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The Trajectories of Survival of the Mungiki Youth in Nairobi

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Introduction

The numerous socio-economic challenges facing the youth in developing nations today have meant that youth must find new approaches to address these challenges and utilize what is available in their surroundings to enable them survive. This is especially the case in the congested, poor living conditions of the sub-urban regions. In most of the developing nations, youth burgeon has been associated with increased crime in both urban and rural areas, activities that can be linked to unemployment and low literacy levels. In their effort to live within the limits of their surroundings, some youth in Kenya have formed groups, within which they identify and pool their efforts for wider recognition, besides enhancing their survival techniques in the midst of economic hardships. Some of these groups have been labelled as gangs, criminal groups and dangerous sects. Members of these groups, therefore, do not readily negotiate livelihoods with the general public but rather with their sect leaders, and they are sometimes known to make deals with political leaders to protect their interests.

Youth gangs may function as residual social institutions when other institutions fail, and provide a certain degree of satisfaction, order and solidarity for their members. Such gangs are present in both socialist and free-market societies and in both developing and developed countries. To exemplify, the Japanese Yakuza, the Chinese Triads, and the Italian Mafia are organized criminal gangs with youth street affiliates or aspirants (Irving 1990:172). Youth and children have been linked to some of these groups. For instance, the Japanese Ministry of Justice reports that 52,275 gangsters were arrested in 1983. The number of juveniles identified

as members of gangster organizations who entered Japanese reformatory schools in 1983 was 713 or 12.3 per cent of the total 5,787 juveniles. In the African continent, juvenile and youth membership in criminal gangs has been evident.

Writing on youth gangs, Irving observes that today's gangs are a violent and insidious new form of organized crime. Heavily armed with sophisticated weapons, they are involved in drug trafficking, witness intimidation, extortion, and bloody territorial wars. Dowdney (2003), studying the involvement of youths in gang violence in Rio de Janeiro, argues that many children who are armed with guns have few other options economically, educationally, and in terms of protection and status. Jensen (1999:76) in his research on the discourses of coping with violence in South Africa's Cape flats mentions that no government has been able to solve the socio-economic crisis of her people or the high levels of crime and violence, and this inability has always been very highly resented. Jensen, borrowing from a number of researches and interviews, explains that the type of violence within a given group is dependent on a number of factors including age, gender, class, housing, and race.

Different groups have been used to perpetrate crime and violence to benefit their members, and as Stephen Ellis (1999) explains, in the context of the discernible drift away from Western modernity towards the re-traditionalization of society, which anthropologists and social analysts have identified in contemporary Africa, youths have adopted diverse aspects of traditional cultures, including initiation rites and religious beliefs and practices, as ideological foundations of their resistance. These characteristics are typical of the Mungiki sect in Kenya. In adopting these features, the Mungiki sect followers claim to be fighting the 'ills' of the state.

On a different twist, African states have at certain times used such groups to perpetrate crime and violence, especially when this is deemed beneficial to a particular group of leadership in the government. The membership of these movements largely constitute youth, and though in some cases they are in conflict with the existing legal frameworks, they have found refuge under existing corrupt leadership in some African governments, who shield them but on certain conditions. The crimes perpetrated by these movements deserve theoretical and practical analysis. As we explore the nature of these movements, we are not ignorant of the fact that there exist economic crises in most of the African countries, with the youth facing the blunt effects of poverty, unemployment, and non-literacy.

As a contribution to this volume on negotiating livelihoods, this chapter takes the extreme perspective in which the youth may not be keen to negotiate the challenges facing their livelihoods with the public, but do negotiate partly with their leaders and the state, in which case they engage the ruling authorities through their ideologies. The chapter therefore questions whether these ideologies have helped the group to succeed in sorting out the social and economic crisis faced by the youth, and considers survival mechanisms employed by this group. The

trajectories of engaging the government and different religious groups in Kenya in their endeavour to survive in the city will be discussed. These highlights will read deeper into the social and economic activities of disfranchised youth, and whether we can use these to exonerate the Mungiki of what the public and the governing authorities have claimed to be criminal activities. This is because, as Mkandawire (2002:181) observes, a disturbing feature of some of the post-independence armed rebel movements in Africa have been the extremely brutal and spiteful forms of violence that they have unleashed and inflicted on fellow citizens.

The situation and nature of the research behind this chapter did not allow much attention to the first-hand views of Mungiki. However, I managed to solicit information from six sect ex-members who insisted that their names should be concealed for security purposes and therefore the names used in the text are pseudonyms. I also listened to conversations held on radio and television programmes and watched documentaries from both Kenyan and European journalists on the activities of the group. These were integrated with the personal experiences and observations to provide an analysis of the findings presented.

Conceptualizing Youth Criminality: A Focus on Mungiki

Cities in sub-Saharan Africa have experienced the fastest population growth and most of the future population growth in the region is expected to occur in the urban areas (Fotso 2007). Fotso explains that rapid urbanization has been occurring amidst stagnating or declining economies, in which case local and national authorities are unable to provide decent living conditions and basic social services, which are already strained. Between 1980 and 2000, the urban population in sub-Saharan Africa grew by almost 4.7 per cent per year according to the United Nations, and per capita gross domestic product according to World Bank dropped annually by 0.8 per cent (2007:208). Consequently, a rapidly increasing proportion of urban dwellers in sub-Saharan Africa are living in overcrowded slums and shanty towns amidst filthy conditions: uncollected garbage, unsafe water, poor drainage and sewers. This poses a challenge not only to their health, but also to their psychological wellbeing. Within these demeaning living conditions, there have arisen needs for social and economic security for groups of people who identify with each other in the quest for survival and protection. The massive powers of these groups have been the main cause of stability and resistance, as well as their continued growth in membership. Moreover, the malleable nature of such movements perplexes the public on their objectives.

Musambayi (2005:507) notes that mobilization and contestation over economic spaces, and the resultant voluntary servitude, have the effect of engendering instrumentalized violence that tends to narrow associational space as variegated social groups turn against one another at the behest of the state. Musambayi

explains that this process means rolling back of the logic of stateness, especially the state's need to dominate the means of violence in the society.

This chapter draws examples from the renowned Kenyan Mungiki sect. The focus is on the malleable nature of the sect, a characteristic that has helped the group change its appearance in the Kenyan public space, hoodwinking both the legal frameworks and the common citizen only to emerge at different times with what has been conceived as dangerous ways of surviving in the public space. On the one hand, we need to reckon: in the words of Loffman (2008:126), 'Understanding conflict does not simply involve engaging with the historical reasons for it. For processes of violence to be properly understood, and to have meaning for readers, the local must be examined in conjunction with the national.' Accordingly, to comprehend the criminal activities behind any youth group, it is necessary to explore the contribution of the state. Some authors have argued that the involvement of Mungiki in criminal activities can be attributed to the push by the state (see the works of Klopp 2002; Ruteere 2008; and Kagwanja 2005). For this reason, Mungiki might justify their unlawful actions because of the failure of state.

Brief History

Early in the history of Mungiki, as Wamue (2001) propounds, it was a paragon of retraditionalization of society, in which the leaders used traditional forms of mobilization and beliefs as instruments for restoring moral order and empowering the dispossessed. However, Anderson (2002) has argued that when the movement stepped outside its rural base and ventured into the milieu of Kenya's urban estates, shanties, and slums, it absorbed some criminal elements and was transformed into a large violent gang that was gradually co-opted by sections of the ruling elite to serve its patrimonial interests.

Mungiki is believed to have been started in the late 1980s by two cousins, Maina Njenga and Ndura Waruinge, when they were still young boys in secondary school. Under this leadership in the late 1980s, the movement split from *Hema ya Ngai wi Mwoyo* 'Tent of the Living God' led by Gonya wa Gakonya in Laikipia (Wamue 2002). Initially the movement took a religious perspective by trying to enhance African culture as a way towards 'liberation' (refer to Gecaga 2007). In the early 1990s, during the land and ethnic clashes of the Rift Valley Province, the movement, mainly composed of the youth aged between 15 and 30, fought for the land rights of the Gikuyu. This saw the first metamorphosis of the 'religious sect' into a militaristic group. According to Waruinge¹, the co-founder of the sect, Mungiki therefore operated as a defence force against the predominantly ethnically Kalenjin militias that attacked Gikuyu settlements (also see Wamue 2001). In the late 1990s, the group metamorphosed from a rural religious sect with political overtones into an urban militia. They began to dominate the *Matatu* (public

transport) industry in Nairobi. Using the *Matatu* industry as a spring-board, the group moved into other areas of commerce, such as garbage collection, construction, and even protection racketeering. They did not, however, shed their first image of religiosity: this continues to be used as a tool to recruit members to the sect.

Wamue explains that Mungiki comes from the word *muingi-ki*, meaning ‘we are the public’, which Githogo (2000) compares with the Mau Mau, who in the 1950s and 60s would identify themselves as, ‘it is us’. *Muingi* is a term derived from the word *nguki* which means *irindi* (crowds) and reflects a belief that destiny entitles people to particular place of their own. Wamue describes Mungiki as heir to a long tradition of religio-political revivalism that dates back to the early stages of anti-colonial resistance, which in turn was characterized by a total rejection of modernity. The mandate of Mungiki, then, was to call people to return to Gikuyu’s indigenous beliefs and practices, and condemn the white man’s culture. Mungiki leaders developed the sect’s teachings (*kirira*) and used especially the Old Testament teachings which form the sect’s Bible (*Gikunjo*) to justify these teachings. They condemned social immorality such as prostitution and called for a return to female genital mutilation, which they justified by noting that when the practice was taken seriously in the traditional communities, there was no immorality and subsequently no HIV and AIDS. They used this ideology forcefully to circumcise women both in the villages and in the city streets. They also stripped naked women who wore trousers and miniskirts.

The initial recruitment process entails the use of *Gikunjo*, and there is some level of acceptance by the initiates that the movement is inclined to Gikuyu traditional religion. Those who accept to receive *Kirira* become followers and initiate others by teaching them the way of Mungiki. A sect ex-member² explained that in most cases, the sect’s criminal activities are not revealed to the initiates until they take the final oath. In taking the oath of secrecy, members agree not to reveal the secrets of the group and at this stage they go through very brutal physical attacks by the sect elders, which are meant to harden them. They swear not to deviate but to protect ‘those of their own’, meaning sect members. They swear to choose to protect the sect’s secrets and members over their families.

Mungiki has metamorphosed to conceal their identity. Mungiki’s religiosity and their initial call for people to return to the Gikuyu traditional cultures has since been replaced by other faces as the following sections reveal. However, they still claim to maintain their religiosity, which is evident in the recruitment procedures.

A Religious Sect?

Mungiki trace their roots to religion, and specifically the Gikuyu Traditional African Religion, more specifically a splinter sect, the Tent of the Living God. Kagwanja (2003) argues that Mungiki’s ideological bloodline can be traced from such revivalist

movements as *Dini Ya Msambwa*, *Legio Maria*, *Akorino* and more recently Tent of the Living God – African-initiated churches and movements that are very common in the Kenyan public space. The common thread that joins these movements is that they have rallied their followers behind traditional values to challenge the orthodoxy of the mainstream churches as well as injustices by the state. To Kagwanja, this well-intentioned movement, whose concern was the restoration of moral order, was only infiltrated and given a bad tag by the KANU regime in the run up to the 2002 general election.

However, the Mungiki legend, according to Makokha (2000), has grown out of the mysterious and little understood ideology and theology of the group. Its members have a god (Ngai) on Mount Kenya (Kirinyaga) whom they worship and to whom they pray. So far no written doctrines about Mungiki as a religious sect have been availed to the public, but Mungiki publicly advocate a return to 'African traditions'. Githongo (2000) explains that Mungiki advocates cultural and religious revival and this has alarmed church leaders and fervent Christians, who have occasionally denounced the activities of the sect.

Mungiki baptizes new members in a river, and with fire. After the initiates are immersed in a river, they walk through smoke as the elders chant certain traditional religious words. Their holy communion is tobacco-sniffing. There are rituals performed, and religious practices used by Mungiki members, which according to Smart's (1968) criteria would warrant Mungiki being classified as a religious sect. The dimensions as explained by Smart include: myths, rituals, social institutions, doctrines, ethical teachings and religious experiences. All these are typical characteristics of the sect. They baptize their converts who also take oaths and swear by saying, 'May I die if I reveal our secrets.' They also perform rituals such as offering of sacrifices, which are believed to protect members; sniffing tobacco; praying while facing Mount Kirinyaga; and keeping unshaven hair (dreadlocks). Their dress code is the African garb made from animal skin. Although some of them have been spotted wearing animal skins, to conceal their identity, this regalia has been used only on special occasions.

Their faithfulness to their religiosity has, however, been determined by the political circumstances of the country. This implies that they change their religious affiliations at different times to camouflage their identities. One interviewee revealed that they rent church buildings on Sundays after a Christian group has held a Sunday service.

In early 2000, many of the Mungiki members converted to Islam, including the co-founder Ndura Waruinge, who was named Ibrahim Ndura Waruinge (according to Panafican News Agency 2000). However it was realized that this was in a bid to deceive the government. In December 2000, Waruinge and 50 sect members attended a Church service before being arrested, and this was a clear act of camouflage. This act met great criticism from Sheikh Banda who

pointed out that Islam would not allow hypocrisy. A few days later, Waruinge was released from police cells and he proclaimed that he was saved. He changed his name to Ezekiel Ndura Waruinge and started his own church. In October 2009, when Maina Njenga, the national chair, was released from jail, he was prayed for and converted to become a Christian at the Jesus is Alive Ministries, a church headed by Dr Bishop Margaret Wanjiru, the Assistant Minister of housing and the member of parliament of Starehe Constituency in Nairobi. He promised to disband Mungiki. However, in early November 2009, the police arrested 200 Mungiki sect members involved in criminal activities in one of the Nairobi estates. In December the same year, police arrested several sect members in Murang'a District, whom they claimed were extorting money from the public service vehicle operators.

Militaristic Group?

The failure of the state to address the core issues of land and ethnic clashes that led to formation of civil militia groups in the early 1990s (see Klopp 2002; Ndegwa 1997 and Odhiambo 2003, who have tried to analyze the origin and causes of land and ethnic clashes in Kenya) might be used to explain how Mungiki youths joined the 'drift into collective social deviance' characteristic of the 1990s. This was an era in which vigilantism and the privatization of violence increased and was profitable. This violence was privatized in consultation with politicians and with their approval. Politicians sought after and employed the services of private militia to execute their political missions, and cripple individuals and groupings within the political opposition.

In 1991, when ethnic clashes broke out in the Rift Valley province, which to a great extent were instigated by the political wing (Klopp 2002), Mungiki metamorphosed from being a religious sect to fight for '*Vizazi vya wapiganiaji uburu*' – the descendants of freedom fighters – who were the Gikuyus living in Rift Valley Province, especially in Molo and Kuresoi regions. They fought other vigilante and militia groups including the Kalenjin warriors. At this time, as rightly observed by Turner and Brownhill (2001), Mungiki could be linked to *Muungano wa Wanavijiji* (the organization of villagers), established among the slum dwellers of the city to fight eviction and protect tenants from exploitation. In the face of land privatization programmes sponsored by the World Bank, which tend to increase rather than alleviate landlessness, the urban-based *Muungano wa Wanavijiji* and the massive Mungiki have arisen to address, among many other realities, the immediate needs of the impoverished for land. There are a wide range of researches that have documented land and ethnic squabbles in Kenya.³ The squabbles have always left reports on deaths and displacement of Kenyans.

From the ethnic clashes, in which Mungiki tried to protect the Gikuyu, the realization was that a great damage had been caused and many Gikuyus had been

displaced, rendering them landless. Mungiki had a large number of followers composed of the youth who had participated in the land and ethnic clashes. With the challenges of landlessness and homelessness on the one hand, and the strengths of a crowd on the other, Mungiki then transformed into an urban sect, moving into the capital city, Nairobi, in the late 1990s, violently demanding conformity to Gikuyu traditions (particularly targeting women). After their arrival in the city, with time they realized there were more open ways of gaining financial support. Emerging during Moi's repressive system as an expression of youth resistance and voice of moral ethnicity, Mungiki was co-opted and transformed into a deadly instrument of political tribalism and terror, as Kagwanja (2005) argues. The group agreed to be used by the KANU government.

Economic Ventures for Mungiki's Survival

One of the perceived reasons why Mungiki moved into the city is the economic challenge in the areas where ethnic clashes had been eminent in the early 1990s. Once they became an urban militia, they not only took over the *Matatu* (public service vans) industry, but also found their way into the informal settlements. Mungiki operates most extensively in Nairobi slums, where poverty and crime are pronounced. Before the ethnic clashes after the contested 2007 election in Kenya, Mungiki had organized itself to extort money from slum residents. Every resident in the slums had been paying a sum of money to the organization, in exchange for protection against theft and property damage. The gang also 'manned' public toilets and charged a fee for their use. These activities mark 'small' sources of money. Their major source of income is the *Matatu* industry. They collect money from drivers and conductors of public transport. It has been reported that those who have failed to honour Mungiki's demands have fallen victims of dreadful wrath. In May 2007, the *Matatu* operators raised an outcry complaining that Mungiki extorted most of their profits. They were forced to part with Kshs. 200 (\$2.5) for every trip made. After the outcry, Mungiki embarked upon a murderous campaign. Members of public would wake up to severed heads on poles, and body parts strewn in bushes in attacks blamed on Mungiki. This drew an armed response from Kenyan security forces, which stormed the Mathare area and killed 100 of its members. These killings did not deter the members of the sect from extorting money from *Matatu* owners. In January 2007, it had been estimated that the sect netted Kshs 90 million (approximately 1.3 million dollars) a day nationwide and this had sparked the May-June 2007 battles with *Matatu* operators (Reuters 2007).

Besides these sources, Mungiki also sources money from small businessmen and women. In Kihuro division in Central Kenya, the business operators would part with Kshs 50 while the homesteads would pay Kshs 100, said to be security fee. Those who did not comply with these demands were objects of violence

from the sect members. The sect members also killed policemen who interfered with their extortion of money from the public.

Mungiki members provide at a cost services of garbage collection, toilet cleaning, illegal power installation, and house security. Those who defy orders to pay face the risk of attack by group members. These are services that should freely be provided to the slum dwellers by the government.

Lately, the movement has been extorting money from peasant farmers in Central Province. They have also been forcefully recruiting youth to the movement and those who defy are subjected to the terror by the members. This was evident on 20 April 2009 when the gang slashed dead 29 young men in Kirinyaga and Nyeri East districts of Central Province, who had attacked and killed three sect members believed to have been forcefully recruiting young men from the said districts (*Daily Nation*, Nairobi 2009).

The structure of the movement and how the activities of the organization are managed are also mesmerizing. An interview with one of the sect ex-members indicated that the members themselves hardly benefit from the collections, although they may withhold some of the proceeds. The sect leaders benefit the most. They live in expensive mansions in Nairobi's affluent areas. The collections are also used to train more initiates and bail out the arrested sect members. The interviewee indicated that before one is fully initiated, he or she can ask for favours from the sect and they are granted. However, once they become sect members there are no more favours. One is supposed to serve the sect wholeheartedly. An ex-member of Mungiki, Mungai (not his real name), compared joining the group to 'stepping on a burning cooker and having a hot cooking plate placed on one's head'. The fear is that one cannot deviate from serving the group. On the other hand, involvement in these activities is risky because members are continuously on the run from the arm of law. Members are supposed to protect each other from the public (which is seen as an enemy), and in the process, the group uses terror to scare the public. The ex-member indicated that the initiated members are meant to support the leaders. To Mungai, some members are leaving the sect because they are used as tools to commit violence and to obtain money for the leaders. He gave an example of the leader Maina Njenga, who then was in prison, and said that his family lived like royalty in Komarock (an estate in the outskirts of Nairobi). He commented that ex-members lived under fear of attack from the current members. He also pointed out that the sect would never be completely eliminated because it had accumulated many followers over the years and even if the leadership wanted to dissolve the organization, the members might not yield because in one way or another, it was a source of livelihood for disfranchised Gikuyu youth.

Political Movement

The group has a flag of red, green, black, and white in that order from top to bottom; red symbolizes blood, black the African people, green the land, and white is the symbol for peace (Wamue 2001). They claim to spearhead African socialism and that their other professed goals are to fight bad governance and social ills facing society and to establish a just nation. They claim to have the Mau Mau blood – that the Mau Mau fought for land, freedom, and religion, and so do they. Wamue, however, emphasizes that the Mau Mau did not achieve all their goals. Further, Waruinge has argued that ‘Kenya today is controlled by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Americans, the British, and the Freemasons. It cannot initiate its own development. All these have promoted tribalism, nepotism and individualism, rather than socialism’ (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/mungiki>, accessed 19 May 2008).

With their ideology of socialism, it is expected that the members would take a keen interest in the less fortunate in the society, and fight the present social and economic crises in the country. Socialism developed in part in response to what were perceived as the failures of liberal individualism, emphasizing instead the values of social and economic equality and social cooperation. It saw social and economic inequality and exploitation as arising from the institutions of private property and capitalistic competition, for which liberal individualism was held to provide the ideological support. The socialist critique argues that the liberal individualist values of liberty and political democracy remain empty or merely formal if the material means of well-being are lacking or are so inequitably distributed that some individuals are totally dependent on others for their livelihood (Gould 1988). Socialist theory emphasizes the centrality of social and collective interest – whether as class interest or as human solidarity – as a motive for action. Thus socialist theory proposes social and economic equality and social cooperation as norms for the good society. Mungiki's wrath and vengeance as released on innocent citizenry, and especially the poor in the slums and peasant farmers in the village, however, did not indicate socialism.

From a different perspective, Kagwanja explains that KANU used Mungiki in 2002 to ensure that the ‘Uhuru Project’, in which Uhuru Kenyatta the son of Jomo Kenyatta (first President of independent Kenya) was Moi's (the then President) preferred presidential candidate. Waruinge went so far in his support to claim that Uhuru Kenyatta was himself a Mungiki. During this time the Mungiki also expanded their revenue-making activities. They controlled *Matatu* trade in Nairobi, supplied illegal electricity in the slums, and stepped into the space left by the failure of the police force in Kenya to provide private security. Unfortunately for Moi and Uhuru, Kibaki of National Alliance Rainbow Coalition won and as Kenya crossed the post-Moi era, Mungiki entered a new phase of becoming a fully-fledged criminal group. Less than a month after the elections, violence erupted

leading to deaths of over 40 people in different estates of Nairobi. This triggered the new government to ban the group in 2002 (Murunga 2008).

There were allegations at that time that Mungiki members had strong links to old KANU government and to some MPs in Kibaki's government. These allegations were given some support six years later in April 2008 when a group of politicians calling themselves elders from Central Kenya appeared publicly to demand the release of the National Director of Mungiki, Maina Njenga. This was after two other leaders of the movement, including Njenga's wife, had been shot dead by the police. Njenga Karume (former Minister of Defence), Elias Mbau (Member of Parliament of Maragua), Joseph Kamotho (former Member of Parliament of Mathioya), Jane Kihara (former Member of Parliament), and Nyaga (an ODM affiliate) all demanded the release of the leaders of the outlawed sect and initiation of dialogue between the government and the sect.⁴ The ex-member Mungai claimed that some of the political leaders were sect members. He noted that these leaders did not attend *keggano* (sect meetings) but always sent money to the leaders secretly. This enabled them to use the sect for their political ambitions when a need arose.

The demands for the release of leaders were made amidst fears that the sect members would revive the post-election violence that had ended in the month of March 2008, and which had led to ethnic cleansing in several parts of the country. At the end of March 2008, and up to mid-April, the sect members had paraded themselves as Kenya National Youth Alliance, and descendants of freedom fighters. Through their leader, the late Gitau Mwangi, who had been declared by Mungiki as the group's spokesperson (Waruinge and Njenga were in custody), they indicated that they were defending their rights which had been violated by the police, who were out to destroy them. Deceiving Kenyans by using different names for the movement, they named senior police officers such as Erick Kiraithe (a police spokesperson) and warned them of dire consequences if the police continued to kill the group members, who were then alleged to be over one million and spread in all parts of the country.

Following the demands of the politicians that the group leaders should be released, the public, through human rights groups and the media, raised questions on the existence of this group. How could such a group comprising mainly youths, most of whom were non-literate, display such organization, with calculated and targeted moves directed to either the government or the citizens? At one point, the sect leaders threatened to make publicly known their political organizers, who were alleged to be in the government. In April 2008, there were claims from Mungiki that they had been promised their leaders would be released but that the promises had been broken. This was the reason they had to release their anger on police and the fellow citizens as a way of communicating to the politicians who made the promises.

In September 2008, after four months of quiet, the group re-appeared in Nakuru, the fourth largest town in Kenya, and the headquarters of Rift Valley province. Parading as the Progress Party Alliance, the movement held a political rally in the town without government permit (in breach of the law that any public gathering, especially one political in nature, must acquire a prior permit), with the late Njuguna Gitau (a Mungiki spokesperson) addressing the public in the presence of the police.

In April 2009, it took a massacre by the Mungiki sect to awaken the government. As already noted, Mungiki youth killed 29 men in Kirinyaga and Nyeri East districts of Central Province in one night. From the massacre, the then police spokesperson through the media pointed out that the political leaders linked to Mungiki were to be named, and that the police had several files containing names of those affiliated to the group and who were yet to be approached and probed. The government argues that there is need to enhance community policing, but there are indicators that some police are members of the group. In the arrests made lately (4 November 2009) in Ndandora estate in Nairobi, one of the 200 suspects was an area chief (the administrator in charge of a division). The study having explained and given evidence that some of the political leaders are affiliated to the sect, it might be a challenge for the government officials to be trusted by the citizens and community members on issues concerning security in as far as Mungiki is concerned. This is a group that has existed for over three decades with the government doing very little to tame its terror activities. On the other hand, amidst the socio-economic challenges in Kenya, the youth have to survive in one way or another. For me, the activities of Mungiki are just an indicator of the hardships facing the youth in the country, and therefore, they manifest one way in which the disfranchised youths have tried to show the government there is need to deal with the problems facing the youth; otherwise crime will be inevitable.

Towards Understanding Youth Movements: Exonerating Mungiki?

Lonsdale (1986:130) argues that although youth rebellion was a feature of the Mau Mau war against British colonialism in the 1950s in Kenya, with the disintegration of the multi-ethnic nationalistic coalitions immediately after independence, youth identity like ethnicity was instrumentalized and transformed by patrimonial politics into a weapon in the hands of elders. Kagwanja (2005) explains that at the height of the Nyayo era (1982-1990) President Moi revitalized the KANU youth wing as a powerful instrument for monitoring and punishing public dissent and asserting his authority. Terror and extortion were perpetrated by party youth on commuter buses, taxis, and kiosk businesses supported by a patron-client relation in a classic demonstration of the state using criminal methods to defend the status quo. Kagwanja further argues that founded by the youth in

late 1980s, Mungiki could be seen as a true child of the age of resistance to Moi's patrimonial rule and a sign of the increasing use of generational politics as an idiom for the accountability of state power. Further, he underscores the fact that between 1991 and 1998, violence linked to tribal militias such as the Maasai Morans, Kalenjin warriors, Chinkororo of Kisii, Sungusungu in Kuria (who were later to extend their tentacles to Kisii land) and Kaya Mbombo of the Digos of Coast, claimed an estimated 3,000 lives and displaced nearly half a million Kenyans. These observations lead to the likely conclusion that Mungiki and related groups were founded to respond to the 'ills' of a state that could not protect the vulnerable in the society.

In a study of children in the drugs trade in Rio de Janeiro, Dowdney points to similarities between children involved in violence and child soldiers: they comprise armed factions, with military weapons that control territory, people and resources within the *favelas*, and operate within a command structure (2003:10). There are parallels with Mungiki, who changed from a rural militaristic group to an urban militia for economic gain, and use weapons but for a different cause. The group is financially stable and can manage members' activities. Once they emerge in a given locality, they take charge and freeze business activities and curtail people's movement.

The incident described above of the massacre of *Matatu* drivers and conductors in May-June 2007, came after President Mwai Kibaki had warned the sect members of dire consequences for unlawful acts. This was an indication that the sect members' demands from the public transport industry had been defied since most of those who suffered were drivers and *Matatu* conductors. It was also an indicator that the sect did not have any respect for the government leaders, not even the President.

In an effort to propagate their 'religion', Mungiki have publicly displayed their loathing for Christianity and other forms of religion that do not conform to the traditional religion that they advocate. For instance, in November 2006, Waruinge declared war on the Freemasons building, referring to the members as a devil worshipers. He observed that most of the members were politicians. A group of 400 sect members with match boxes and petrol in their hands had marched along Nyerere Road singing songs and occasionally sniffing tobacco on their way to the premises where the Freemason temple is located. They chanted, 'We will burn it down.... It promotes devil worship,' but were dispersed by police before they could torch the building. In retaliation, they burned down Muranga and Nyahururu police stations, which are miles away from Nairobi (<http://whow.kumekucha.com>, 16 August 2008). This is an indication that the group is coordinated in various parts of the country, and deterrence in one city does not indicate complete paralysis of the sect.

Mungiki have therefore devised mechanisms that are meant to benefit the sect as they seek to make known their demands to the government. It is unfortunate that their violence takes the lives and destroys property of innocent citizens, though to Mungiki this is meant to send a word to the government. The section that follows contrasts the activities of Mungiki with their ideology of socialism.

Activities Versus Ideology

The history of the formation of Mungiki as indicated by one of the leaders, Waruinge, was to fight for the rights of the poor and disenfranchised, and especially to propagate socialism in a state that encouraged individualism and capitalism after the introduction of structural adjustment programmes in Kenya. An observer of Mungiki activities would state otherwise about the objectives of the group. Take, for instance, the 2002 Kenyan general elections when, through their leader Waruinge, the movement agreed to be used by the KANU government to obtain the Gikuyu vote in support of Moi's chosen successor Uhuru Kenyatta. A group that had opposed the government since its inception was used by the same government as a campaigning tool.

Second, it is evident that, since 1996, when they became urban-based, Mungiki have been extorting money from slum dwellers. If their objectives were to propagate socialism and fight for justice, especially for the poor, why would they then demand money for security, garbage collection, sanitary fees, and for power installation from the poor slum dwellers? Why not target the rich in the community? Their brutal attacks on *Matatu* drivers and conductors, who happen to be employees, is questionable. Most of the *Matatu* operators in Nairobi are Gikuyus and the question is: if Mungiki have Gikuyu roots are in search of equality and are 'fighting for the descendants of freedom fighters', why then would they attack 'their own'? Why would they seek to provide security in central province villages, which are mainly occupied by the Gikuyu ethnic grouping? Kenya is made up of over 42 tribes and so the Gikuyu youth are not the only marginalized group.

Mungiki are wise to be hands-on in whatever is happening in the political arena. The knowledge of political issues has therefore enhanced their arguments, and they have subsequently used politics tactfully to argue out their cases. If it were about socialism *per se*, then the agenda would be a call to all to embrace their ideology, with a clearly laid down constitution and not ethnic kind of affiliation.

The group uses politicians and the politicians as well use them to promote their interests and achieve their ends. This is the reason why despite the killings of innocent Kenyans by Mungiki their 'sponsor' politicians would call for the release of the leaders of the outlawed sect. Following Maina Njenga's release from the jail, and his pledge that he would disband Mungiki and call on the political leaders that support the group to stop it so as to bring to an end the unlawful activities of the group, the eyes now are focused on the future of this sect.

Projected Future of Mungiki

Mungiki is a group that emulates the Mau Mau, though with a different objective. The Mau Mau was purposely fighting for independence. Mungiki is not. It is evident from the above discussion that Mungiki's actions in the Kenya public space are meant to enable them survive economically. However, the problems of land, poverty and unemployment in Kenya are not likely to be solved in the near future. They continue to affect the youth more than any other group. Mungiki, and any other similar groups, such as the Kisii vigilante groups, and Sabaot Land Defence groups that are formed to enable the members negotiate their livelihoods, are likely to persist for long in the country. Apart from being well established in terms of numbers, which are relatively well spread in three of the most populated Kenyan provinces, Mungiki has well-controlled and reliable sources of income. When all this added to the advantage of political support, Mungiki emerges as a group that is likely to remain strong.

Mungiki seems to be a well-organized group with focused leaders who know the political situation, and who have used religion to conceal their affiliation to the group. This kind of coordination makes it difficult for the country's security agencies to completely wipe out the movement. From the government's perspective, it will take a strong-willed leader to completely crack Mungiki and stop the terror that this group wreaks on the general public. It is also noted that the strategies of Mungiki cannot be used to enhance socialism. The Marxian principle proposes, and as further propounded by Geras (1994), that 'the liberation of the working class must be won by the working class'. Any great decisive movement must originate not in the initiative of a handful of leaders, but in the conviction and the solidarity of the masses. It must be made from the depth, out of the self-conscious efforts of an active politically vigorous populace.

Conclusion

Mungiki is just one example of youth gangs that have violated the rights of citizens through unlawful activities. This is, however, linked to the socio-economic challenges that most youth in developing countries face. The issue here is not to justify their misdemeanour, but to call for a deeper insight and for more research on related groups. A variety of theoretical and methodological problems have hindered the development of adequate knowledge about youth sects and movements. Variables and categories in such studies have not been clearly defined and distinguished. There has been a failure to distinguish norms and behaviours, sub-cultures and gangs, gangs and delinquent groups, different ethnic movements' patterns, and variability in their problems and patterns in different cities over time (Irving 1990). Such groups may be an endemic feature of urban culture that varies over time in its form, social meaning, and anti-social character. Observational studies, on the other hand, have been time-limited. Conspicuously absent have

been studies of socialization of youth gangs compared with other non-youth gangs or other sub-cultures or groups. These are possible avenues of constructive research on related groups or groups with characteristics that are similar to Mungiki's.

Notes

1. Waruinge is believed to be the co-founder of Mungiki. History indicates that he founded the group with Maina Njenga (the national director, who after his jail term is now claiming to have seen the light and endeavours to reform Mungiki), when they were young boys.
2. An interview with Njeru (not his real name) an ex-Mungiki sect member on 29 November 2008, who indicated that he is living in fear after he deviated from the group because the members of the group might 'come for his head' any day.
3. Klopp 2002; Odhiambo 2003; Turner and Brownhill 2001; Lynch 2006. In the presentation of research findings, all these researches acknowledge that the land clashes faced in most parts of the Rift Valley are politically instigated, or happen with full knowledge of political leaders. The areas affected by these clashes have been used as grounds to appropriate political ambitions and at times by some political leaders to seek revenge. It is also realized that land and related ethnic clashes started in the Rift Valley especially before the very first multi-party elections. The need for Moi together with his allies too stay in power saw the introduction of the *Majimbo* system, which led to ethnic divisions and squabbles over land. All these issues are well articulated by the noted scholars and the government is also aware of such, yet very little is done to rectify the situation.
4. Caroline Mutoko & Maina Kiai, Oral Interview about Mungiki on Kiss 100, FM Radio, on 30 April 2008.

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