Original Article

An Anatomy of Ethnic Gangsterism and Militant Nationalism in Kenya: The Case of Nairobi, 1940-1963

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ABSTRACT

Towards the end of the 1940s, Nairobi was characterized by momentous political conflict. A large proportion of Africans were said to be living outside the confines of colonial supervision, a situation that resulted in gangsterism and serious anarchy. Extensive research has been carried out on various dimensions of this episode, revealing that militarism and anarchy were deeply rooted in unresolved issues revolving around economic deprivation and the political exclusion of Africans by the colonial authorities. Some aspects of this violent agitation however remain unexplored. It's demonstrated in this study that the urban poor in post-1945 Nairobi, pushed to the limits of human endurance, created their own alternative society in clandestine opposition to the forces of law and order. Examining the anarchy, however, reveals a nexus between anti-colonial militancy and ethnic acrimony. The study reveals that tribalism remained an important influence on daily life and political allegiances in the African locations. Armed with various weapons, Kikuyu gangs roamed the streets, terrorizing people of other communities. The spate of militant activity in Nairobi alienated the non-Kikuyu elements in the African population. Anti-colonial militarism thus had far-reaching implications on inter-ethnic relations in Nairobi. The ethnic question remained critical in political transitions that took place in Nairobi city in the post-Mau Mau period. The study was carried out in Nairobi County, particularly in the colonial 'African locations' of Pumwani and Shauri Moyo. It entailed the collection and analysis of data from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected from oral informants and the Kenya National Archives while secondary data came from newspapers, books, magazines and dissertations. Data was then corroborated and both context and content analysis were done to guarantee consistency, reliability and validity of the information. A historical research design based on qualitative procedures was employed. Interpretation was done within the Marxist theoretical framework. Marxists hold that social and political behaviour can be reduced to economic motives, and ethnicity is an important force in political behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

The article examines the place of ethnicity in the wave of violent nationalism that erupted in Nairobi in the 1940s, culminating in the declaration of a state of emergency in Kenya in 1952. Prior to the creeping violence in the 1940s, the majority of Nairobi's African inhabitants had been drawn from the rural areas of Central Kenya. Furthermore, the ethnic question remained central in the local administration that had been set up in the city as early as 1926. It was noted that the Kikuyu, though comprising a big majority of the capital's African population, were seriously under-represented in the local government, which entrenched feelings of marginalization. This added to their existing frustrations with colonial economic hardships. Thomas Askwith who served as the Municipal African Affairs Officer between 1945 and 1948 had perceived that better control over the Africans could be achieved by appealing to ethnic solidarity, and tribal associations might have provided the most effective mechanisms of managing the urban African population. Askwith observed that 'the introduction of the full panoply of rural government, based on the various tribal associations, was essential'. He urged that the municipal authorities should acknowledge their corporate influence and foster their development into an effective system of urban control' (Bannet & Njama, 1966: 117).

These proposals were widely accepted by the white administration but were rejected by the African elite serving on the Nairobi Advisory Council. This articulate section of the African population, led by Francis Khamisi and the Luhya political activist, W.W.W Awori, condemned the proposals as 'a retrograde measure designed to preserve ethnic suspicions in order to facilitate divide-and rule' policy (Parker, 1948: 107). According to Askwith and other like-minded administrators, most Nairobi Africans were still enmeshed in ethnic rivalries and were not yet ready to enter the multi-tribal systems espoused by the African Advisory Council. According to Parker (Parker, 1948: 115), 'the aspirations of the elite were completely unrealistic, given the tribal particularisms of the vast majority of the capital's African population'. The elite feared any official recognition of the tribal associations' power, as this could diminish their own influence and block their own political and economic incorporation. Khamisi therefore avowed that Nairobi Africans were not divided by tribalism and claimed any attempt to establish native authorities in the capital in a modified system of indirect rule would fail.

Instead of relying on tribal solidarities, as did most urban Africans, the elite representatives on the advisory council wished to secure their own incorporation into the colonial state and be recognized as full participants in the political life of colonial Nairobi, with their own members in the municipal council. When Eliud Mathu, Walter Odede and Francis Khamisi met Askwith to discuss the future organization of the locations, they persuaded the officials to abandon the idea of

reinforcing the power of the tribal associations and to introduce a ward structure, dividing the locations into three areas, Kaloleni, Shauri Moyo, and Pumwani, rather than along ethnic divisions (Mc. Vicar, 1968: 78). The blocking by elites of attempts to establish an effective administration presence in the African parts of the capital in alliance with the tribal associations left the locations at the mercy of political gangs, which increasingly conducted organized crime on a scale that caused serious concern to the colonial administrators. This violence however took ethnic dimensions.

The constant pleas of Africans in Nairobi for better living and working conditions, better health and educational facilities, the removal of discriminatory by-laws, and the promotion of Africans to responsible administrative positions continued to go more or less unheeded. In the early 1950's, the African locations in Nairobi provided freedom from government interference which enabled the radicals to establish their headquarters in the capital. From here, they controlled the induction to the Mau Mau and coordinated protests in the reserves and the white highlands. The Mau Mau oath was intended to unite the Kikuyu against the colonial regime and African communities considered moderates. Ultimately, the 'Forty Group' and Mau Mau were to show that most urban Africans could only be mobilized by appeal to tribal solidarity.

Colonial authorities did not want to be seen as being guilty of having brought the social and economic contradictions which caused the Mau Mau rebellion. The government waged an intense propaganda campaign to alienate other communities from the Kikuyu (Macharia, 2012: 103). The oathing ceremonies were depicted as primitive and atavistic, and the Agikuyu was dangerous to the rest of the society. This denied the Mau Mau movement any meaningful support outside members of the Kikuyu community in Nairobi.

Nevertheless, the ethnic question remained central to the political transitions that took place in Nairobi during the period after the Mau Mau crisis, which culminated in the victory of Tom Mboya over Argwings Kodhek in the first African election of 1957. This article focuses on the intersection of colonial ethnic identity, socio-economic exclusion and militant nationalism in an urban context. It offers an analysis of how these factors jointly contributed to the broader narrative of nationalism and decolonization in Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

Generally, the study covered Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya. In the census conducted in 2019, the population of the city was recorded as 4,397, 073. Geographically, the city is situated at 1°09′S 36°39′E and 1°27′S 37°06′E. In 2020, the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics recorded the area occupied by Nairobi as 696.1 square kilometres. It is located 140 kilometres south of the equator and 480 kilometres from the Indian Ocean at an elevation of about 5,500 feet (Morgan, 1967, p.31). A descriptive research design was adopted which allowed the researcher to conduct the field survey. This encompassed data collection from the archives and conducting oral interviews. Data was also gathered from secondary sources such as theses and articles which aided in the realization of research objectives. The target population comprised respondents with knowledge of matters pertaining to the politics of the city through participation, experience and observation. Participants included former freedom fighters, retired traders, political leaders and government administrators. The age limit for the informants was between 25 and 105 years. Purposive sampling was used to select respondents who provided the required information with respect to nationalist politics in colonial Nairobi. An Interview Schedule and focused group discussion guide were used in the process of collecting data. The collected data were analyzed thematically and periodically and presented in a prose kind of format in the subsequent discussion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Local government representation and exclusion: The prelude to militant action

Throughout the 1940's, Kenya's urban poor particularly in Nairobi lived below the official poverty line (Maloba, 1993). The capital, like the white highlands, had largely been left to the control of settler-dominated municipal councils, which showed little if any concern for the appalling socio-economic problems of the African parts of the city. During the aforementioned period, African participation in policy-making in Nairobi city was through the Nairobi African Advisory Council (KNA, RN/1/68: 1941). This body had been established in 1926 to take over the task of the Native Village Councils, formed earlier in 1923 to channel communication between Africans and the Government and, more specifically, to advise on the expenditure of Native Trust Funds (Parker, 1948:219). Initially, the Nairobi African Advisory Council was composed of representatives from tribal and religious groups (KNA, AG 1/399: 1955). Later, representatives from various occupational associations and village committees were added. Following the suggestion of the Municipal African Affairs Officer, the African Advisory Council was later changed to the African General Ward Council, with representatives chosen entirely on the basis of place of residence (KNA, JW/6/2). However, according to Parker (1948:221), both as an Advisory Council and as a Ward Council, this government-sponsored agency meant to channel communication and ease African political pressure never really proved successful, though it was at times taken seriously by the City Council. It was never accorded executive powers of any sort or control over the expenditure of funds. Some of the positions it took proved to be unpopular, such as a 1947 request that the influx of Africans into Nairobi be controlled and the unemployed Africans be expelled from Nairobi. Yet another unpopular view was a 1948 recommendation that African policemen be housed in the locations to act as village constables and a 1956 proposal that the poll tax be increased to provide for social services.

The rasion d'etre of the Advisory Council was not only to discuss all matters affecting Africans in the urban area but also to exercise influence in the enactment of policy. 'What the African wants is not principally greater representation,' according to Desmond O'Hagan, a Native Court Officer in Kenya writing in 1949, "but greater recognition of the Advisory Council, a greater readiness to respect its views on matters affecting Africans, a greater sympathy in listening to its complaints and more patience in allowing it to discuss changes of policy proposed by the Municipal Council (KNA, JW/6/2). Though this body played a role in decision-making, Tom Mboya argued in the Legislative Council that: ". . . the African Ward Council cannot in effect be a substitute for the need of Africans to be represented on the City Council of Nairobi. . ." (KNA, AG, 1/399: 1955).

It was also notable that the Kikuyu, who formed approximately 55% of the capital's African population, were seriously under-represented in the council, while people from the coast comprising only a small fraction of the Nairobi population, were extremely influential. Khamisi, Mbotela, Jimmy Jeremiah, and Maulid Jasho, who were the most influential members of the council all came from Coast Province. In contrast, only two of the leaders, Muchoki Gikonyo and Dedan Githigi, were Kikuyu, while Juto Obwa was a Luhya. According to Simone (1998: 108), the leaders of the Advisory Council were thus isolated by class and ethnicity from the Kikuyu who formed by far the largest element in African Nairobi. Simone (1998) further argues that the Advisory Council was not even being consulted on matters affecting Africans as had been promised. With time, it appeared to have lost the respect of Africans. Mboya argued that "there have been aspects of the functions and responsibility of the advisory Council which have tended to isolate and discriminate as far as the African is concerned, sometimes under the guise of giving him a privileged position, but very often having the result of making it impossible for him to be effectively represented at the place which matters, the City Council," (Simone, 1998: 111).

Africans remained seriously underrepresented in the real decision-making body, the Nairobi City Council.41 From 1946 to 1953, the number of African councillors in Nairobi remained at two, (Mutuma, O.I., 10/11/15). The frustration felt by these two African councillors is indicated by one of their memorandums quoted by Mary Parker in 1948:

At the moment being only two against overwhelming majority by Europeans and Indians, our views have little influence, and more particularly as we do not have the sympathy of the Europeans councillors and Aldermen, who have by far the greatest influence on the city council matters. It is our experience that unless we have increased representation, the present representation may be of little effect. For this reason, we are convinced that it is essential, in the constitutional development in urban affairs, to consider most seriously the question of increasing African members to the Town Council. African population is rapidly increasing and with it more problems affecting them. To solve these problems, African opinion should not be ignored (Parker, 1948: 165).

The fact that these African councillors were nominated by the government, on the basis of the Advisory Council's recommendation, made them vulnerable to the charge of being 'stooges' (KNA, CS/1/14/11). This was especially true during the tense period prior to the declaration of the state of Emergency when the two nominated Africans became identified with the increasingly repressive police measures supported by the Council to solve the growing housing shortage (Parker, 1948: 225). In 1953, the government agreed to increase by one the number of African councillors because of 'the growing burden of work' (KNA, AG, 1/399). At the same time, the newly formed Nairobi City Council was to have two liaison members on the Nairobi City Council, thus offsetting the slight gain in non-European members on the Council. This meant, as Eliud Mathu was quick to point out, that Africans, comprising 60 per cent of Nairobi's population, were a minority of only 10 per cent in the City Council (Burton, 1993: 170).

But it was then clear that Africans would have to wait until they had increased their political power nationally to gain more power in the City Council (Anderson, 2005: 84). Their frustration, however, appears to have intensified when they failed to gain the extent of political power in the Nairobi City Council as in the Legco. It should be pointed out that much of the plight of Africans in Nairobi prior to the independence of Kenya stemmed from their limited influence on public policy. It was not until 1944 that an African was appointed to the Legco and no African was appointed to the executive council until 1951 or elected to the legislature until 1957. The Nairobi City Council was even slower than the Central Government to give Africans meaningful representation.

Gang violence in African locations and its ethnic dimensions

In the period after 1947, the presence of administration was extremely weak in the African locations in Nairobi. According to an informant, these locations were abandoned to the control of political militants and street gangs which began organizing concerted political action against the colonial state (Okello, O.I., 17/10/2016). Throughout the 1940s, discontent simmered and threatened to erupt into violent confrontations in Nairobi and the adjacent Kikuyu districts (Nairobi Law Monthly, April-May, 1989:26). By December 1948, some administrators considered that the rule of law had almost entirely collapsed in what was increasingly being referred to as 'outcast Nairobi', and drew an alarmist comparison with the anti-British revolt in Malaya, which had just begun (Maloba, 1993: 112). The locations were said to have become a 'republic all of their own at night' where all manner of illegal activities had become rampant (KNA.). A clear illustration of this was an incident at Marurani where police were driven off by residents and their captives freed when they attempted to arrest brewers and other lawbreakers (Throup, 1987).

The following table illustrates the magnitude of convictions on offenders of the respective races in Nairobi at this time.

Convictions under the Penal Code for the years 1946, 1947 and 1948.

	Europeans	Asians	Africans	Others
1946	77	151	8,267	51
1947	59	284	9,333	110
1948	89	313	9,961	93

Source: KNA, AH/13/97.

According to Ainsworth, it had been easier to control African locations previously not just because the population was smaller but because the population had been more law-abiding. Africans were now noted to have adopted an attitude of opposition (White, 1990: 144-146). A report to the Criminal Investigations Department by the Superintendent of African locations warned, "It's common knowledge that armed gangs move around the African locations at night…the cases of assaults and threats to persons at night is on the increase. The number of police patrols available in these locations are inadequate to tackle these people...." (Bannet & Njama, 1966: 172). Askwith, the Municipal African Affairs officer concurred with the report and informed the police 'I have come to the conclusion that the lawlessness is part of a carefully concerted plan to bring the wheels of government to a standstill by creating conditions of anarchy' (Bannet & Njama, 1966: 174). He argued the situation in places such as Pumwani had reached such a critical stage that only large bodies of police, operating in military fashion could be successful against such formidable opponents. 'Drastic action is essential before a crime wave hits the CBD, and the European and Asian suburbs of the capital' (Bannet & Njama, 1966: 175). Askwith identified Heron Maina from Ziwani as the ring leader of the gangs and organizer of the militant 'Forty Group'. Police agents further warned the Special Branch that at a meeting in Kariokor early in October 1947, it had been decided that all Europeans should be thrown out of Kenya and that preparations were being made to attack prominent African loyalists. An informant (Karindu, O.I., 20/08/2016) confirmed that he participated in this meeting where militant action was methodically planned.

Gang warfare and crime continued to be the most visible manifestation of African discontent with poor living conditions, rampant inflation and growing unemployment. The rising crime wave was already causing such concern among the settlers that members moved an emergency debate in the Legco (KNA, MAA/2/5/212). The two members representing Africans, Mathu and Beecher stressed the socio-economic dimension of the crime. For them the crime was 'the outcome of social and economic conditions which Africans had been subjected to' (McVicar, 1968: 81). An informant asserted that gang crime and violence opened up new avenues for social advancement, enabling the urban 'outcasts' to gain economic advancement and corresponding social prestige (Kimanthi, O.I, 10/09/2016).

Life in the towns intensified rather than diminished ethnic rivalries, as financial assistance, moral welfare, and burial expenses were all provided within the confines of the tribe. The street gangs were ethnic and so didn't prey upon their own kind, defined in strictly tribal terms (Bannet & Njama, 1966: 122). According to Branch (2009: 125), the Kikuyu formed over half of the city's total population in post-World War II Nairobi. The approximately 30,000 Kikuyu and members of the related Aembu and the Ameru dominated the street gangs that were accused of terrorizing people belonging to other communities such as Luo, Luhya and the Akamba with abandon (Maloba, 1993: 116).

Ethnic tensions between the Kikuyu and Luo in Nairobi had been escalating throughout the preceding decades (Otiende, O.I., 20/10/2016). According to Muturi (O.I, 21/10/2016), greater educational and economic advancement gave the two communities a common political consciousness that made both receptive to radical nationalist activity but the mass of these ethnic communities did not develop good relations. As Mboya put it, 'the antagonism between the

Kikuyu and the Luo was such that they fought on sight (Mboya, 1973:71). The Luo often complained of exploitation by Kikuyu landlords, who owned most of the accommodation in the African locations. Furthermore, there had been some dissatisfaction in 1944 among educated Luo over the alleged preference given to the Kikuyu with the appointment of the first African, Eliud Mathu, to the Legco (Throup, 1987:97). According to Africa Confidential (Vol 23 no. 8 April, 14, 1981), the Luo also harboured deep bitterness over Kikuyu dominance over the first nationalist political movement, Kenya African Union (KAU) which had been established in 1944 in response to the nomination of Mathu to the Legco. According to an informant, it also did not escape the attention of the Luos that key leaders of the African Workers' Federation, Chege Kibachia, Fred Kubai, Bildad Kaggia, Mwangi Macharia and Chege Kiburu were all Kikuyu (Kaluma, O.I., 19/11/2016).

The militant Kikuyu trade unionists organized the capital's first general strike in May 1950. Some of the militants were arrested and charged with being officials of an unregistered organization (Bannet, 1963: 39). One year later, Kikuyu radicals captured the leadership of the Nairobi KAU branch from Mbotela and the educated elite and began to use it as a base from which to organize political activism (Throup, 1987). At the national level, another radical Kikuyu nationalist, James Gichuru, took over as KAU president. The new Nairobi KAU branch leaders joined *Muhimu*, or inner circle, the radical wing within the party that was advocating for political change through violent means (Maloba, 1993:114). *Muhimu* was behind the creeping oathing of the Agikuyu in Nairobi in the late 1940s.

The colonialists responded with hostility to the radical demands presented by the KAU leaders. Throup (1987:97) asserts that state power was used to harass the party, while the colonialists continued relying on divide and rule to weaken the party's national focus by emphasizing ethnic and regional differences and inequalities. KAU's failure to bring about reform of the colony through peaceful, constitutional means shifted the nature of the political struggle from reforming the colonial state to an outright attempt to overthrow it. Constitutional negotiations increasingly became less important as the militants switched to violent action. Furedi (1989:176) states that multifaceted discontent involving landless squatters and Nairobi's poor boiled over into increasingly violent forms.

In the meantime, rural linkages were quickly established between the reserves and Nairobi as reverberations of trouble in the Kikuyu districts were registered (Kershaw, 1997: 79). Militant action was increasingly directed from Nairobi. Linkages with the Kikuyu countryside were swiftly maintained, with oathing being administered in African locations in Nairobi (Kibiru, O.I., 18/10/2016). Leaders of KAU and trade unionists shuttled between Nairobi and rural areas, coordinating violent nationalism (Bannet & Njama, 1966: 117). Towards the end of the 1940s, violence and insecurity not only in the capital but all over the country were becoming widespread and unmanageable (Kanogo, 1987). According to an informant, country buses, taxis and railways from the city provided 'the arteries along which African politics flowed as urban militants began to organize rural resistance' (Kameri, O.I.,17/10/2016). The poor in Nairobi were to be particularly active as leaders of the Land and Freedom Army, also known as Mau Mau, as the urban workers became the focal point of African militant political action. Kiruthu (2006) illustrates how criminal gangs in Nairobi merged imperceptibly into the militancy of Mau Mau. He states that;

Among the urban poor who supported the Mau Mau included the unemployed, hawkers, *chupa na debe* collectors, thieves, prostitutes and beer sellers. This group formed a stratum that was available for political activism. It should be noted that even African women were actively involved in militant activism (Kiruthu, 2006:166).

The success of the Mau Mau movement depended on the degree of unity within the movement. The strongest force that created a common bond among the members was the 'oath of secrecy'

(Gatonye, O.I., 2016). Kanogo (1987) asserts that it is through the administration of the oath that recruitment was carried out in urban areas as well as rural areas. The serious weakness of the Mau Mau movement was however revealed; based on the oath, it appealed to the Kikuyu but could not be used to build a mass trans-tribal movement.

Among the Mau Mau activities included attacks on settler property such as cattle and crops. Chiefs were attacked while agricultural instructors and police informers were locked in their huts and burnt to death (Throup, 1987). The movement was accused of carrying out a campaign of intimidation and instituted a type of protection racket aimed at Asian and other non-Kikuyu traders in Nairobi (KNA, OP/1/1570). Militant activity in Nairobi involved frequent murders and other forms of violence against whites, Asians and African loyalists largely from non-Kikuyu. Moderate Kikuyu leaders were also attacked and some of them were murdered. In September 1952, the new governor, Sir Evelyn Baring arrived to take over from Phillip Mitchell (The *East African Standard*, June 22, 1955). By this time, violence in the capital had escalated to shocking levels. This was attributed to the Mau Mau and the '*muhimu*'. Against this background, and following the murder of a prominent loyalist, Waruhiu wa Kung'u, the new governor declared a state of emergency on October 20, 1952 (Elkins, 2005: 158).

On 27th November 1952, Tom Mbotela, a Nairobi African Advisory Council member, identified as an enemy of the radical movement and a stooge of the whites was assassinated near the Burma market (Africa Confidential, Vol 23 no. 8 April, 14, 1982). *Muhimu* and the Mau Mau were believed to be responsible for this murder, thereby giving the incident an ethnic dimension (Kanogo,1987: 111). Bannet and Njama (1966:112) assert that the government took advantage of the incident to intensify the antagonism between the Kikuyu and the other communities. A Police raid was conducted on the Burma market, where many traders were arrested and detained at Kingsway Police Station for interrogation. Soon afterwards, a fire broke out at the market, believed to have been started by the home guard. According to Kiruthu (2006:168), the Burma Market was one of the critical hotbed areas of the Mau Mau.

Backed by settler propaganda, the Luo of Nairobi organized a demonstration against 'Kikuyu gangsterism' (Bannet & Njama, 1966). This demonstration was followed by a government statement indicating that the Provincial Commissioner (PC) of Nairobi had been asked by the delegation of the Luo leaders to be allowed to start a tribal war against the Kikuyu (Abuor, 1973: 205-206). Apparently, the Luo were prepared to counter the unending violence against their community by Kikuyu militants. The PC urged the Luo to join the colonial home guard in order to assist the state in countering the Kikuyu revolutionaries.

The colonialists responded to the Kikuyu challenge of violence with firmer control and increased coercion. A decision to clamp down on Mau Mau resulted in a colonial approach that lumped KAU together with Mau Mau (Kiruthu, 2006:170). Hence many Kenyan Africans were arrested, including KAU leaders. The six KAU leaders arrested and charged with managing Mau Mau - the so-called 'Kapenguria six', were; Jomo Kenyatta, Bildad Kaggia, Achieng' Oneko, Kung'u Karumba, Paul Ngei and Fred Kubai (*East African Standard*, September 30, 1961). The arrest of KAU leadership left *muhimu* as the only political organization in Nairobi. The organization's leaders continued collecting ammunition, recruitment of fighters, and oathing activities (Atieno-Adhiambo, 1995).

An informant observes that Nairobi emerged as 'the control tower of the movement' (Kirika, O.I., 18/10/2016). White (1990) further asserts that as the movement became increasingly urban-based, it drew heavily on the support of the urban underbelly, utilizing the networks which Kikuyu women in Nairobi had built up outside state control. Prostitutes and brewers from Mathare, Pumwani and Eastleigh were oathed and instructed to collect information that would help the movement and contribute money to support

Mau Mau activities. A District Officer, G.R.B Brown indicated that African locations where brewers and prostitutes lived had emerged as centres of oathing ceremonies (White, 1990: 206). Meanwhile, curfews were ruthlessly enforced in African locations. Loyal home guards patrolled the streets of Nairobi and anyone seen outside at night could be shot on sight (KNA, AH/13/34). During the day, police and home guard patrols intercepted Africans on the streets, checking work permits, passbooks, and arms, with the Kikuyu being the main target (Kiruthu, 2006: 68).

As the violence intensified, Ambrose Ofafa, the Treasurer of the Luo Union was assassinated by suspected Mau Mau in Kaloleni in 1954 (KNA, OP/1/1570). According to an informant, Ofafa had been accused of collaborating with the colonialists as he took over shops previously owned by the Kikuyu (Gatonye, O.I., 2016). Many people concluded that this killing substantially represented a Kikuyu plot against the Luo. The suspicion of the other African communities against the Kikuyu was seriously augmented. The Luo in particular were thoroughly embittered by this killing (Okello, O.I., 16/10/2016). They argued that it was principally they who had dauntlessly come forward to take over the leadership of KAU when Kenyatta and his colleagues were detained and that with assistance from members of other tribes who were free from Mau Mau involvement, they had wholeheartedly organized the workers to voice strong opposition against the mistreatment of the freedom fighters (Masinde, O.I, 22/11/2016).

Across the colony, Emergency measures entailed curfews, confinement to strategic villages, confiscation of trucks, barbed wire reinforcement, digging ditches around Emergency villages, and clearance of vegetation around African settlements. Many people fled to Nairobi from the rural areas because of compulsory labour levies, starvation due to restrictions on cultivation associated with villagization, and persecution as chiefs used the emergency rules and regulations to settle old scores (Elkins, 2005). Despite these measures and partly because of the ensuing commotion, illicit ventures such as prostitution,

hawking and selling of traditional liquor intensified along with violent crime in Nairobi. According to Mugucia (O.I., 21/10/2016), many restrictions and controls were imposed and enforced on Kikuyu, Embu and Meru communities. To stay in Nairobi, they had to show evidence of having paid poll tax. If they were found in the city looking for a job, but without evidence of having paid tax, they were liable to arrest and imprisonment (Gatonye, O.I., 2016). But those without jobs could not pay tax. It was indeed a vicious cycle. Heyer (1998: 233) notes that about 1000 Kikuyu were being expelled from Nairobi per month in line with the emergency regulations. Karume (2009:158) further asserts that out of 20,000 people arrested and detained in Nairobi during the duration of the state of emergency, 80% were Kikuyu, Embu and Meru.

On April 24, 1954, the British military forces launched an ambitious operation code-named Operation Anvil, to reclaim the control of Nairobi by purging the city of the Kikuyu living within its limits. Nearly 25,000 security force members under General Erskine were involved in the operation, which involved cordoning off the city's African locations (Elkins, 2005: 213). According to an informant, the entire city population was caught off guard by this operation (Nyathira, O.I. 27/09/2016). Large numbers of Kikuyu were rounded up and removed from the city. They were either returned to the reserves or sent along to detention camps (KNA, AH/13/34). More than 37,000 of those identified as Kikuyu, Embu and Meru were deported from Nairobi (Hake, 1977; Kiruthu, 2006: 170). Members of these communities were also removed from ethnically mixed housing estates and concentrated in guarded areas of their own (Kiruthu, 2006: 172). Many Kikuyu were detained in government camps in far-off places like Manyani and Mackinnon Road. Other camps such as Embakasi were established to accommodate those suspected of being sympathetic to the movement (KNA, CS/1/14/11). The only Kikuyu who were spared from the mass arrest were those who had express government permission such as loyalist traders. Macharia (2012) observes that a number of

Kikuyu people in Nairobi resorted to Islam as a strategy to camouflage themselves in the face of colonial repression. Some settled in areas such as Kibera to avoid harassment by security agents. This was collaborated by an informant who indicated this is how he relocated from Pumwani to Kibera (Muthondu, O.I., 2016). Kibera was considered ideal for settlement because the Sudanese inhabitants were spared strict emergency regulations, unlike other African locations, perhaps because they had provided vital military services to the colonial government (KNA, PC/CP 9/15/4).

The purge greatly reduced Kikuyu's domination and access to trading facilities and housing in the city. An informant asserted that many trading stalls at Shauri Moyo, Kariokor and elsewhere were vacated by the Kikuyu (Mwariri, OI, 2016). Immigrants from western Kenya moved to places such as Kibera and Kawangware to take advantage of the emerging trading opportunities and jobs previously dominated by the Kikuyu. The stalls vacated by the Kikuyu were reallocated to members of other communities, especially the Luo, the Abaluhya and the Akamba (Oucho, 2002:109). In the Kaloleni estate, which had been built for Africans in 1945 with the Kikuyu being the largest group in the estate before Operation Anvil, it was mainly the Luo who took over (Masila, OI, 2016). An informant asserted that even in the post-independence period, the Luo greatly dominated the estate (Masinde, O.I., 2016). There were however some instances where Kikuyu traders who had been detained or moved from Nairobi temporarily awarded the guardianship of their enterprises to Luo friends. This demonstrates the close ties that sometimes existed between African residents of Nairobi despite the pervasive ethnic-based animosity. According to Kiruthu (2006:173), such traders went to the extent of encouraging intermarriage between their relatives and the male Luo so as to cement partnerships.

Post-conflict political settlement and elections in Nairobi

The year 1955 is crucial in the political development of the city for it witnessed the emergence of a post–Mau Mau African leadership that would articulate the nationalist goals of the Africans into the time of independence. Central to this emergence was the articulate youthful leadership that was ready to contest white hegemony on its own terms. Political discussions in Nairobi were largely centred on the Kaloleni Club. Members were then principally Luo. Argwings-Kodhek, the Luo lawyer-intellectual who since 1952 had taken up the defence of Mau Mau guerrillas in the colonial courts, often pro bono, emerged as the main leader of Africans in Nairobi. An informant (Kirika, O.I., 18/10/2016) asserted that Argwings-Kodhek's association with the Mau Mau had won him strong admiration from the Kikuyu, the animosity between the two communities notwithstanding.

More than 1000 Africans of varied ethnicities assembled in Nairobi on 18th December 1955 at Kaloleni Club to start the Kenya African National Congress (KANC). They nominated Argwings-Kodhek as President of the party and selected a committee of eight to draft a party constitution (*The East African Standard*, December 19, 1955). 'Africa for the Africans' and 'Independence Now' became his rallying call (*The Times*, December, 22, 1955). Although the new party was ostensibly a Nairobi association, its aim and its declared objective of promoting a national political organization gave it a much wider scope than the district of Nairobi alone (*The Times*, December 22, 1955). The Congress pledged itself to national aims such as a reversal of the existing Constitutional order and the opening of the white highlands to African occupation, abolition of racism and universal adult suffrage. Even more radically, Kodhek called on Mathu to resign from the Legco.

The government was certainly aware of both the potency and legitimacy of this simultaneous nationalist and Pan-Africanist trajectory. Its response was to pre-empt Argwings-Kodhek's

national platform by rebutting the possibility of allowing a territorial-nationalist African political party. The colonialists also sought to criminalize the party by painting a fearful scenario of a conspiracy by Argwings-Kodhek and his Kikuyu supporters in Nairobi (Kellas, 1991: 97). Furthermore, the government declared unequivocally that it was not going to allow the proliferation of political organizations among Africans having national connotation. In the event, Argwings-Kodhek was compelled to have the name changed to Nairobi District African Congress, which was then registered in March 1956. The government decreed that Congress 'would not in any way merge or affiliate itself with any other organization or association' (Anderson, 2005: 117).

Colony-wide parties remained outlawed by the time of the 1957 election for the African members of Legco, conducted in line with the Coutts Constitution. The election was of great importance in the development of African nationalism, even though the extremely complicated franchise allowed only about 10 per cent of those of voting age to register, and though political meetings were relatively few and unpublicized and limited to about 600 (Mueller, 1978: 148).

Argwings-Kodhek easily emerged as the front-runner for the high-profile Nairobi seat. The regime's counter-strategy was to play the ethnic card of divide-and-rule by setting up Tom Mboya as the rival of Argwings-Kodhek for the control of Nairobi politics (Furedi 1973; Mutiso 1993: 117). Mboya's success as a trade union leader in Kenya was unprecedented, which was cleverly harnessed for political objectives in Nairobi. Through links with American trade unions, Mboya obtained funding for the construction of Solidarity House, the headquarters of the Kenya Federation of Registered Trade Union (KFRTU). They also made funds available for what was in effect political activity. In 1954, Mboya was awarded a scholarship to study at Ruskin College, Oxford, for the academic year 1955 to 1956. He returned to Kenya in 1956, with the tacit instructions to contest the Nairobi seat against Argwings-Kodhek (Kyule, 1999:79). Mboya announced he would contest the Nairobi seat against Argwings-Kodhek.

After the Kenyan government had established the basis on which Africans could vote, registration commenced in August 1956 and ended in December 1956. Under Coutt's multiple voting scheme, the franchise was based on education, income and property. There were special conditions for aspiring Kikuyu, Embu and Meru voters due to their involvement in the Mau Mau (KNA, MAA/2/5/1841). In addition to the common requirements for all voters, members of the aforementioned communities had to pass a loyalty test administered by the District Commissioner (Mugucia, O.I., 21/10/2016). Nationally, 126,508 Africans registered to vote (Kyule, 1999:75). In essence, the exercise turned out to be politics without the Kikuyu, as very few Kikuyu qualified for the loyalty certificates.

Polling took place over two days, on 9th and 10th March 1957, but the electorate was rather tiny. In Nairobi, there were only 4,255 votes cast (Kyule, 1999:76). The result of the poll was that Mboya thrashed Argwings-Kodhek by polling 2,138 votes to Kodhek's 1,746. Although Nairobi had a Kikuyu candidate in the name of Muchoki Gikonyo, he was never considered a serious contender as the few Kikuyu voters split their support between Mboya and Kodhek. In the event, Muchoki Gikonyo secured a measly 238 votes and lost his £25 deposit (Kyule, 1999:77).

In the elections, by colonial design, all the African constituencies represented were essentially ethnically based. All the same, it did not escape Kikuyu plotters that Mboya sat as a Luo for a Nairobi seat, thanks to the disenfranchisement of the Kikuyu majority. According to Karindu, (O.I., 20/08/2016), many Kikuyus felt this condition should not be allowed to prevail in the next election.

Nationally, thirty-seven candidates stood for the eight African Legco seats. Seventeen of them failed to get 1/8 of the votes cast in their constituencies and therefore forfeited the election

deposit. It should be pointed out that all candidates were required to offer a £25 election deposit which was only refunded when a candidate secured more than 1/8 of the votes cast (Kyule, 1999:79). All the six original nominated Members of Legco (MLC's) were beaten except Moi, plus two recently added MLC's (KNA, OP/1/1570:1957, p. 148, 150).

A major opponent of Mboya who triumphed at the poll was Jaramogi. It was an augury of future national politics and its ethnic configuration that Jaramogi's ally, Argwings-Kodhek, had been thrashed by Mboya. Mboya led the other elected members of Legco into forming a united front and refusing to participate in the council of ministers. They demanded the creation of 15 new African seats in the Legco to provide adequate representation for the African population. In his regard, Mboya wrote a letter to *The Times* in May 1957, stating that African elected members had never accepted the Lyttelton constitution. He noted that African candidates had pledged during the campaigns to overturn the constitution, which apparently had strengthened European interests. In response to their unrelenting agitation, the Lennox-Boyd Plan of 1958 was adopted. It partially satisfied the desires of the Africans and Europeans, while retaining the multi-racial pattern of government which Lyttelton had established in 1954 (Branch, 2009: 175).

In March 1958, Mboya went to Ghana to attend Ghana's first anniversary celebrations of her independence. Much stimulated by his experience with the political system in Ghana, he came home determined to step up the pace of political mobilization. He took the step of forming a political party named in imitation of Nkrumah's successful movement, the Nairobi Peoples Convention Party (NPCP), which adopted a 'cell-type' organization to survive efforts of the government to outlaw it. It was this organization that Mboya used both to act as a voice of the nationalist movement and to spread his influence beyond Nairobi. He began to reach out from Nairobi to penetrate the various district parties that were legally operating so that when national parties were licensed, his men would be well-placed politically. He used a bulletin *Uhuru* to agitate for constitutional change, to campaign for the release of Kenyatta, and to make him a nationalist symbol (Goldsworthy, 2008: 75). Those who disregarded the instructions of the NPCP, such as the Nairobi City councillor Musa Amalemba, in agreeing to cooperate with the Europeans and Asians under the 1957 Lennox-Boyd constitution, were discredited.

Though the NPCP was never allowed to become a national party and though it eventually merged with the Kenya African National Union, it proved to be most useful in providing an urban-based, trans-tribal foundation for African nationalism in Kenya (*East African Standard*, October 30, 1961). The explanation for the party's success, according to Mboya's biographer, Alan Rake, was its emphasis upon urban workers, drawn from all tribes and held together by a good organization and by loyalty to Tom Mboya's brilliant leadership (Rake, 1962).

In 1958, with the easing of restrictions on the movement of Kikuyu, Embu, and Meru peoples, many who had been detained or expelled from Nairobi trooped back to the city (Kimanthi, O.I., 10/09/2016,). They were naturally resentful of the fact that, during their absence, jobs and positions of leadership that they had held (or might have held) had been taken by non-Kikuyu, or 'loyalists' as Muthee referred to them. Some of this latent hostility was utilized by a group of the more ambitious Kikuyu 'intellectuals' and their associates to challenge Mboya's political leadership, till the period of independence (Goldsworthy, 2008: 79).

Despite the uneasy political situation prior to independence, the principle of African majority rule embodied in the 1960 Lancaster House constitution was firmly established at the national level. However, this principle was not established at the local level. This meant in the case of Nairobi, that after 1960 the political orientation of the city council began to sharply diverge from that of the central Government. According to *The East African Standard* of December 2, 1961, the hesitancy of the Central Government to reform the

City Council's racial and ethnic composition in accordance with the Lancaster House Constitution caused the council to be burdened by severe political tension. The goal of Africans was to gain greater political power in Kenya as a whole. On the other hand, African political control of Nairobi was tied to developments leading to the independence of Kenya. Because the institutional structure of the Nairobi City Council was determined by the Kenya Legislative Council, Africans had to gain power at the national level before they could do so in Nairobi. Political developments in Nairobi continued to be shaped by ethnic and racial alignments and re-alignments.

CONCLUSION

The study on ethnic gangsterism and militant nationalism in colonial Nairobi city concludes that the desperately poor in Nairobi were involved in a vicious battle with the state that entered a violent phase in the late 1940s. It has been argued that Africans in Nairobi were not a homogenous community united by despair and violence, but were bitterly divided by class and ethnic animosities. Tribalism therefore remained the most important influence upon the daily life and political allegiances in the African locations. After 1945, gangsterism and militant politics emerged as the main cause of government apprehension. Some of the criminal groups responsible for violence had close links with African political organizations more so KAU. The administration, the settlers, and African moderates identified violent agitation as the most important problem to be tackled after 1947. Subjected to the tyranny of Kikuyu street gangs, members of other communities became greatly disillusioned with Kikuyu militants. The study argued that one of the factors that made the land and freedom movement an urban phenomenon as a rural one was the fact that many Africans in Nairobi were discontented with the deterioration in the conditions of living after the Second World War and the contradiction brought by colonialism.

Radicals tried to establish secure headquarters in Nairobi. The study demonstrated how Kikuyu traders were targeted for being suspected of funding the Mau Mau. The Mau Mau oathing from 1950 onwards however seriously accelerated the existing isolation of the Kikuyu from other African peoples, especially in Nairobi. When the state of emergency was declared, most of the non-Kikuyu African population adopted a neutral stand in Nairobi. The study argued that the period of emergency restrictions, lasting from 1952 to 1960, was characterized by serious upheavals with traumatic consequences for the Africans in Nairobi. Especially hard pressed were the Kikuyu, Embu, and Meru. Members of these communities were evicted from Nairobi, with other communities largely replacing them in jobs and trading. Those who were allowed to remain in the city were placed in separate locations and strictly controlled by means of a curfew and passbook system. As the Kikuyu left, the others began to fill the opportunities for employment and petty businesses operated by departing Kikuyu. The article has further demonstrated that the post-conflict political settlement in line with the Lyttelton and Lennox-Boyd constitution culminating in the first African elections was characterized by ethnic suspicion and contestation as the Kikuyu were largely excluded from the politics of the city. Under the circumstances, political leadership in Nairobi (and thereby, Kenya as a whole) passed to non-Kikuyu, the most prominent leaders in Nairobi being Mboya and Argwings-Khodek.

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