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**Terror, Religion, or Socialism?: The Faces of *MŪngĩkĩ* Sect in
The Kenyan Public Space**

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Abstract

This paper examines how Mũngiki members have used the sect in the public space as a tool of emancipation. In the paper I argue that Mũngiki has been using different faces in terms of religion, names, and approaches, to appear in the public and appropriate their goals. Though their initial goal was to propagate socialism, the mandate of Mũngiki in the Kenyan Public space has been perceived as that of a terror group. Their terror activities in most occasions have happened with great oversight from the government and the question that lingers in the minds of many is whether the government is in support of the movement or just overwhelmed by the Mũngiki masses. The findings of the study on the one hand indicate that though true 'Word' according to most religions is meant to propagate peaceful and abundant life, especially among the poor, the 'gospel' of Mũngiki instills fear and pain to people, both rich and poor for various reasons. On the other hand, if Mũngiki is a social movement designed to proliferate socialism among the poor citizenry, then their approach is not by any means approved, following the tenets of socialism theories. Being a very stable religious/social and political movement, the fear of many Kenyans is that the future of the group still looks bright, and the lives of many Kenyans continue to be in danger.

Introduction

The socio-economic challenge in most African countries is that of sustaining the youth, in especially providing for quality education, employment opportunities, medical/health care, and in general, secure livelihoods. This challenge has prompted formation of protest youth movements in different African countries. It is observed that the dynamic process of protest and reform is nascent in Africa (Bratton & Walle, 1996:197). The protest are by different groups and are undertaken for different goals. Some of the protest groups have used religious background to hoodwink the public, especially of their activities. In Africa, it is also notable that the religious phenomenon has occupied central position of people's lives, thoughts and institutions. This fact is depicted by the wide occurrence/formation of diverse religious groups/denominations. These offshoots in Africa are evident in both Christianity and African Traditional Religions. In Kenya the diversity has largely been exemplified by the existence of New Religious Movements. Some of these movements have been classified as radical religio-political movements. *Mũngiki* movement falls within this category. It is a religion/movement largely associated with young and energetic Kikuyu males (Kikuyu is the largest ethnic group in Kenya). A mention of this movement to the non-members brings fear, terror and hatred. This is because it is associated with death. '*Mũngiki*', as the faithfuls of the religion are

referred to, slash with machetes not to punish but to kill. The members take oaths not to spare anyone who does not comply with the doctrines and demands of their 'religion'. They have used this organization to manipulate the government officials to listen to their pleas. This has more often than not found the movement at longer ends with the arm of law. IT has in many occasions been disqualified as a civil organization aimed at propagating socialism, especially for the oppressed masses. As observed by Bratton and Walle (1996:199), a civil society must be adequately organized into primary associations, sharing a degree of consensus on a political agenda and democratic procedures, and a new elite must arise "that arouses a depresses and previously leaderless social group into a concerted action". In the absence of such social organization norms and leaders, isolated efforts from below or constitutional reforms are unlikely to amount to lasting regime.

The paper therefore discusses the origin of this religious movement by examining its history and characteristics which qualifies the religion to be a radical sect/movement. The study therefore answers questions such as: Who are the *Mũngiki*? What kinds of rituals are performed by the members of *Mungiki*? Do the rituals warrant *Mungiki* to be a true religion? What are the many faces of the movement? How has *Mũngiki* affected the security of Kenyans? What are the political implications of this sect to the Kenyan government? How has the Kenyan government indirectly met their demands through their unlawful acts? What is the Government's stand about this sect? What is the future of *Mũngiki*?

Formation and Spread of *Mũngiki*

In the early 1959, in Kenya's Central Province, groups of men would knock on people's front doors in the dead of night. Asked who it was, they would identify themselves as "it is us" and everyone would understand that a Mau Mau unit was at the door. Today some people argue that the name *Mũngiki*, taken by a controversial sect whose members are from the Gikuyu community is derived from the words *Muingi ki-* meaning, "we are the public" or in relation to Mau Mau movement, "it is us" (Githongo, 2000). Wamue (1999) notes that *Mungiki* is a Gikuyu word that is derived from the word "Muingi" which means masses. *Mũngiki* is an outlawed, quasi-political/religious cult in Kenya. According to one of *Mũngiki*'s founders, the group began in the late 1980's as a local militia in the highlands of Kenya to protect the Kikuyu farmers in disputes over land with Maasai and with forces loyal to the government which was dominated by the Kalenjin tribe at the time. This religio-political movement is composed mainly of youth of Kikuyu origin, aged 18-40. When the group was formed,

Mungiki were not simply a militia; they took up the Kikuyu ideas of statehood and purity and rejected Christianity and neocolonial influences on the country. In so doing, they resembled the Mau Mau movement that played such a crucial role in the independence struggle. Waruinge, one of the founders of the group claimed: “We have Mau Mau blood in us and our objectives are similar. The Mau Mau fought for land, freedom and religion...so do we”. Like the Mau Mau, the *Mungiki* rely on oaths to ensure loyalty among the group members (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mungiki>).

The history of the formation of this movement indicates that in the first Kenyan multi-party elections of 1992, Mr. Moi used militias to destabilize three provinces namely Rift Valley, Nyanza and Western Kenya. This led to ethnic clashes that left many dead and thousands displaced. Most of those forming the *Mungiki* movement were therefore the internally displaced after the 1992 multiparty general elections. In the mid 1990s, the group had migrated into Nairobi with the acceptance of the government under Daniel arap Moi, Kenya's second President. They therefore changed from a rural religious sect with political overtones into an urban militia. They began to dominate the matatu (public transport) industry in Nairobi, by dividing themselves into cell structures of 50 members-a-cell. 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. Inevitably, the group's actions led to involvement with politicians eager for political support from masses. In defining the history of this group, Wamue (1999) points out that *Mungiki* strongly resents accumulation of massive wealth by a few Kenyans, especially those in the political ranks. Of late however, the leaders of this cult seem to occupy mansions in the most expensive estates of Nairobi. It is also evident that they are being used by politicians to articulate their policies as the paper reveals later.

It is observed that, initially, the aim of the *Mungiki* was to sensitize people against the government which they accused of starting and fuelling ethnic clashes, that led to displacement of most *Mungiki* members. According to Waruinge, *Mungiki* therefore operated as a defense force against the predominantly ethnically Kalenjin Militias that attacked Kikuyu settlements. This raises queries over their allegations that they are a religious group. Wamue posits that a discussion with a *Mungiki* member hardly carries on for five minutes without spontaneously deviating into the politics of contemporary Kenya. Currently, the movements activities display much of political and socio-economic involvements than religious

endeavours. The sect through its political and social-economic upheavals, and specifically the threat it poses to the general security for the public has elicited condemnation from religious bodies, private organizations, the government, and the public at large. Of late, it is amazing how some politicians have come out publicly to defend this movement despite the humiliation, suffering and fear it has instilled on Kenyans both in the rural and urban dwellings.

Against this backdrop, that the paper seeks to address the different faces of this quasi-political/religious sect in Kenya's public space. This is in a bid to answer the many questions that linger on peoples minds; whether this is a political, or a religious movement. The paper also seeks to address questions such as: Are the actions of *Mungiki* in an effort to achieve their objectives are justified? and whether or not the group has a future in the Kenya public space.

Setting and Methods

Initially the author had suggested to do a field survey and investigate on the activities of *Mungiki* in Nairobi to elicit data for this paper. However in the months of March, April and May 2008 *Mungiki* members emerged from their hideout and spoke out rightly, expressing their views and thoughts through television and radio shows, via interviews with Kenyan journalists. The interviews directly touched on the topic of research and subsequently the researcher followed this up through the radio, T.V., internet and newspapers. These collections provided ample data for the study. Relevant literature was also reviewed to strengthen the theoretical framing of the paper.

Theoretical Orientation from Objectives of *Mungiki*

Ngugi Waruinge, one of the main founders of *Mungiki* observes that the mandate of the movement is to propagate socialism and denounce capitalism in the Kenyan state which has led to social and economic disparities. To Waruinge, the aim of the movement is to ensure democracy and freedom, especially for the oppressed masses. As Geras (1994:69) observes, it has been common for socialists to be critical of the limitations of the existing 'liberal' or 'bourgeois' democracies. This has been the case for *Mungiki*. However, it has also been noted, in the words of Geras, that;

“The process of socialism has been thought of in different ways. To some, it is a continuity with the major institutions of existing democracy, as a

consolidation or enlargement with these. Others have viewed it rather as discontinuous with them, as a sharp punctual break in an institutional progression”.

Wamue (1999) indicates that the main objective of the *Mungiki* is to unite and mobilize the Kenyan masses to fight against the yoke of mental slavery, which they claim was introduced by Christianity and Colonization. To Wamue, the liberation of the masses from mental captivity must come through a reversion to indigenous way of life, in particular culture and religion that all ethnic groups in Kenya should denounce foreign faiths, especially Christianity and revert to traditional beliefs.

The relationship between socialism and democracy has been a complex and contested one. To large numbers of socialists, it was axiomatic that their project, both the goal of socialism and movement for it, must be democratic. However some of the movements that claim to be propagating socialism like the *Mungiki* are not democratic. This is bad, not only for socialism but also for democracy. *Mungiki* members strip women who wear trousers and miniskirts naked in the public and force them to be circumcised. When these actions were seriously attacked by human rights activists in June 2007, the group wore another face of religiosity and changed their tactic which helped in their masquerade, only to re-appear later as a forceful group in the public. They focused on release of their comrades from police cells and subsequently attacked several of the stations.

This paper, through an examination of the different faces of *Mungiki*, disqualifies the group as a formal social movement that is aimed at liberating the masses from the oppression of the bourgeois. The paper explores strategies of public space actors as a way of understanding *Mungiki*'s twisted and varied moves which help them to evade the government and appropriate their goals to the public.

***Mungiki*: A Religious Sect?**

The absence of fear, the dare-devil spirit in its members and the sense of community the movement's communal affairs are appealing to the masses of disillusioned, rootless, unemployed and displaced youths who are out of school or just in the streets. The *Mungiki* legend, according to Makokha (2002), has grown out of the mysterious and little understood ideology and theology of the group. Its members have a god on Mount Kenya, whom they worship and pray to. So far no written doctrines about Mungiki as a religious sect have been

availed to the public but they publicly advocate a return to “African traditions”. This return is propagated by their public attacks on “evils” introduced by colonialism and Christianity such as condemnation and elimination of inappropriate dressing codes (Women wearing trousers), and lobbying for traditional practices, including female circumcision. To *Mũngiki*, this eliminates social evils such as prostitution and moral decay, that make Ngai (their god) angry. *Kigongoona* (spirituality) according to *Mũngiki* was lost with the coming of colonialists and introduction of Christianity in Kenya. To them, Christianity has therefore led to defilement of the whole country leading the many evident social, economic and political problems in the country. To *Mũngiki*, Christianity is the sole reason for the eminent divisions among the Agikuyu. In response to this, *Mũngiki* want all Kenyans to adopt one religion and worship in the manner of their forefathers (Wamue, 1999). To Githongo (2000) *Mũngiki* advocates cultural and religious revival and this has alarmed church leaders and fervent Christians.

Makokha (2000) indicates that the movement could actually be religious and may just be stumbling over what doctrine to follow. This he justifies by explaining that Christianity took nearly 300 years to fashion with the polish and coming at the council of Nicaea in 325 AD. Makokha’s views could however be challenged by the awkward religious affiliations of the Mungiki members. They pray as they face Mount Kenya which they believe to be the home of their God known as *Ngai*. They baptize new members in a river and their holy communion is tobacco-sniffing. Their hair style is that of Mau Mau dread locks. Their dress code is African regalia. The origin of the sect is shrouded in mystery and even as they take the oaths, the group members promise not to reveal their secrets at any given time (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/Africa/2745421.stm>). New initiates have to go through these rituals, and subsequently, becomes the culture to be followed by the members. Their faithfulness to their religiosity has however been determined by the political and security circumstances. This implies that they change their religious affiliations at different times to camouflage their identities.

In early 2000, many of the *Mũngiki* members converted to Islam, including their leader Ndura Waruinge, who was named Ibrahim Ndura Waruinge (Panafrican News Agency, 3 September 2000). However it was realized that this was in a bid to hoodwink the government. In December 2000, Waruinge and 50 sect members attended a Church service before being arrested, and this was a clear act of double standards which met great criticism from Sheikh Banda who pointed out that Islam would not allow a few people to play around pretending to

be converts. A few days after the incident Waruinge's release from police cells was followed by his proclamation that he was saved and he soon started his own church. This did not last for long because in 2004 when Raila expressed his desire to become Kenya's President in 2007, Waruinge took him head-on and declared that he was going to challenge Raila in his Langata constituency, as the member of parliament for Langata constituency. Careless public utterances led to his arrest and detainment in Kamiti maximum prison.

Despite the double standards depicted by *Mũngiki* members in their religious affiliations, there are rituals performed, and religious practices used by *Mũngiki* members which according to Smart's (1968) observations would warrant *Mũngiki* a religious sect. Smart observes that there are six dimensions which can be used to explain existence of a religion. They include: Myths, rituals, social institutions, doctrines, ethical teachings and religious experiences. All these dimensions are part and parcel of the sect. They baptize their converts and give them teachings related to the sect. The converts take oaths and swear by saying, "May I die if I reveal our secrets". They also practice rituals such as offering of sacrifices, sniffing of tobacco, praying while facing Mount Kenya, and keeping of unshaven hair (dreadlocks). Their religious teachings as already noted advocate for a return to the traditional religion, and their icon dress code is African. Some of them have been spotted wearing animal skins. Their teachings are however in conflict with the public's views. The Kenya women's political caucus described *Mũngiki* actions as dehumanizing and a gross violation of women's human rights. It was observed "we note with deep concern that the *Mũngiki* sect has continuously engaged in primitive, barbaric and heinous activities with impunity. While members for *Mũngiki* should enjoy the freedom of association they must however, not be allowed to terrorize and improve their will on innocent members of society. (The Nation, 24 October 2007). These sentiments were aired by executive secretary of federation of women lawyers (FIDA) after members of the sect had attacked and harassed women in Kayole, Nairobi by stripping them off their trousers and threatened to circumcise them in public. It is therefore confusing to most members of the public if *Mũngiki* is a purely religious sect since their actions in the public space do not correspond to most of other religious ethical teachings.

Economic Ventures and Survival of the *Mũngiki*

Mũngiki operates most extensively in Mathare, Nairobi's second largest slum where poverty and crime are pronounced. Before the ethnic clashes following the contested 2007 election

results in Kenya, the cartel had organized itself to extort money from Mathare residents. Every resident of the slum 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 use of the facilities. 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 “devilish” wrath. In May 2007, the matatu operators raised an outcry in which *Mungiki* extorted most off their profits. They were forced to part with Kshs. 200 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 who stormed the Mathare area and killed 100 of its members. These killings did not deter the members of this sect from extorting money from Matatu owners. In January 2007, it had been estimated that the sect netted Kshs. 90 million, (approximately over 1.3 million dollars) a day nationwide and this had sparked the May-June 2007 battles with Matatu operators (Reuters, 1 June, 2007).

Besides these sources, *Mungiki* also sources money from small business men/women. In Kihuro division in Central Kenya, the business operators would part with Kshs. 50 while the homesteads would pay Kshs. 100, allegedly said to be security fee. Those who did not comply with these demands were objects of wrath from the sect members. The sect members also killed policemen who interfered with their planned cartels of extorting money from the public. ([http://www.religionnewblog.com/18540/mungiki animals](http://www.religionnewblog.com/18540/mungiki%20animals)). The picture below depicts *Mungiki* members armed with machetes and buttons which they use to terrorize their target groups. The members openly proclaim that their aim is to slice to kill any of their enemies/rivals (watch their confessions and terror activities on [http://www.youtube.com/watch,v=ogjcd+Qr4rq](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogjcd+Qr4rq)).

One of the objectives of *Mungiki* when it was formed was to fight for equality and economic stability for the less fortunate in the society. With their socialism ideology, it is expected that the members should be keen on taking care of the less fortunate in the society. This is because socialism developed in part in response to what were perceived as the failings of liberal individualism. It emphasized 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 argued that the liberal individualist values of liberty and political democracy remains 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 fro their livelihood (Gould, 1988:6). 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. These precepts have been aired out by some of the *Mungiki* leaders. It is however amazing how they articulate this matters in the society. The money obtained from their activities in the public only benefit a few...not the non-members. The terror actions are dreaded by the members of the public, and those who have at any point faced the wrath of the members always have regretted memories from the terror of *Mungiki*.

Picture 1: Members of the outlawed *Mungiki* sect displaying their tools of terror



It
not

has
been

reported that *Mungiki* members are criminal thieves or rapists. Their means of acquiring money are known to be mainly, from the matatu industry, garbage collection, provision of security to homesteads and houses in specific areas in town. They use crude means to ensure that they obtain money from there sectors though they do not violently steal.

Political Involvement

In as much as there are aspects that prompt the argument that *Mungiki* is a religious cult/movement, it is evident that this is a political organization. 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, land and white is the symbol for peace (Wamue, 1999). Waruinge notes that “our aim is to spearhead African socialism. We have a duty to mobilize and bring economical, political and social changes in society so that masses can control their destiny. Their other goals are to fight bad governance and social ills facing the society and to establish a just nation. Waruinge also notes, “we have the Mau Mau blood in us and our objectives are similar. The Mau Mau fought for land, freedom, and religion.... and so do we”. He however states that the Mau Mau did not achieve all their goals. “Kenya today is controlled by international monetary fund, the World Bank, and the Americans, the British and the Freemasons. It cannot initiate its own development. All these have promoted tribalism, nepotism and individualisms, rather the socialism”. Their socialism theory is therefore meant to benefit the masses, and fight the present social and economic crises in the country (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/mungiki>). However, many people would confidently assert that this is just an ideology to hoodwink the public because the group fights for their own good and not to help the poor masses since *Mungiki* extorts money even from the less fortunate in the society.

Though the initial initiation of the group points out that it was meant to seek justice for the disfranchised in the society, especially after the 1992 ethnic clashes, this is proved to have later changed and the group accepted to be used by the KANU government. For instance in 2002 when Moi the KANU leader and then the Kenyan President felt that he was losing power, he saw *Mungiki* as a tool he could use to fracture the Kikuyu vote in support of his chosen successor Uhuru Kenyatta. He used the *Mungiki* to harass opposition supporters. So the *Mungiki*, a group formed to defend itself against government violence became co-opted by the very government it opposed. Waruinge went too 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. In 2002, after Mwai Kibaki came to power, the gang sensed that with Moi’s patronage system no longer supporting the *Mungiki*, they could challenge the new system. Less than a month after the elections, violence erupted leading to deaths over 40 people in

different estates of Nairobi. This triggered the new government to ban the group in 2002 (<http://www.k:1 who are the Mungiki -Rss English.htm>).

The allegations at that time (2002), that *Mungiki* members had strong links to old KANU government and some MPs in Kibaki's government were evidenced later after six years 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 some other two leaders of the movement had been gunned down and shot dead by the police, including Njenga's wife. The leaders comprising of Njenga Karume (former minister of defense), 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) demanded release of the leaders of the out-lawed sect and initiation of dialogue between the government and the sect (Mutoko and Kiai, 10 April 2008).

These demands were made amidst fears that the sect members would revive chaos that had ended after the post election violence in Kenya in the month of March, 2008, which had led to ethnic cleansing. At the end of March, and up to Mid April, 2008 the sect members had paraded themselves as National Youth Alliance who claimed that they were "*vizazi vya wapiganiaji uhuru*"-The descendants of freedom fighters, through their leader Gitau Mwangi (Waruinge and Njenga Were in custody), and indicated that they were defending their rights which had been violated by the police "*Jeshi la Kwekwe*" which was out to finish them. Hoodwinking Kenyans by using different names for the movement, they named Senior police officers such as Erick Kiraithe (police spokes person) and warning them of dire consequences if the police continued to kill the group members alleged to be over 500,000 and spread in all parts of the country.

Amidst political chaos of December through February 2008 instigated by the contested presidential election results, the sect members took advantage of the cleared streets of the Capital city, Nairobi and stormed the city protesting the arrest of their leaders Waruinge and Maina. The numbers were over-whelming and it was not clear if they had the support of the police, or the police force could not counter the masses. Through Gitau, the group described itself as disfranchised outcasts of the society, who are poor and therefore need to survive by fighting for their rights and their comrades who were in custody. It is evident that with the kind of money this group collects from the public, they can organize themselves into a kind of

a warfare group by recruiting more jobless and poor youth into their militia. They freely give information about their objectives to journalists and when war against them intensifies, they melt into shadows, with the government unable to know their hideouts. It is feared that once they disappear from the public space, this becomes an opportunity for them to meet and strengthen their cartel, only to emerge in the unawareness of the public to remind Kenyans that they exist with great might.

Following the utterances of the noted politicians that the group leaders should be released, the public rose questions on the existence of this group. How can such a huge group comprised of mainly youths, most of whom are non-literate display such a kind of an organized and well led group, with calculated and targeted moves directed to either the government or the citizens? At one point, the sect leaders threatened to make publicly known of their political organizers, who were alleged to be in the government. This might have just been an allegation that the group is supported as well as supports political leaders, but the structure of the group nearly affirms an existence of politicians' involvement. It is almost vivid than *Mungiki's* threats to the politicians that they use them and *Mungiki* uses the politicians to meet their objectives. In April 2008, there were confessions by *Mungiki* leaders that they had been promised that their readers would be released but the promises had been broken, the reason they had to avenge their anger on police and the fellow citizens as a way of communicating to the politicians who made the promises.

A deeper probing into this matter showed that the leaders were arrested not because they are sect members but because at the time of the arrests, they had dangerous weapons. It is evident that for a magistrate to convict a *Mungiki* sect convict, the police must prove their case beyond any reasonable doubt. This has been very difficult because the argument that the suspects were caught sniffing tobacco or wearing dread locks or African dress codes is not a crime that warrants conviction. It is not *Mungiki* alone who sniff tobacco, many people do and this is not illegal, it is equally not unlawful to dress in traditional regalia and carry such items like fly whisk, the first Kenyan president Mzee Jomo Kenyatta had such as his trade mark but was not a *Mungiki*. In such a backdrop, it becomes very difficult to incriminate the sect members since most of their practices, including female circumcision are in line with Kikuyu traditions. The characteristics given so far in the courts rhymes with that of a pedigree and conservative traditionalist (The Standard, 27 November 2006). The sect members who have been arrested in these acts have always been freed due to lack of incriminating evidence. This

has also affected police operations due to the failure of the police officers to prove the sect members guilty in the courts of law.

In September 2008 after four months of quietness, the group re-appeared in Nakuru, the 4th largest town in Kenya, and the headquarters of Rift Valley province. Parading as the Progress Party Alliance (PPA), the movement held a political rally in the town without permit with the KNA leader Njuguna Gitau addressing the public in the presence of the police who made no single arrest of the sect members (remember that KNA had appeared in March 2008 in the streets of Nairobi to demand the release of their leaders and no arrests had been made). This re-affirmed that *Mungiki*, KNA and PPA are one and the same. This complete metamorphosis of the group warrants it opportunities to camouflage and escape the arm of the law. Their tactics remain very unpredictable.

Threats Posed by *Mungiki* to the General Kenyan public

Mungiki members are spread in most parts of the country. Once a need arises (to articulate their ideas by instilling fear to the public through fights in a given area), they join forces with their “brothers” in that region. It is estimated that there are over 500,000 *Mungiki* members. They are financially stable and can manage their activities. Once they emerge in a given locality, they take charge and freeze business activities and curtail people’s movement. Their weapon is the machete. They mutilate, circumcise, strip women naked and kill (watch their activities on, <http://www.youtube.com/watch,v=ogjcdf>).

The past happenings from *Mungiki*’s activities are evident that it is a group that makes known their demand by terrorizing the general public. So far their wrath has mainly been faced by Matatu owners, drivers and conductors. In May-June 2007 in a grisly twist of events after President Mwai Kibaki had warned the sect members of dire consequences through lawful acts, villagers in Central Kenya found severed heads placed on poles and body parts scattered in bushes in a Mungiki attack (Reuters, 1 June 2007). This was an indication that the sect members’ demands from the public transport industry had been defied since most of those who suffered the wrath were drivers and Matatu conductors.

Besides the Matatu business women have been another target of this outlawed sect. Religiously, they have argued that the Kenyan Society has abandoned circumcision of women, which to them, encourages prostitution. In addition, to *Mungiki*, women have aped

western culture and instead of wearing respectable clothing are parading themselves in the streets as prostitutes with “inappropriate clothing”. This has defiled the Kenyan society. For this reason, God is angry, and subsequently *Mungiki* exist to instill the sense of African norms and values to Kenyans, especially women. They have in different occasions stripped women on the streets naked, and circumcised some of them. They get energy to do so from their female recruits, who accept to be circumcised as one of the requirements of the sect members. So far there are no rape cases reported from the group’s terror activities.

In an effort to propagate their “religion”, *Mungiki* have publicly displayed their detest for Christianity and other forms of religiosity that do not conform to their traditional religion that they advocate for. For instance, in Nov. 2006, Mr. 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 freemasons is located. They chanted “we will burn it down.... It promotes devil worship”, but were dispersed by police force before torching the building. Their fury was released on Muranga and Nyahururu police stations which are miles away from Nairobi. This is a clear indication that the group is well coordinated in various parts of the country, and deterrence on one city does not indicate complete paralysis of the sect. Waruinge was later to issue a statement about the burning of freemasons that “it is only a matter of time. The hall must go... they must be destroyed” (<http://whow.kumekucha.com>).

Mungiki members have also been a constant threat to the Kenyan slums, where most of them live. They give services for garbage collection, toilet cleaning, illegal power installation and house security, and of course at a cost. Those who defy orders to pay face the risk of attack by group members. It is therefore in their power to determine who survives in the slums and who does not.

The activities of *Mungiki* in the public realm are therefore meant to instill fear to the general Kenyan citizenry. They have devised mechanisms that are meant to benefit their members as they seek to make known of their demands to the government. It is unfortunate that their fury falls on the innocent Kenyans or property of innocent citizens, though to them (*Mungiki*) this is meant to send a word to the government. Argumentatively, there is more than meets the

eye about the activities of this sect. I hereby look at the other side of the coin and try to analyze the forces of Mungiki.

Mungiki through an Observer's Lenses

The history on the formation of *Mungiki* shows that it was founded by the poor, uneducated, unemployed, and homeless/landless youths. As indicated by one of the leaders-Waruinge-their intention was to fight for their rights, and especially propagate socialism in a state that encouraged individualism and capitalism over the years. An observer of *Mungiki* activities would state otherwise about the objectives of the group. Take for instance the 2002 Kenyan general elections; through their leader Waruinge, the movement accepted to be used by the KANU government to crack the Kikuyu vote in support of Moi's chosen successor Uhuru Kenyatta. Of course Uhuru did not win the election. The campaigns propagated by *Mungiki*, especially through attacks to the non-supporters of Uhuru, depict a double standard. A group that had opposed the government since its inception, were used by the same government as a campaigning tool.

Secondly, it is evident that, since 1996 when they became urban-based, *Mungiki* have been extorting money from slum dwellers. If their objectives are to propagate socialism and fight for justice, especially for the poor, why would they then demand money for security, garbage collection, sanitary fee, and for power installation from the poor slum dwellers? In their survival tactics, why would they not target the rich in the community? Their brutal attack to Matatu drivers and conductors, who happen to be employees, is questionable. Most of the Matatu operators in Nairobi are Kikuyu's and the question is, if *Mungiki*, having Kikuyu roots, are in search of equality, "fighting for the descendants of freedom fighters", why then would they attack poor Matatu operators, who are Kikuyu? Why would they seek to provide security in central province villages, which are mainly occupied by the Kikuyu ethnic grouping?

Observably, these are clear indications of criminality. Being a poor lot, *Mungiki* has used false ideologies and "constitutions" to appropriate their criminal activities aimed at obtaining money from the innocent citizens. They 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 clearly laid constitution. This is not the case.

For *Mungiki* to claim that they were formed by Ngai (Waruinge's observation) and that their mandate is to propagate the true religion to Kenyans is all questionable. Most world religions advocate for peaceful co-existence unlike *Mungiki's* terror on those who do not conform to their "religious" demands. They circumcise and strip women naked with a justification that these acts enhance African norms and values. They sniff tobacco which is believed to be their holy communion and chant heroic songs which criticize the existing political leadership. It is however amazing that through these critiques they time and again identify with the same politicians. A peripheral observer would acknowledge that the group uses politicians and the politicians as well use them for their achievements. This is the reason us to why, despite the killings of innocent Kenyans by *Mungiki*, their "sponsor" politicians would call for the release of the leaders of the out-lawed sect. This indicates that the group is a well established cartel that some politicians have been using to achieve their ambitions.

The Future of Mungiki

Youth groups, especially those affiliated to politicians have, in most African countries existed as tools, to be used for political ambitions. This has so far been evident in countries like Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zaire, among others. In countries where these groups have been banned, they have later revived as similar movements, with different names, such as vigilante groups, to extort the public and ensure their survival. *Mungiki* is a group that emulates Mau Mau, though with a different objective (as opposed to the claim of the leaders-Waruinge-that they have same objectives as the Mau Mau). The Mau Mau were purposely fighting for independence. *Mungiki* are not. It is evident from the above discussion that *Mungiki's* actions in the Kenya public space are meant to enable them survive economically, as they ensure that people are aware of their existence. The problems of land, poverty and unemployment in Kenya are not likely to be solved in the near future. This continues to squarely affect the youth more than any other group in the Kenyan society. Subsequently, it is projected that *Mungiki*, and any other similar groups, such as the Kisii vigilante groups, and Sabaot Land Defense groups that are formed to extort money from the public as well as fight to acquire land, are bound to persist for long in the country. Apart from being a well established group in terms of numbers which are relatively well spread in the country with a strong base in central and Nairobi Provinces, *Mungiki* has well controlled and reliable sources of income,

especially the matatu trade and their economic activities in the slums. They also seem to have political support. These advantages are thought to be a strong base of support for the future of *Mungiki*. The sect's different faces of for instance, KNA PPA, NYA and the religious affiliations have also been used to hoodwink the law enforcers. It is also difficult to convict a sect member because their practices are linked to Kikuyu traditions, and it is not unlawful to practice one's tradition.

Mungiki seems to be a well controlled group with focused leaders who know the political situation just too well. Inception into the group entails baptism and oath taking. They seem to have secrets that members vow not ever to reveal to the public. This kind of coordination makes it difficult for the country's law forces to reach to the bottom of *Mungiki's* ideology. In addition, the double standards by some politicians about the sect makes the difficult for the police to appropriately deal with *Mungiki*. It is therefore projected that *Mungiki's* disappearance from the Kenyan public realm might not be in the near future. The implication for this projection is that Kenyans will continue to suffer in the merciless hands of *Mungiki* since every time they emerge from their shadows, blood must be shed and property must be destroyed. As for the government, it will take a strong-willed leader to completely crack *Mungiki* and stop the terror and fear that this group poses to the general public. It is however noted that the strategies of *Mungiki* cannot be used to enhance socialism. Just as Marxian principle proposes, "the liberation of the working class must be won by the working class" (Geras, 1994:72). 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. As Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919) once exerted, "rebuilding and transformation cannot be decreed by some authority, commission or parliament; they can only be undertaken and carried out by the mass itself". For *Mungiki* to source its power from governments leaders, their so called 'socialism' goals, which so far have not been acknowledged by the poor masses, may never take root. A strong willed leader would therefore use this loophole to crack down the movement, or advice the sect members for the better.

Conclusion

The paper has examined ways in which *Mũngiki* has used the public space to appropriate their unlawful activities. It has been argued that the group enjoys a wide range of opportunities as they seek to camouflage and propagate their objectives to the general public, sometimes with support from political leaders, and at other times, with the government's oversight and assumptions about the capabilities of the group. It has been noted that *Mũngiki* has used religion as a tool to hide their identities. By use of Kikuyu traditional way of life, it becomes difficult to incriminate the sect members in the courts of law, and as such those arrested are in most cases set free due to lack of evidence. This has led to continued multiplication of *Mũngiki* members. They have caused terror to the general public as they seek to enforce their image as a powerful group in the most productive sectors of the economy, such as transport, electric power, security, and, housing. This way, they are able to support their activities and facilitate their movement from one place to the other. The findings of the research indicates that the movement may persist for quite a long period of time in the country and as such there is a dire need of a strong will to crack the movement. This could done through a thorough study of the roots of *Mũngiki*; as well as pursuing the need to alleviate some of the problems faced by the youth in the contemporary society, including landlessness, non-literacy, and unemployment. This could be a step towards filling the gaps that *Mũngiki* seek to fill as they attract the disfranchised youth in Kenya.

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