that if there is a single factor that can be said to have delivered victory to the British over the Mau Mau forces in the

70. 'Register Mungiki, lawyer demands', *Daily Nation*, 9 May 2000.

71. Amnesty International, *Kenya*, 4 December 1998.

72. US Department of State, *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999: Kenya*. Released by the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Washington, DC, 9 September 1999.

73. Muchemi Wachira and Marcharia wa Mwati, 'Mungiki attack officer dies', *Daily Nation*, 26 September 2000.

74. Odalo, 'Mungiki members jailed'.

75. *Daily Nation*, 3 April 2001.

1950s, it would not be the effect of massive troops and bombers but rather the work of captured or 'turned' Mau Mau fighters. These were organized into 'pseudo-Mau Mau' gangs that infiltrated and broke the hard-core Mau Mau from the inside.<sup>76</sup> In a similar fashion, from the beginning of 2000, *Mungiki* organizers and political leaders and activists warned that government security services were infiltrating the sect and setting up pseudo-*Mungiki* to monitor its activities with the aim of torpedoing it from inside. Although a clear causal link between the colonial state's use of pseudo gangs to infiltrate and eradicate Mau Mau and the way its postcolonial successor has allegedly dealt with *Mungiki* is hard to establish, the similarity is strikingly uncanny. In April 2000, *Mungiki*'s Rift Valley Province Coordinator, Hussein Ruo Kimani Ruo, claimed that the government was propping up 'a small *Mungiki* to counter the larger *Mungiki*'.<sup>77</sup> Waruinge voiced the same concern during a public rally organized by the *Muungano wa Mageuzi* (United Movement for Change), an unregistered party, in March 2002. Other *Mungiki* leaders accused the government of forming hit squads that unleashed terror and then shifting the blame on to the *Mungiki*.<sup>78</sup> In the words of one analyst, the state created 'pseudo-*Mungikis*' to 'neutralize' the *bona fide* movement in a typical security-service approach. It instigated leadership wrangles over money aimed at de-legitimizing the sect in the eyes of its followers just as it did with *Mungiki*'s predecessor, Ngonya wa Gakonya's Tent of the Living God in 1992.<sup>79</sup> In March 2002, Parliament was also told that the Office of the President, through the Provincial Administration, was instigating criminal activities by a group of state-sponsored thugs and blaming them on *Mungiki*. Proponents of this view cited the widespread violence against women's rights in parts of Nairobi as the activity of state-sponsored 'Pseudo-*Mungiki* gangs'. Hard-and-fast evidence to back these widespread allegations, especially in strictly security situations such as this one, is difficult to obtain. But while the dividing line between the violence of *Mungiki* and state-gangs posing as *Mungiki* is still quite thin, it is difficult to dismiss these allegations as baseless. In the past, a plethora of impeccable reports, including, paradoxically, its own, have clearly pointed to the involvement of the state or its agents in sponsoring 'warrior gangs' and masterminding ethnic violence in various parts of the country.

It is against this background that on 20 October 2000 a mob attacked and stripped naked six women dressed in trousers at the Nairobi Kayole

76. Ian Henderson was the brain behind the strategy of using 'Pseudo Mau Mau' gangs, which in 1956 captured the overall Mau Mau leader, Dedan Kimathi Wachiuri, signalling the victory of the British forces over the movement. See Wunyabari O. Maloba, *Mau Mau and Kenya: An analysis of a peasant revolt* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, 1993).

77. Mugo Njeru, 'Eight shot as sect battles police', *Daily Nation*, 24 April 2000.

78. *Ibid.*

79. Githongo, 'Why won't the state clip them dreadlocks?'

Estate in the full glare of press cameras, ostensibly because they were 'improperly' dressed.<sup>80</sup> Among those captured by the press cameras were a man and two women waving the shredded trousers triumphantly. The state and the press found *Mungiki* guilty of the heinous violation of the rights of these women. This indictment was anchored on the police theory that *Mungiki* members were venting their anger on these innocent women after the police had violently dispersed their Kenyatta Day meeting in the Estate. This opened a barrage of public condemnation of *Mungiki* by the media, human rights and women's lobbies, the church and inter-governmental agencies, and a call on the government to contain the movement.<sup>81</sup> With this public nod, security agents clamped down heavily on suspected *Mungiki* members, arresting a total of 778 people in areas as far-flung as Nairobi's Mukuru Kayaba, Kawangware, Kasarani, Kangemi, Mathare, and Kayole shanties.<sup>82</sup>

*Mungiki* denied responsibility for the action, arguing that its own women members wear trousers just like the women who were stripped and insisting that it had never supported violence against women and that it respected the rights of other people to wear what they wanted.<sup>83</sup> However, even its leaders did not seem to be clear as to who had stripped the women. Initially, Waruinge blamed the act on members of another associate sect, *Kenda Muiyuru* (Nine Kikuyu clans) who wear dreadlocks and are Kikuyu extremists. He later withdrew this claim, blaming the Kayole incident on state-sponsored 'criminal squads'. Waruinge went to the *Daily Nation* offices and positively identified the three people who appeared on the front page of the paper on 25 October waving trousers taken off the women as being linked to the police.<sup>84</sup> He maintained that the three were criminals, well-known even to the police at the Kayole Police Post and Buru Buru Police Station, and were always being arrested for this or that offence. In spite of this disclosure, the three were neither questioned by the police nor arrested. Muslim Imams accused a section of the media of writing malicious reports and siding with forces bent on destroying the *Mungiki*.<sup>85</sup> This time round, the government had the last laugh: in the aftermath of the Kayole incident it not only managed to remove *Mungiki*'s freedom of worship and assembly, it also arrested and detained its members with utter impunity.

In another incident, on 23 April 2002 leaflets giving women aged between 13 and 65 an ultimatum to submit to the traditional Kikuyu ritual of female

80. *Ibid.*

81. *Ibid.*

82. Hannah Gakuo, 'Women demo over dress code', *Daily Nation*, 5 November 2000.

83. 'Exposed: terror gang of Kayole', *Daily Nation*, 25 October 2000.

84. These were a Mr Evans Nyakundi, a mason at Kayole, Ms Catherine Nyawira, who sells *mitumba* (second-hand) clothes at Gikomba market, and Ms Jackline Mueni who hangs around *changaa* (illicit liquor) dens in the area, and is a close ally of a powerful KANU youth-winger in Kayole.

85. 'Abong'o outlaws Mungiki meetings', *Daily Nation*, 26 October 2000.

circumcision were circulated in the Kiambaa and Kikuyu Divisions in Central Kenya by a group alleging to be *Mungiki* members.<sup>86</sup> The group reportedly set 7 July 2002 as the deadline for women to undergo the operation. Human rights groups were intimidated for investigating the origins of this threat to women. When leaflets were circulated in Kiambu, the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) condemned the threat.<sup>87</sup> According to one informant, 'FIDA chairperson received a call threatening her to shut up or she would become the first victim of the threat'.<sup>88</sup> The *Mungiki* distanced itself from the threats, arguing that this was a ploy by the state to obtain an excuse to send in 'squads' to intimidate, harass and arrest possible demonstrators coming out to commemorate the *Saba Saba* Day (7 July) when multiparty politics was launched in 1990. Evidence from interviews with women's rights lobbies points to a political rather than a criminal agenda in these threats. In the words of the same informant: 'We actually came to discover that the threat was also politically motivated. In the Kariobangi/Embakasi constituencies, the *Mungiki* [followers] have been asking women to keep out of politics or risk violence. This means that they should not contest during the 2002 elections.'<sup>89</sup> The League of Kenyan Women Voters, FIDA and several other organizations mounted pressure on the police commissioner, the Attorney General, and the Head of Internal Security to arrest the authors of the leaflets. Thereafter, the police arrested and charged followers of the Tent of the Living God.

*The mined road to 18 March: Mungiki and the KANU/NDP merger*

The merger between KANU and the National Development Party (NDP) on 18 March 2002 was the single most important step in the Moi succession saga that witnessed intense jostling for power among the fractions and factions of Kenya's ethnic elite. Stunned by the fact that the Kikuyu voted as an ethnic bloc during the 29 December 1997 general elections, the Kalenjin elite apparently embarked on a strategy of forging an ethnic alliance that would outflank the Kikuyu and secure its interests after Moi's retirement. The lot fell to the Luo, and the astute former NDP chief,

86. This threat came hard on the heels of the passing of the children's law by the Kenya Parliament in December 2001 that outlawed the circumcision of girls under the age of 18. See David Kanja, 'Get circumcised: Mungiki sect tells women', *East African Standard*, 23 April 2002.

87. 'Stop Mungiki, FIDA appeals', *East African Standard*, 24 April 2002. Pro-democracy forces in Kenya have regularly celebrated 7 July, popularly called *Saba Saba* Day, to commemorate the struggle for the 'Second Liberation'. Since the first *Saba Saba* in July 1990, the day has been marked with bloody confrontation as government security forces and sometimes '*morans*' clamp down on opposition leaders and civic and religious organizations to prevent them from assembling and addressing public meetings.

88. Interview with Cecilia Kimemia, Executive Director, League of Kenyan Women Voters, 2 June 2002.

89. *Ibid.*

Raila Odinga. As Atieno-Odhiambo evinces, the effect of this move on Kenya's tenuous ethnic politics was profound: 'Moi has yet again adeptly positioned the Luo against the Kikuyu in his perennial moves for survival.'<sup>90</sup> In the absence of a system of coalition between parties, the only other viable option was a protracted merger negotiation process culminating in a review of the KANU constitution and party elections to absorb NDP (Luo) leaders without upsetting the ethnic balance within the party.<sup>91</sup> The campaign process heightened ethnic tensions that largely created fertile ground for the violence that rocked Nairobi. *Mungiki* was at the centre of this violence, the most grisly expressions of which appeared in the Kariobangi killing.

On 3 March 2002, about 300 youths, wielding machetes, axes, and other crude weapons, rampaged through Nairobi's Kariobangi Estate,<sup>92</sup> killing between 20 and 23 people and injuring 31 others. The assailants arrived in three buses, and were dropped off a short distance from where the attack began, on Kamunde Road in Kariobangi North.<sup>93</sup> After the slaughter, the gang disappeared moments before a contingent of 300 regular police, administration police, and para-military GSU officers arrived. It was reported that *Mungiki* were avenging two of their number who had been killed by an overwhelmingly Luo militia based in Kariobangi known as the *Taliban*. At 3 am the previous day, *Taliban* men on patrol had met and killed two *Mungiki* members near a bus stop in the estate, losing one of their own in the fight. Some residents accused the *Taliban* of overstepping the limits of its powers, employing excessive violence, usurping police powers and even holding kangaroo courts, which provoked the killings. But *Taliban* chairman David Peter Ochieng answered back, saying that his 250-strong group were operating within the purview of the law and 'with the full knowledge and in conjunction with the police to stem insecurity in this area'. Others asserted that the massacre was part of a wider plot by landlords in the area in an attempt to ward off future demands for lower rents by intimidating tenants to reduce their bargaining power. Of course, there were those who blamed the incident on the laxness of the police and the entire

90. Atieno-Odhiambo, *Ethnicity and Democracy in Kenya*, p. 37. A Kikuyu-Luo political détente evokes memories of the KANU victory over KADU in the 1963 elections. While keeping the Luo at bay was the challenge that confronted the Kenyatta state, guarding against a Kikuyu-Luo political alliance has been the touchstone of the Moi state.

91. The 18 March elections, which were carried out within the framework of a liberally revised KANU constitution, saw Raila elected as KANU Secretary General and Uhuru Kenyatta, Kalonzo Musyoka (Kamba), Musalia Mudavadi (Luhya) and Katana Ngala (Miji Kenda) as the vice-Chairmen. Moi retained the seat of Party chairman, while Saitoti and his ally, former Secretary General Joseph Kamotho, withdrew from the elections.

92. Kariobangi Estate lies between Mathare and Nairobi Rivers, and houses an estimated 50,000 people. The Estate has for long captured the popular imagination with the splendour, the squalor and the fantasies of Nairobi's urban life and has inspired a number of popular tunes.

93. 'Religious sect rampages in Kenya', British Broadcasting Corporation, 4 March 2002.

security infrastructure. The Member of Parliament for Kasarani, Mr Adolf Muchiri, had forewarned the police, the provincial administration, and the Assistant Minister in the Office of the President, William Ruto, in good time about the impending attack. *Taliban* Chairman Ochieng had also made three trips to Kasarani police station to warn the officer-in-charge of the planned attack, but no preventive steps were taken.<sup>94</sup>

Aside from this local dimension, the overriding view was that the killings were deeply steeped in politics. Certain KANU leaders claimed that some politicians with national influence were sponsoring *Mungiki* — a view given weight by the fact that, a few weeks before the incident, *Mungiki* had announced that it would back KANU and a number of its candidates, including Vice-President George Saitoti and Cabinet Minister Uhuru Kenyatta, for top posts during the 2002 general elections. Waruinge declared that *Mungiki* would not support the opposition; instead it would throw its weight behind KANU and a number of its candidates during the crucial KANU national elections (planned to coincide with the KANU-NDP merger scheduled for 18 March 2002) and the subsequent general elections later in the year. He criticized the National Opposition Alliance (NAC) which the main opposition leaders, Charity Ngilu, Wamalwa Kijana and Mwai Kibaki, had formed, largely in response to the political threat that the KANU-NDP merger presented. He predicted that the NAC was doomed to fail because each of them was power-hungry, and added: 'We would rather vote President Moi and KANU back to power than the doomed opposition alliance.' Waruinge pledged *Mungiki*'s support for Vice-President Saitoti to capture his Kajiado North parliamentary seat because 'he has never engaged in politics or mudslinging'.<sup>95</sup>

On 3 March 2002, *Mungiki* organized a fund-raising function in Nyahururu, Laikipia District and invited Uhuru Kenyatta as the guest of honour. The fundraiser turned into a campaign for the young Kenyatta, at which 10,000 *Mungiki* members launched a campaign to support him. *Mungiki*'s National Chairman, Maina Njenga, also declared that he would contest the Laikipia seat on a KANU ticket. Moreover, Waruinge disclosed that *Mungiki*, relying on its huge resources and numerical strength, would field over 150 candidates countrywide. However, he added the rider that *Mungiki* was awaiting the outcome of the 18 March KANU/NDP merger meeting to decide who to back as the presidential candidate. As a display of its strength, *Mungiki* reportedly spent over Ksh1 million (\$13,000) to organize the Nyahururu function. This drove home Waruinge's warning to Kenyans not to underrate the sect, as it had people and resources sufficient to change politics in Kenya. It is against this background that many

94. 'Claims police ignored massacre alerts', *The Daily Nation*, 6 March 2002.

95. 'Mungiki sect to support Kanu, Saitoti and Uhuru in poll', *The East African Standard*, 4 March 2002.

wondered why the Kariobangi killings took place only after *Mungiki* leaders had pledged to work with KANU.

More critically, the vast majority of those who were killed in the massacre were Luo, giving an ethnic streak to the killings, which emerged as a Kikuyu massacre of Luo.<sup>96</sup> The rekindled Luo-Kikuyu hostility was also stoked by a protracted verbal war between the then KANU Secretary-General, Joseph Kamotho (a Kikuyu), and Raila Odinga (Luo) over the post of Secretary-General ahead of the 18 March KANU elections. After the incident the police outlawed 18 militias across the country, including *Mungiki* and *Taliban*.<sup>97</sup> Waruinge and Ochieng were arrested, but, although Ochieng was charged jointly with Martin Billy Aerea for the murder of two people, no one was charged with the murder of the 20 others. David Mwenje, the Member of Parliament for Nairobi's Embakasi constituency, was also arrested and later charged with an offence not related to the killings.<sup>98</sup>

In the intervening period before and after the Kariobangi massacre, there were signs that the *Mungiki* leadership, if not its rank and file, were steadily climbing onto the KANU band-wagon. However, what has not been patently clear is how the *Mungiki* got in there in the first place and what role it was playing or was destined to play in KANU's electoral strategy in Nairobi, Central Province and Kikuyu-populated pockets in the Rift Valley. The information available on this issue is inescapably speculative, and largely reflects the views of political leaders, members of civil society, *Mungiki* members, and the portrayal of what has become 'the *Mungiki* debate' in the Kenyan and international press. To that end, in Parliament on 13 March 2002, the Member for Ndaragwa, in Nyandarua District, Thirikwa Kamau, protested that President Moi was hosting members of the *Mungiki* sect and holding discussions with them on an undisclosed agenda. In the light of the fact that vigilantes and militias in Kenya are the private armies of politicians, the MP wondered who really owned and funded the *Mungiki*.<sup>99</sup> Around the same time, Kihika Kimani, the MP for Molo in Nakuru, organized high-profile public defections to KANU of what he described as repentant '*Mungiki* members', and appealed to the Kikuyu community to help the government in crushing the *Mungiki* sect for 'engaging in crude defiance of the authorities'.<sup>100</sup> According to this view,

96. In a rare move, the police published a list of the dead and injured by their ethnic identities. The dead included 10 Luo, 3 Luhya, 1 Kisii, 1 Turkana and 6 unidentified, while the injured were 11 Luo, 9 Luhya, 5 Kikuyu, 2 Kambas and 4 unidentified.

97. For a detailed analysis of some of these vigilantes see Anderson, 'Vigilantes and the politics of public order in Kenya'.

98. 'Kenya's president visits slum where 23 people were hacked to death', Associated Press, 8 March 2002.

99. 'Government blamed for hypocrisy over *Mungiki*', *The East African Standard*, March 14, 2002.

100. In March, Kihika paraded 61 shabby youths at a political rally attended by President Moi in Nakuru. It was later claimed in the press that these were not *bona fide Mungiki* members, but Kimani's own workers. *Weekly Review*, 12 March 2002.

*Mungiki* was a prized arrow in KANU's political quiver, a veritable weapon in demobilizing and fragmenting Kikuyu politics, destroying the hub of the political opposition and keeping it perennially in cold storage. Speculation was in the air that the ruling elite was poised to use a two-track approach vis-à-vis *Mungiki*: in its first track, it would sponsor *Mungiki* to chip away at the electoral basis of the opposition and to predetermine the outcomes of the elections in Nairobi, Central Province and the Kikuyu diaspora. In its second track, it would exploit the negative public image of *Mungiki*'s criminal violence to discredit and demobilize the opposition, to harass and intimidate its supporters in the Kikuyu enclaves of Central, Nairobi and Rift Valley provinces and, eventually, to put Kikuyu politics on an even keel.

Parliamentarians from these areas grew increasingly wary of this prospect. They accused the government of aiding hooligans to commit crimes and then blaming it on the *Mungiki* as a political ploy to demonize the Kikuyu community, which is said to back the *Mungiki*, and destroy Mwai Kibaki's leadership chances. The MP for Gatanga in Central Province, David Murathe, stated that KANU has relied on this strategy to paralyze the opposition since the 1992 general elections. When Wamalwa Kijana, the Ford-Kenya Chairman, was the official leader of the opposition in Parliament during 1992–97, he reminisced, the government set up the February Eighteen Revolutionary Army (FERA), which it claimed had bases in Wamalwa's strongholds in Western Province. In the guise of routing out FERA followers, the government infiltrated Wamalwa's electoral base, harassed and intimidated his supporters, and destabilized and demobilized his politics ahead of the 1997 general elections. The MP concluded that, during the tenure of Mwai Kibaki as the official leader of the opposition (1997–2002), KANU has been criminalizing and using the *Mungiki* to intimidate and harass the Kikuyu, to clip Kibaki's political wings and destroy his political base prior to the 2002 general elections.<sup>101</sup> It has been charged that the government has used the violence to discredit the opposition as incapable of maintaining public order or governing. Citing the Kariobangi case, President Moi charged that the Democratic Party mayor of Nairobi had done little to stop the rising crime in the city.<sup>102</sup> Finally, government security services can also exploit *Mungiki* to arrest and harass opposition leaders by claiming that they are linked to or are financing the *Mungiki*.<sup>103</sup> During the final quarter of 2002, the link between KANU and the *Mungiki* leadership became public knowledge as the latter announced that the movement would field candidates on KANU tickets and published posters to that effect.

101. Njeri Rugene, 'Mungiki as clever ploy, charges MP', *The Daily Nation*, 2 November 2000.

102. Associated Press, 8 March 2002.

103. The frequent arrests of MP David Mwenje have given weight to this claim. *The Daily Nation*, 8 March 2002.



*Conclusion: what future for 'moral ethnicity'?*

Writing in 1998, the Kenyan historian, Atieno-Odhiambo, concluded his paper, *Ethnicity and Democracy in Kenya*, with this splendid line: 'The future of ethnicity is robust, the career of nationalism ended at independence, and the future of democracy, like the arrival at destination of the *matatu* transport system in Kenya, remains uncertain.' This article has examined *Mungiki* as an aspect of this 'robust ethnicity' in Kenya, within the wider canvas of escalating political violence, which has drawn more blood from Kenyans than is necessary to water the tree of democracy. However, some of the questions I have addressed in the article were honed by Willy Mutunga, Atieno's colleague in the resistant coalition of civic groups in the 1970s and 1980s, and now steeped in the struggle by civic organizations for human rights and democracy. Deeply troubled by the hijacking of *Mungiki* by sectarian interests, he posed the questions: 'What bothers me is where is the *intifadah*?<sup>104</sup> Why have they allowed the leaders to hijack the movement? Why has *Mungiki* leadership not lost the people?' While some of these questions beg for deeper answers than are provided here, the article has traced *Mungiki*'s slide from 'moral ethnicity' to 'political tribalism' and violence. This has taken place within the broad corpus of 'informal repression' which the ruling elite has relied on to win competitive elections, disorganize political opposition, frustrate democracy and return Kenya to a *de facto* one-party order. While civic groups and their constituent members have started dissociating themselves from the 'criminal *Mungiki*', others still see a glimmer of hope in a *Mungiki intifadah* as a symbol of 'moral ethnicity' and hybridity that blends Kikuyu traditions, Christian and Islamic values and a vision of Kenya as a commonwealth of equal ethnic nations. But, for now, political tribalism holds sway in *Mungiki*'s house, wielding a heavy sword against human rights and democracy along the perilous road to the unknown future of the post-Moi era.

104. After the *Mungiki* leadership was co-opted by KANU, Mutunga and the Kenya Human Rights Commission came to draw a distinction between 'criminal *Mungiki*' and the '*Mungiki Intifadah*.' While the former has largely contributed to violence, intimidation and the abuse of women's rights in urban areas and in Central Kenya, the *Mungiki Intifadah* represents the original *Mungiki* which converted to and sought sanctuary in Islam and espoused the ideals of liberation, protection of human rights and the struggle against social and economic evils associated with the forces of globalization.