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## THE ROLE OF CHURCH IN STATE AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS DURING THE MOI ERA, 1978-2002.

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## **THE ROLE OF CHURCH IN STATE AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS DURING THE MOI ERA, 1978-2002.**

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** The primary objective of this study was to determine the role of the mainline church in state and public affairs in Kenya between 1978 and 2002. This paper focuses on the contribution of the church in the transformation of the society that took place during this period. This work seeks to contribute to the debates and understanding about the role of religion in the political process. The study thus brought together both theoretical and empirical links that intersected religion with the political agendas of the mainline churches and with the institutional politics and social processes of Kenya.

**Methodology:** Methodologically, the research drew upon information obtained from interviews, questionnaires, participant observations, religious sermons, newspaper reports, church magazines and internet blogs. The target population for this study was the mainland churches in Kenya and the role these churches played in state and public affairs in Kenya between 1978 and 2002.

**Results:** Despite the oppressive reaction by the government, religious leaders during the Moi era continued to preach against the high level political power monopoly by the ruling party, KANU. The most vocal church leaders in the crusade to democratize Kenya were the Catholic Bishop Ndingi Mwana-a Nzeki, Anglican Bishops Henry Okullu and Alexander Kipsang Muge, and Presbyterian Church Timothy Njoya among others. Under the banner of the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK), the church was at the forefront in condemning the 1988 queue voting system not only as unbiblical but also to travesty to political justice.

**Unique contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:** The study recommended that the government should put in place laws that would involve the church in government matters. This can be done by introducing motions into parliament that advocate for the direct involvement of the church. This would involve laws which ensure that a portion of all members sitting in any committee represents the church. This can also be done by the introduction of electoral posts for church representatives just as there are positions for women representatives. The study also recommends that amendments be made to the constitution to make a legal requirement that one of the nominated MPs must be from the church.

**Keywords:** *Church, Society, State, Political process, Religion*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The 1980's would perhaps be described as the time of political conscientization for the churches. In Kenya, public responsibility has always been fostered by the Anglican and Presbyterian Clergy. Their political statements became more outspoken in the 1980s to the extent that the outside observer sometimes wondered whether the border line between prophetic criticism and direct political action was not crossed. Some evangelical Churches condemned outright the courageous statements of NCCCK leaders, its fortnightly target newspaper was suppressed by the government and the outspoken Anglican Bishop Muge suffered a death similar to that of Archbishop Luwum of Uganda.

In the first place, the situation did not dramatically change during the first years of Daniel Arap Moi's Presidency. Njonjo remained the Attorney General until 1980 when he resigned from the civil service and was elected MP for Kikuyu in Kiambu district. Afterward, he was appointed to the cabinet as Minister for Constitutional Affairs and continued to exert a considerable influence within the government. Moi's other man Kikuyu supporter was Mwai Kibaki, who became the new Vice President. He had been educated at Mang'u High School, the leading Roman Catholic school, and had been the most prominent Catholic in the Cabinet since the assassination of Tom Mboya in 1969. But after the abortive attempted coup d' etat of 1st August 1982, the situation rapidly changed. The President, who was Mr. Moi, decided in 1983 to abandon his erstwhile ally to bolster his political position. Thus by that time, the major Churches had lost its two most influential defenders – Kibaki as a Catholic and Njonjo Anglican member.

It is worth noting that the Catholic Church had first to get rid of her minority complex. Three events greatly helped to change her attitude: This includes the Papal visit of John Paul the second in 1980 with the very positive reception by the Kenyan government. The celebration of the Eucharistic world congress in 1985, meaning as much of the Catholics as the world council of churches general assembly and the charismatic World Congress in 1975 had for the Protestants; and finally the centenary celebration of the Catholic church in Kenya 1989-90. It was in these last years that the diocesan peace and justice commissions began to work, making the laity conscious of their social and political obligation. Catholic opinion is expressed in and supported by three monthly magazines; Mwananchi, the Seed and the New People. The 1991-2 multiparty campaign was a great occasion for the churches to exercise their public responsibility of guiding and advising. This was done by the Anglican and Catholic hierarchies supported by NCCCK and KCS, but ambitious politicians frustrated efforts towards full democracy.

The development of the Kenya's capital Nairobi into East Africa's Metropolis brought the country several metropolitan International Church institutions. Thus in 1964 the Protestant AACC (All African Conference of Churches) moved its headquarters to Nairobi and the Catholic AMECEA (Association Member Episcopal Conferences of East Africa) opened its Secretariat. AACC soon started APS African Press Service while AMECEA published the bimonthly AFER African Ecclesial Review and spearheaded a series of the pastoral and theological monograph. Its pastoral institute founded 1967 in GABA near Kampala, was in 1976 moved to Eldoret, under the name Gaba pastoral Institute and Publications).

AMECEA most ambitious project was the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, in 1985, on the occasion of Eucharistic Congress; the Pope could inaugurate its forerunner. The Catholic Higher Institute comprising of two faculties: Theology, and Arts and Social Sciences (including Philosophy and Education), the Institution received its official charter in October 1992. Located in Nairobi, Langata on the same compound as St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary, Apostles of Jesus Seminary and Tangaza College (the Theologicum of the religious Congregations) and in conjunction with Hekima College (the theological school of the Jesuit order in Africa), the new University promises to play an important place in higher learning . It was preceded by another church-founded academic institution, the Seventh Day Adventists University of Eastern Africa in Eldoret–Baraton. These Higher Learning Institutions were not meant to be small general educational institutions. They were purposely and explicitly established so as to train the clergy and the laity in pressing matters of social transformation that would not only help in addressing spiritual problems, but also address far-reaching social problems which the society was going through. Tangaza University College was specially established for social transformation. This was a deliberate step to awakening the hearts of the Christians not just to wait for the Kingdom but also to look at the social problems and advocate for reforms in governance.

### **Objective of the study**

The objective of the study was to examine the mainline Church’s approach to issues of public affairs and politics during the Moi era, 1978-2002.

## **2.0 METHODOLOGY**

3.0 Methodologically, the research drew upon information obtained from interviews, questionnaires, participant observations, religious sermons, newspaper reports, church magazines and internet blogs. The target population for this study was the mainland churches in Kenya and the role these churches played in state and public affairs in Kenya between 1978 and 2002.

## **RESULTS**

During the Moi era, the study found out that AIC became almost the state Church. Several factors led to her silence in political issues in Masinga and even at national level. The factors involve sacralisation of political leadership, denominational affiliation, ethnocentrism, the temptation to power and wealth by the Church leaders and internal leadership crisis. During this era, AIC even withdrew from NCCK which was maintaining a tough prophetic stance to issues of justice, human rights and governance.

After independence, the church was moderately involved in politics. However, during the Moi’s era, the government used not to consult the church on the main issues of the state that would see the church’s involvement in the political activities of the nation. Thus, with the little consultations, the church only offered the necessary support to the government although it sometimes criticized the government operations whenever evil deeds occurred in its administration and governance. The church would only speak about the state when no one of the government officials would be within their reach since the government would control the voice

of every individual after the independence and during the Moi's era. This indicated that though the church would talk about the evils in the governance, its voice was limited due to the government threats to those who openly criticized the administration. This made it difficult for the church to effectively play its role in overseeing the governance and addressing evils in the society since even the leaders of the church lived under pressure due to the government threats.

Findings as well showed that there were political threats that silenced the church that resulted in its failure to talk openly about the government evils. The poor management of information by the information handlers in the community by then would limit the church from talking about the evils of the government since it would be used against the source to commit more atrocities to the church. The relationship between the church and the government was not so close due to its critics that led to the differences in the administration and the church's stand. This as well made it hard for the church to address the evils that occurred to the society due to poor governance.

Findings further showed that the church was ineffective in the correction of evils in the government. The results further revealed that the church remained silent to the crimes being conducted since independence and during the Moi era due to the political threats posed by the government. The church, however, played a significant role in fighting for multiparty democracy in the country. It was, however, inefficient in addressing the then increased violation of human rights and gross injustices from the government. Political activism by the churches in Kenya also lacked during the Moi era in government. From the findings, it is evident that the church continued to call for the constitutional review to suit humanity and protect the people of the nation despite the challenges posed by the government during the Moi's era. Also, despite the problems, the church actively offered a significant contribution to peacemaking, conflict resolution, and reconciliation in the country.

### **3.1 The State and the Consolidation of Power during Moi's tenure.**

During President Moi's tenure, presidential powers were not reduced following his ascension to power. Rather, the person of Moi took over that of Kenyatta in redefining state operations in Kenya. Moi was faced with the immediate challenge of consolidating his power. To do this, he needed an effective coalition to marshal support in his favour<sup>4</sup>.

The need for a new coalition was important given that the clique surrounding Kenyatta had tried to block Moi's ascension to power when they fronted the change-the-constitution movement. But Moi faced one main obstacle in constructing this coalition. Unlike Kenyatta who had an economically strong Kikuyu coalition, Moi came from a region of low capitalist penetration and therefore had a weak economic class to start with. He needed first 'to construct a capital base for his coalition' before proceeding to use them as an alternative to the Kikuyu coalition. Since there were no fresh areas of accumulation, Ajulu rightly argues that 'Moi's embryonic accumulators were compelled

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<sup>4</sup>A. Thomson, *An introduction to African politics*.

to “loot” from the old accumulators<sup>5</sup>. In other words, the new coalition had to be constructed upon the dissolution of the already entrenched Kikuyu capital. Predictably, the initial opposition to the Moi regime was also likely to emanate from these Kikuyu coalition that felt orphaned by the death of Kenyatta. At a broader level, Moi looked for popular support from other regions that bore genuine grievances against the Kenyatta regime. He adopted a populist approach in reaching out to different groups within his first three years. He tried to legitimise his leadership and reconcile the numerous forces jostling for the presidency prior to Kenyatta’s death. Between 1978 and 1982, Moi was very successful and made enormous gains in cementing unity and prosperity<sup>6</sup>.

By 1982 the fragility of the state in Kenya was increasingly becoming apparent as the attempted coup d’état of that year revealed. Political tensions were contained in the rising direct and indirect opposition to the Moi regime<sup>7</sup>. Opposition was motivated by several factors. A major factor was the increase in presidential despotism associated with the change from a de facto to a de jure one party system. Things were also complicated in the 1980s by the poor economic performance coupled with clear indications that, rather than depart from the cliquish rule of the Kenyatta era, Moi was constructing a Kalenjin alternative to the Kikuyu clique. The Moi regime was saddled with pressures resulting from its politicisation of ethnicity, ethnicisation of politics, corruption and malfeasance. Not surprisingly, the new opposition came from the old Kikuyu elite that Moi was seriously dismantling.<sup>8</sup>

For a start, one-person rule intensified to levels previously unknown in Kenya. This began with the introduction of a bill in parliament that made Kenya a de jure one-party state in 1982. The bill was drafted by Paul Muite, then Njonjo’s lawyer, and unprocedurally moved by Mwai Kibaki, then leader of government business in the national assembly, and passed into law in a record forty-five minutes. The first casualties of this bill were Oginga Odinga and George Anyona who were detained for attempting to form a rival party to KANU. In detaining them, the state used the Preventive Detention Act, a 1966 relic of the Kenyatta regime. From then onwards, numerous people were either detained without trial or forced into exile. This further constricted the space for free expression, speech and assembly. Any challenge to the government was viewed as a personal challenge to Moi<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup>J. Stott, *Involvement: being a responsible christian in a non christian society*.

<sup>6</sup>P. Weil, *The separation of church and state*.

<sup>7</sup>D. Miller, *The blackwell encyclopaedia of political thought*.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup>T. Ranger, (2008). *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Africa*.

In response the state devised numerous mechanisms for punishing real or perceived offenders given its monopoly of sanctions and economic rewards. These ranged from detention without trial to suspension from the ruling single party. Towards this end, the KANU Disciplinary Committee (KDC) was formed in January 1986 and became the most notorious mechanism of excluding non-conformists. Unlike Kenyatta, Moi reconstructed KANU into the most powerful organ of his regime declaring in 1986 that ‘the party is supreme’ over parliament and the High Court. The president then shifted the avenue of decision-making from the executive and the legislature to KANU. In doing this, Moi was supporting Shariff Nassir’s recommendation that ‘if members of parliament talk loosely and at whim, the party should be empowered to discipline them’. He gained several advantages by reconstructing KANU as supreme over parliament<sup>10</sup>. First, KANU was the only party whose sponsorship was required to vie for an electoral mandate. As such it vetted and controlled access to parliament. Second, it was an informal non-state grouping effectively controlled by Moi and an inner core of loyalists whose support Moi used to purge radical politicians from the party. Through KANU, Moi could vet and control access to parliament for those politicians who failed the party ‘loyalty test.’ Indeed, it was towards achieving this goal that Moi revamped KANU.

By shifting supremacy from parliament to the party, Moi by implication concentrated extra-legal power in the presidency<sup>11</sup>. This became a reality when on November 21<sup>st</sup> 1986, the Attorney-General introduced a Constitution of Kenya Amendment Bill (1986) which abolished the office of Chief Secretary, lessened the security of tenure for the Attorney-General, the Auditor-General, and of High Court Judges. The amendments were meant to put the judiciary at the mercy of the president in the event of disobedience to state (read presidential) orders<sup>12</sup>. The judiciary was extensively affected because, from then onwards, it has never been impartial in politically sensitive cases. At some point, foreign judges were employed and, given the contractual basis of their terms, they became out rightly partial.<sup>13</sup>

The abuse of the judicial system peaked in the era of Chief Justice Allan Hancox in 1989. Hancox was a partisan person and on occasions condemned lawyers especially the Law Society of Kenya (LSK) for being anti-government<sup>14</sup>. He asked them to be loyal to the president as opposed to the LSK which claimed loyalty to the constitution. Democracy is operationalised differently in diverse contexts, but it has certain general critical tenets. These are the basic principles of inclusion, participation, freedom, justice

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<sup>10</sup>J. De Gruchy, *Christianity and democracy*.

<sup>11</sup>T. Beauchamp, *Philosophical ethics*.

<sup>12</sup>R. Bhargava, *States, Religious Diversity, and the Crisis of Secularism*.

<sup>13</sup> These issues are documented fully in the *Nairobi Law Monthly*.

<sup>14</sup>A. Borer, *Challenging the state*.



and equity for all who find themselves in any of our African countries at any given time<sup>15</sup>. Allowing aggrieved parties to seek redress on issues over which they feel justice has either been delayed or denied ensures fairness. By compromising the judiciary, the overt authoritarianism of the Moi state emerged, sealing all channels of redress over injustice while it perpetuated corruption in high places and placed a premium on mediocrity and malfeasance. The state and its selected agents became the creator, dispenser and guarantor of justice. By closing down avenues of impartial arbitration over political and economic disputes, the Moi government, in a manner akin to the Banda regime in Malawi, began to constantly monitor, manipulate and mutilate words, to impose silence and built a nation where, to paraphrase and quote Zeleza, only the monotonous story of Nyayo's achievements was told and retold<sup>16</sup>.

Kenya became 'a state of dull uniformity that criminalised difference, ambiguity, and creativity, an omniscient regime with a divine right to nationalise time and thought, history and popular will'. KANU was deified as songs were composed specifically and exclusively for the president while religious songs were adopted as military marching tunes in praise of the regime. State agents like the PC's, DC's DO's and chiefs accumulated enough extra-legal extortionist powers that made the state of questionable relevance at the grassroots<sup>17</sup>.

The political and economic crises climaxed in the infamous 1988 general elections. During these elections, undemocratic party procedures were employed to work out popular leaders both in the party primaries and in the national elections. The elections were conducted in an atmosphere of state repression, suspicion, and enforced silence. KANU adopted not only the queue voting method but also allowed all those who got over 70 percent of the total votes in the party primaries to go to parliament unopposed<sup>18</sup>. During the primaries, many popular leaders were pushed out through unscrupulous means. The elections witnessed massive rigging as the provincial administration was deployed against candidates disliked by the state. The provincial administration oversaw and stage managed this rigging. Moi's biographer, Andrew Morton, blames this rigging on the provincial administration and feigns ignorance on the part of the president.<sup>19</sup> But it is doubtful that Moi was ignorant of this widespread malfeasance.

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<sup>15</sup>A. Chepkwony, *African religion and modern African states*.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid p. 335

<sup>17</sup>R. Chopp, *An introduction to christian theology in the twentieth century*.

<sup>18</sup>S. Ellis, *Worlds of power*.

<sup>19</sup>D. Miller, *The blackwell encyclopaedia of political thought*.

### 3.2 Christian Churches during President Moi's regime

During President Daniel Arap Moi's regime (1978-2002), Christian churches, particularly mainline Protestant and Catholic churches, varied in their support and opposition of the state. On his ascension to power in 1978, Moi gradually consolidated his reign under his infamous Nyayo Philosophy (Nyayo means "footsteps" in Swahili) and expressed Moi's determination to walk in the footsteps of founding president of the Republic of Kenya, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta. Over the years this philosophy, adopted by Gifford mutated into the demands that all Kenyans walk in his footsteps.

Mainline churches were suspicious of this philosophy and although he tried to co-opt the clergy, this was resisted by the mainline churches. Yet Moi was nevertheless determined to tighten his grip over the country. By about 1985, he had centralised power under the one party state, a party that was increasingly becoming supreme over parliament and cabinet. His regime was increasingly autocratic, characterised by greed, corruption, tribalism, nepotism, patrimonialism, abuse of human rights and poor governance<sup>2021</sup>. The Christian churches and individual clergy constituted tremendous pressure on President Moi and continued to preach against the high level political power monopoly by the ruling party, KANU, corruption in government, tribalism, nepotism and human rights abuses<sup>22</sup>. It was at this point that a number of clergy from mainline Protestant denominations became extremely vocal in their demands for multiparty elections in the early 1990s. Scholars have noted that it was individual Anglican and Presbyterian clergy who came together under the umbrella body of the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK) rather than individual churches that played significant roles in Kenyan politics during this time<sup>23</sup>.

The Catholic Church had, at the beginning, hesitated to join the rest of the clergy in the clamour for change. But with the publication of pastoral letters in 1992 and operating as a unified voice, the churches had begun to exert even more pressure on the government<sup>24</sup>. These protestant clergy were later on joined by Catholic bishops who jointly mounted tremendous pressure on President Moi's increasingly autocratic regime by demanding a new constitutional dispensation and a return to a multiparty democracy.

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<sup>20</sup>P. Gifford, *Christianity, politics and public life in Kenya*..

<sup>21</sup>The civil society and various political groups who wanted to press for a more democratic dispensation had asked Christian churches to spearhead the constitutional process because Christian churches and individual clergy had remained the only credible and organised network that could stand up to an increasingly autocratic regime

<sup>22</sup>B. Chacha, *The dynamics of religion and politics in the 2007 General elections, in Kenya*.

<sup>23</sup>H. Maupen, *The churches and the polls*..

<sup>24</sup>O. Kalu, *African Christianity*.

This led to increased and sustained pressure for even wider democratic and constitutional reforms.

Christian clergy such as Bishop David Gitari of the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK), Rev Timothy Njoya of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) and others were influential figures who made significant contributions in the dismantling of Kenya's one party and autocratic regime. We can demonstrate this with numerous examples. In 1989, for example, the late Bishop Henry Okullu, David Gitari and Timothy Njoya called for the repeal of the 1982 clause mandate that had made Kenya a de jure one party state<sup>25</sup>. Bishop Okullu pressed for a constitutional change and demanded that Kenya discards the one party state, but also specifically demanded a two-term limit to the tenure of any future president. Bishop Okullu argued that it was a mistake in the first place to make Kenya a de jure one party state and called for its reversal. In his opinion, power corrupts even persons with the best of intentions and that there was a need for checks and balances. Similarly, retired Presbyterian Church cleric, the Rev Timothy Njoya, while delivering a sermon at Nairobi's St Andrews Church on New Year's Day 1990, called for an end to a one party state. He denounced one party state in Africa and argued that they were doomed to fail the same way they had failed in Eastern Europe and called for its abolition<sup>26</sup>.

A few years back in 1986 he had earlier on delivered another sermon where he launched scathing attacks on the oppressive KANU regime. Another example where mainline church clergy showed tremendous involvement in the democratisation process was during the 1988 general elections. In 1986, Moi abolished the secret ballot preferring the infamous mlolongo or queue-voting (where supporters line up in front of a picture of their chosen candidate) for KANU's primary voting. This election was marred by irregularities and was shameless rigged, especially given the mlolongo style of voting<sup>27</sup>. This move was condemned and fiercely resisted by the clergy who argued that it was not only unacceptable and unbiblical, but was also a travesty to political justice and amounted to intimidation of the electorate.

Although Gifford concedes exemption of the clergy,<sup>28</sup> the clergy sustained tremendous pressure on Moi's autocratic acts. This time, not only as individual clergy but also under the NCKC whose Secretary General was Methodist clergy; the Rev Samuel Kobia. During this time, resistance was organised and coordinated by this giant religious organisation which had by this time become the country's biggest development Faith

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<sup>25</sup>M. Ndarangwi, *Exploring the social impact of christianity in Africa*.

<sup>26</sup>D. Persitau, *Gospel without borders*.

<sup>27</sup>P. Gifford, *Christianity, politics and public life in Kenya*.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid

Based Organisation and partner with outreach and tremendous resources throughout most of the country<sup>29</sup>. Armed with these resources, established networks and extensive outreach, public goodwill, and the backing from the international community, NCKK was able to stand up against Moi's dictatorial regime. Regarding the social and political roles of mainline Christianity in Kenya and elsewhere, there is extensive literature on the involvement of Christian groups in the struggle for democratisation. This has been underscored by several studies such as Paul Gifford<sup>30</sup>, Hansen and Twaddle<sup>31</sup> and John Lonsdale<sup>32</sup>

All these studies have not only underscored the roles of mainline churches in the democratisation process and their provision of social services, but they also underscore and demonstrate the profound importance and significance of the Christian message on the Kenyan socio-political scene from the 1960s to the late 1990s. Thus, during the turbulent years of the eighties and nineties the mainline church clergy generated a lot of heat and gained the reputation of radical theologians and social activist and had been appropriately christened the "firebrand". This small cadre of radicalised clergy garnered disproportionate influence within the Kenyan community in the span of a decade<sup>33</sup>.

The mainline church clergy's achievements stemmed in large measure from the alacrity with which they were able to fashion a bold self-image structured around such elements as commitment to social change, a penchant for high social visibility, and last, though certainly not least, a conscious decision to focus on the political sphere as their primary target for social action<sup>34</sup>. As such, the church acted as the voice of the voiceless and the conscience of society and time and again questioned the one party rule excesses from the pulpit. And they spoke with one voice as the men of cloth and honour. Indeed, the clergy constituted a central place in the body of the then reformers in Kenyan politics they were not only motivated by faith, but repeatedly used religious language to argue for their cause. The mainline churches could be described as the conscience of society, the watchdog of the nation and the voice of the voiceless.

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<sup>29</sup>J. Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and politics*.

<sup>30</sup>P. Gifford, *Christianity, politics and public life in Kenya*.

<sup>31</sup>Hansen, H. Bernt and M. Twaddle, *Religion and Politics in East Africa: the period since independence*.

<sup>32</sup>J. Lonsdale, *Religion and politics in Kenya*,

<sup>33</sup>A. Shorter, *Secularism in Africa*..

<sup>34</sup>N. Mue, *Reflecting on church state relationship in Kenya*..

At best, these churches developed a critical theology of protest and engagement in which they interrogated the excesses of the state<sup>35</sup>. Thus religious organisations have to a large extent shaped the constitution review process as much as they played significant roles in the transition to multiparty democracy in Kenya. These churches no doubt articulated a social and political discourse by bringing pressure on Moi's regime. Yet, some of these clergy paid heavily for their criticism of Moi's regime, some at great personal costs<sup>36</sup>. The outspoken Anglican Bishop Alexander Muge was for example mysteriously killed in a car accident in 1990 because he defied a warning from Moi's government that his life would be in danger if he visited a particular region. In 1997, during the seven-year commemoration of the 1990 Saba Saba Massacre where over twenty people died when rallying for multiparty elections, the Rev Timothy Njoya, then pastor of Saint Andrew's Presbyterian Church, was attempting to peacefully lead the commemorators out of All Saints Cathedral after paramilitary police had fired tear gas into the sanctuary. He was severely beaten to the point of being in a coma. This followed years of torture and humiliation by Moi's government due to Njoya's incessant demands for democratisation in Kenya and the attention he drew to human rights' abuses<sup>37</sup>.

As though that was not enough, the Rev Njoya was defrocked by the Presbyterian churches. Yet he remains an activist to date and is not afraid to point out any forms of injustices in Kenyan society. Anglican Bishop Henry Okullu, another vocal critic of Moi's government, also suffered a number of frustrations and personal inconveniences for his criticisms of the regime<sup>38</sup>. The development of his political theology has been well documented and shed important light on the rationale for opposing a political regime. Yet, Muge, Njoya and Okullu represent not only high-profile clergy in the 1990s who expressed their criticism of the government, but they also all had well developed personal political theologies that under-girded their political action and their calls for civil disobedience<sup>39</sup>. These leading clergy and theologians viewed their roles and mission of fighting Moi's dictatorial regime as part of their prophetic and civic duty. They took it as their prophetic obligation to resist all forms of injustice and oppression and used religious language, symbols, pulpits, pastoral letters, Episcopal

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<sup>35</sup>P. Gifford, *Christianity, politics and public life in Kenya*..

<sup>36</sup>F. Frew, *Between two mountains*.

<sup>37</sup>O. Kalu, *African Christianity*..

<sup>38</sup>D. Branch, Democratization, sequencing and state failure. *African affair*, 1-26, 2008.

<sup>39</sup>R. S. Chopp, *An introduction to christian theology in the twentieth century*.

conferences, interviews, print, electronic and private media to stand up to Moi's excesses<sup>40</sup>.

It is clear that actions undertaken by these churches and their clergy have not only shaped the country's democracy, but have also helped create political and social awareness in all Kenyans. Their criticisms of the managers of the state sometimes drew sharp responses from several government quarters, some of whom considered the clergy's actions unpatriotic. It is therefore unsurprising that church-state relations at this point in history were strained. But even as individual bishops from mainline churches as well as the National Council of Church of Kenya (NCCCK) and later the Catholic Episcopal Conference were taking on the Moi dictatorship, Moi closely aligned himself with Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. These Evangelical and Pentecostal groups not only supported Moi's autocratic regime, but they also continued to portray Moi as a God-fearing leader, who was guided by principles of peace, love and unity<sup>41</sup>, even as his regime was increasingly accused of corruption, nepotism, torture and complete disregard for human rights<sup>42</sup>. Ndegwa<sup>43</sup> noted that the Evangelical and Pentecostal churches were co-opted by Moi to countercheck the opposition from mainline church clergy. For example, as Moi faced increased pressure to lift the ban he had imposed on opposition parties, he attended a Redeemed Gospel Church service in which Bishop Kitonga delivered a forceful pro-Moi sermon. In this sermon, which was televised by KBC TV, Bishop Arthur Kitonga of the Redeemed Gospel Church (RGC) alleged that Kenya had been like heaven for years under Moi's leadership<sup>44</sup>. He opined that Moi had been appointed by God to lead the country, and Kenyans ought to be grateful for the peace prevailing. He lambasted the mainline churches for pressing for socio-political reforms, and termed their leaders rebels, who preached their own gospel, not that of Jesus Christ.

Other clergy who supported President Moi include the Rev Denis White, formerly of the Nairobi Pentecostal Church (Valley Road) who publicly endorsed former President Moi (a frequent worshipper in the church in the 1990s despite being an astute member of the African Inland church AIC) as God's elect and one whose reign had seen the tremendous growth of Christianity in Kenya because he upheld the constitution which promoted and respected freedom of worship in the country<sup>45</sup>. Bishop Gaitho of the

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<sup>40</sup>B. Hansen, *Religion and politics in East Africa*.

<sup>41</sup>M. Hutchinson, *A Global faith*.

<sup>42</sup>N. Mue, *Reflecting on church state relationship in Kenya*.

<sup>43</sup>S. Ndegwa, *National dialogue in Kenya*.

<sup>44</sup>J. Olen, *Applying ethics*.

<sup>45</sup>P. Gifford, *Christianity, politics and public life in Kenya*.

African Independent Pentecostal Church (AIPC) also threw his weight behind President Moi. Others who threw their weight behind Moi include clergy from a number of Pentecostal and African Instituted Churches such as the Redeemed Gospel, Deliverances Churches and the Nairobi Pentecostal Church Valley Road and African Instituted Churches such the African Independent Pentecostal Church (AIPC) led by the late Bishop Gaitho respectively<sup>46</sup>.

Evangelical and Pentecostal churches supported Moi because they viewed him as their own. In fact, some Evangelical churches like AIC, to which Moi is a bona fide member and a staunch Christian who never skipped Sunday services, even withdrew their membership from the NCKC primarily not just over the issue of political involvement<sup>47</sup>, but also for opposing Moi's regime. Ndegwa<sup>48</sup> noted that the Evangelical and Pentecostal churches were co-opted by Moi to countercheck the opposition from mainline church clergy. Moi increasingly used Bishop Arthur Kitonga of the Redeemed Gospel Church to attract the support of the Pentecostals whom he used to counter the attacks from mainline clergy. For example, as Moi faced increased pressure to lift the ban he had imposed on opposition parties, he attended a Redeemed Gospel church service in which Bishop Kitonga delivered a forceful pro-Moi sermon. Evangelical and Pentecostal support for Moi can be explained variously<sup>49</sup>.

For one, it is important to note that at this point, many Pentecostal churches had not developed any social activism that allowed them to offer any constructive criticism of the government. Kenya's Evangelical churches, with a conservative theology, were more preoccupied with a call for the personal brokenness of being born again to salvation that did not depend on political activism but upon faith<sup>50</sup>. Besides, many believed and still believe that by praying for the president, the government of the day or those in authority, they are performing their civic and prophetic duty. To many Pentecostals, prayer is a sort of civic engagement and a political praxis where true Christians must pray to God to establish his kingdom on earth. This is a kingdom of righteousness, corruption free and where peace prevails<sup>51</sup>.

In the understanding of many Pentecostals, this is even more effective than engaging in a more combative way. At the same time, analysts have argued that Pentecostals align

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<sup>46</sup>J. De Gruchy, *Christianity and democracy*.

<sup>47</sup>P. Oluoch, *Religion and Politics in Kenya*.

<sup>48</sup>S. Ndegwa, *National dialogue in Kenya*.

<sup>49</sup>E. Kamaara, *Religion and socio-political change in Kenya*.

<sup>50</sup>J. Lonsdale, *Religion and politics in Kenya*,

<sup>51</sup>O. Kalu, *African Christianity*.

themselves with the rulers for respectability and to benefit from the states' largesse. It is not lost to many that numerous Pentecostal Churches were rewarded for their support for Moi's regime. Many received access to state controlled media, and they continually and increasingly portrayed Moi as God's appointed leader for the country<sup>52</sup>. From the foregoing analysis, it is clear that mainline churches played critical roles in Kenya's public life particularly during president Moi's rule, while Evangelical and Pentecostal churches played less prominent roles but undoubtedly did not hesitate to come to Moi's side when he was facing increased pressure from mainline churches. Mainline churches, besides keeping Moi's government in check, also played significant civic and public roles particularly in civic education, monitoring and observing elections and in some cases even documenting the outright electoral malpractices and abuses of human rights, pushing for constitutional reforms particularly in the early 1990s<sup>53</sup>. These churches remained engaged in issues in civic and public life until the 2002 general elections that brought an end to KANU's 39-year-rule. While the roles of mainline churches in the democratisation process from 1970-2000 is thoroughly researched, developed and highlighted, their roles and shifts in civic and public life since 2000, particularly their interaction with politics during President Kibaki's two terms, has not been critically examined<sup>54</sup>.

### 3.3 The church and the foundations of its power in Kenya

By the 1980s, the position of the church was firmly entrenched within the Kenyan national arena. Its deep involvement in the spheres of education, health-care, social welfare and economic training and development began during the first phases of the missionary expansion, was intensified under colonialism, and continued into the era of independence. On the eve of independence in 1963, for example, 90 percent of the schools were connected to one or the other of the churches. The same was true of health services, vocational training and most of the welfare services, which were executed through thousands of local and specific church organizations throughout the country.

Personal and ethnic affinities, as David Throup in a recent article points out, cannot be neglected when analyzing church capacity<sup>55</sup>. To his understanding, much of the church's power is derived from close family ties between Kenyatta and the church leadership as well as the fact that after

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<sup>52</sup>H. Maupen, *The churches and the polls*.

<sup>53</sup>T. Ranger, *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Africa*.

<sup>54</sup>D. Persitau, *Gospel without borders*.

<sup>55</sup>D. Throup, 'Render unto Caesar the Things that are Caesar's. The Politics of Church- conflict in Kenya, 1978-1990', in B. Hansen and M. Twaddle eds., *Religion and Politics in East Africa* James Currey, London, 1995), pp. 145-146, 152, 159-161



independence the CPK, the PCEA and the Roman Catholics had all become increasingly dominated by Kikuyu churchmen. Moreover, he stresses the point that influential positions in the government were held by church lay members, most prominent was Attorney-General Charles Njonjo, a lay member of the CPK. As important as these facts are, it would seem that its intensive social involvement throughout the country is by far the central foundation of the church's power. This very social involvement-with its concomitant extensive social influence-continues to this day, despite the rapid advancement of non-Kikuyu clergy to leading positions in all churches and the nationalization of educational and health institutions in 1965.

The dense network of structures, bodies and organizations of the church in virtually every social and economic sphere, together with its on-going physical presence among the people in their everyday lives through its religious services, gave it an organizational distinctiveness<sup>56</sup>. This organizational distinctiveness afforded it a two-way channel of access. On the one hand, its organizational web of contacts with peoples of all ages, classes' professions, ethnic backgrounds and localities gave it an unparalleled insight into the needs and mood of the people. On the other hand, this same organizational web afforded it the means for the broad dissemination of its moral doctrines and social and political views. At times this two-way channel also served as a means of communication, via the church, between the people and the political elite (and vice versa). In addition, the church also enjoyed radio broadcasting time on the Kenya National Radio broadcasting Service<sup>57</sup>, and published weekly newsletters and monthly newspapers and magazines<sup>58</sup>.

Finally, the churches, and particularly the CPK, the Roman Catholics, and the PCEA, were financially independent to a large degree, the major part of their funding being received from outside donors<sup>59</sup>. Their virtual financial autonomy, together with the international organizational

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<sup>56</sup>E. Wolf, ed. *Religious Regimes and State-Formation. Perspectives from European ethnology*

<sup>57</sup>While these radio programmes were mainly theological lessons, in times of civil unrest and political tension many of these lessons were made relevant to the current situations. The best example was the CPK radio services between May-July 1991, specifically Bishop Gitari's sermons.

<sup>58</sup>As members of the NCCK, the CPK and the PCEA had their share in the management of Church newspapers, the major ones being the monthly magazine *beyond* and *Target*. *Beyond*, which had originally specialized on matters of social morality and family life, was banned in March 1988. The reason was that it had started carrying articles by some of the more outspoken members of the clergy which were critical of the political system. Its circulation figures rose from 15,000 to 60,000 and, on occasions, 90,000. CPK /ARCH, Synod Reports, 1986

<sup>59</sup>As little as 5 per cent of the total GYK budget came from the Kenyan government and was subject to the government's control. CPK /ARCH; Financial Advisory Committee Nairobi Diocese, 1980-1990. The same is true of the Catholic Church which is funded by European Church agencies as well as by funds directly from the Vatican.

connections, gave these churches greater immunity from governmental control and strengthened their position in the local arena. 'What power they [the churches] have is now more locally based and they have in many cases grown in popular credibility as much as governments have declined in that commodity'. Adrian Hastings's dictum is amply supported by the Kenyan experience. However, due to this very phenomenon of growth in popular credibility, the church became one of the only remaining available tools for the expression of dissatisfaction and the urge for change in the country. It is interesting to note that although significantly different in its historical background and its political affiliation, both the Anglican and the Roman Catholic Churches of Uganda have taken upon themselves a similar role<sup>60</sup>. Under the brutal ruler of Idi Amin and Milton Oboe local participation in and control of local decision-making have been eroded as people have been manipulated or suppressed, even terrorized, by politicians, Youth wingers, security agents and the army....

The importance of the church as an institution firmly rooted in the society has been underlined. The various church facilities and institutions were, at times, the only providers of essential services to the Ugandan people, by that gaining a stronger grip over society.<sup>61</sup> As a space of integration and construction of solidarities and because of its capacity to combine both sacred and profane resources, the church in Kenya thus enjoyed, by the beginning of the 1980s, a specific type of power, the power to deliver and the power to tame and define reality. It is from this position that its most important ministers spoke out.

### **3.4 The public discourse: Power and Corruption**

The second major critique of the structure of power in Kenya centered on the theme of corruption, and outspoken clerics emphasized the church's moral duty in combating this social evil. Anglican and Presbyterian leading clergy had constantly reiterated their belief that the Kenyan political system was led by corrupt individuals prone to the use of coercion in order to foster their private interests: 'Corruption in Kenya has become a dangerous cancer ... that has

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<sup>60</sup>One of the main differences between the Kenyan and the Ugandan case is that in Uganda the large churches were in one way or another affiliated or identified with specific party. This identification dates back to colonial times and was re-emphasized during independence under all rulers. For a detailed account see K. Ward 'The Church of Uganda amidst conflict. The interplay between Church and Politics in Uganda since 1962', in Hansen and Twaddle, *Religion and Politics*, p. 72-105; Specifically on the Catholic Church see J. M. Waliggo, 'The Roman Catholic Church and the Root-Cause of Political Instability in Uganda', in Hansen and Twaddle, *Religion and Politics*, pp. 106-119.

<sup>61</sup>Ward, *The Church of Uganda amidst conflict* pp. 93-95,

damaged many levels of our society...we must condemn the practice unreservedly no matter what the consequences will be.<sup>62</sup>

If the Church sleeps and conforms to the standards of this world, then she will be held responsible for all unchallenged evils taking place in every given society, such as immorality, corruption, injustice and greed . . . Christians must not only resist such immoral characters but must expose them as well. When politicians are bound with this devilish practice, we must expose them...during general and civic elections and, above all, use our votes to remove them from leadership and replace them with morally upright characters.<sup>63</sup>

In the theological discourse of the churches and in many of the local sermons, corruption and idolatry were often equated.<sup>64</sup> In addition, in most of their political preaching the clergy used biblical episodes, metaphors and narratives, aimed at showing how in the confrontation between the powerful and the powerless God himself chooses the side of the latter, thus protecting the rights of the victim against corruption and the abuse of power.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>The Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Resolution of 29 April 1988, as cited in the Daily Nation, 30 April 1988

<sup>63</sup>The Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Resolution of 29 April 1988, as cited in the Daily Nation, 30 April 1988

<sup>64</sup>In a sermon in Kabare on 14 June 1987, Bishop D. Gitari, for instance, defined idolatry as the fact of worshipping a god that man creates, instead of worshipping God who created man. In his view, one of the greatest idols in contemporary Kenya was money. 'There are people who think of nothing except how to acquire money. They will exploit the poor so as to maximize profits and enrich themselves, money becoming the beginning and the end of everything. 'Similar comparisons were made by the Presbyterian Rev T. Njoya of Nyeri District. See Gitari, Let the Bishop Speak, p. 29.

<sup>65</sup>Such metaphors were, for instance, the conflict between Naboth and King Ahab; Uriah and King David; Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and King Nebuchadnezzar; see Gitari, Let the Bishop Speak, p. 29-30, and Gitari, A Christian View of Politics. Gitari and Njoya's references to the prophets of the Old Testament, such as Jeremiah, Daniel, and Job and political entities (the Persian Empire) fulfilled the same functions; see Gitari, Let the Bishop Speak and Njoya's sermon at Tumu Presbyterian Church, Nyeri District, and 2 July 1983, reported in Church News, 20 July 1983. These analogies did not go unchallenged. For example in a reply to Gitari's 21 June 1987 sermon in Nyeri, Mr. David Okiki Amayo, the KANU national chairman, confessed that he and the party were 'unable by any stretch of imagination, to understand the comparison of King Darius, a pagan king who ruled over conquered kingdom and worshipped idols', with the leadership in Kenya: 'Bishop Gitari's biblical reference to the book of Daniel chapter 6, about Darius and Daniel, has no parallel in Kenya. Such comparison can only be made

### 3.5 Church and Education Democracy

Concomitant with its growing involvement with the formal political opposition and parallel to its intensive and ongoing relief work, the church during this period extended the range of its activities within the field of popular education. Since these activities were, by and large, an expansion of the church's regular educational operations, they did not require from it any major planning or consideration. In 1991, and in keeping with its direct involvement with the democratization process, the Church added 'Civic Education' to the wide range of its educational programs. Civic Education was designed to focus on issues related to political transformation such as voter education, election monitoring, and the rights and duties of both the rulers and the ruled within democratic systems.

In 1992 the National Ecumenical Civic Education Programs (NECEP) was established by the NCKK, the CPK, and the Kenya Episcopal Conference.<sup>66</sup> This organization was intended to replace the different organizations created by individual churches between 1990-1992 (such as the Education for Participatory Democracy of the Anglican Church) in the task of preparing Kenyan society for change and promoting democracy. The vision of the NECEP was that 'leading clergy and their churches must inquire into the possibility of accelerating the development of democratic environment which could promote democratic process through a democratic civic educational agency'.<sup>67</sup>

The formal long-term objectives of the NECEP were the promotion of public political awareness and the encouragement of the view that participation in multi-party elections was a formal political contribution to the democratic process. In addition, the Kenyan public was educated that their active involvement in pluralist democracy was necessary in order to protect their fundamental human and civil rights, and that there was direct link between the fulfillment of their basic needs and democratic politics in general, and political representation through free and fair elections in particular.<sup>68</sup> Using these objectives, the NECEP produced a large number of instrumental guidelines in pamphlet form, such as *Why You Should Vote*, *Towards Multi-party Democracy in Kenya*, *Issues to Consider in the Forthcoming Multi-Party Elections*, and *A Guide to Election Monitoring*.<sup>69</sup> These publications, which were to be circulated through the myriad

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with the aim of confusing the God-fearing and peace-loving Kenyans.' *Daily Nation*, 27 June 1987.

<sup>66</sup> S. Kobia, 'The Duties and Responsibilities of National Christian Councils in Discharging Their Political and Social Stewardship', (Paper presented at a seminar on the 'role of the Church in Democratization in East, Central and South Africa',

<sup>67</sup> Abuom, 'The role of Kenyan churches', p. 31.

<sup>68</sup> E. Oyugi, *National Civic Education Programme: An evaluation*, Abuom, 'The role of Kenyan churches', p. 32.

<sup>69</sup> Abuom, 'The role of Kenyan churches', p. 35 and 40.

church organizations, services and programs, were in great demand by both Christians and non-Christians all over the country. In addition, the Daily Nation published number of NECEP articles explaining the rights and duties of all Kenyans in the first multi-party elections since 1963. Finally and possibly reaching the widest audiences, in many churches and parishes, Sunday sermons, weekday study-groups and organized lectures focused on or devoted considerable attention to the nature and process of political democracy. Major internal conflicts, however, prevented the wide circulation of these publications and limited actions to disseminate the civic gospel.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, since the church waste only non-political organization to provide these basic facts, it served as a bridging element in Kenyan society during this period of political transition and ethnic wars.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusion**

Despite the oppressive reaction by the government, religious leaders during the Moi era continued to preach against the high level political power monopoly by the ruling party, KANU. The most vocal church leaders in the crusade to democratize Kenya were the Catholic Bishop Ndingi Mwana-a Nzeki, Anglican Bishops Henry Okullu and Alexander Kipsang Muge, and Presbyterian Church Timothy Njoya among others. Under the banner of the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK), the church was at the forefront in condemning the 1988 queue voting system not only as unbiblical but also to travesty to political justice. Leading theologians within the churches viewed their mission of fighting Moi's dictatorial regime as part of their exercise of 'the prophetic ministry of judgement'. They took it as the obligation of the church to 'constantly remind people of the standard of righteousness and justice, which alone exalts a nation', and its duty to morally and practically support the state when 'it upholds that standard' while responsibly criticizing it or those in authority 'when they depart from it'. As such, the church acted as a conscience of the society and time and again questioned the one-party rule excesses from the pulpit.

### **Recommendations**

The study recommended that the government should put in place laws that would involve the church in government matters. This can be done by introducing motions into parliament that advocate for the direct involvement of the church. This would involve

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<sup>70</sup>These conflicts were primarily in three spheres: 1.Rifts between the Roman Catholics and the other churches within the NECEP, as well as serious conflicts within the Catholic delegation itself; 2. The image of thence as a Luo-dominated organization, which led to the estrangement of large numbers of would-be supporters from other ethnic groups; 3. Accusations of corruption and the squandering of donated funds on personal extravaganzas, which resulted in the withdrawal of funds by several donor nations. (From private conversations with USAID officials, held in Toronto, 1994)

laws which ensure that a portion of all members sitting in any committee represents the church. This can also be done by the introduction of electoral posts for church representatives just as there are positions for women representatives. The study also recommends that amendments be made to the constitution to make a legal requirement that one of the nominated MPs must be from the church. The study has recommended that since gender balance is a key issue in the constitution, then religious balance also be made a key issue with positions open for church representatives. The study has further recommended that the church unite under one umbrella body so as to gather enough critical mass to be able to have a say in national matters or even gather enough signs to cause a referendum that will influence current laws. On the same note, the study recommends that the state should put in place mechanisms to ensure that all clergy men and women should be highly vetted then trained in theological matters before being licensed to serve as Church ministers. The presidential advisory committee should include a senior minister who is either a Bishop or Pastor to provide direction and advice in case of any decision that touches on the spiritual matters.

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