THE POLITICAL CULTURE OF KENYA[1]

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Introduction

I want to try to suggest answers to three questions:
Why did Kenya once seem to do so well?
What, if anything, has gone wrong?
What are the signs for the future?

Political scientists and development economists try, or used to try to explain something they call or called 'Kenyan exceptionalism', just as German historians try to explain *der deutscher sonderweg*. Kenya's exceptionalism lies or lay in its combination of economic growth, despite its lack of minerals, and its political openness and stability, relative to so many countries of tropical Africa. It is difficult to know in what tense one should put that statement. In both economic and political spheres Kenya began to look more like the rest of Africa from 1982 in its stagnation and arbitrary political closures. Since December last year Kenya has also seemed to follow the new common path towards multi-party democracy, however much against President arap Moi's wishes. But even if Kenyan exiles and human rights organisations are right to insist that Kenya no longer deserved its good reputation in the West, most Kenyans themselves did and do feel different from their neighbours and are even thankful that they are not as others are. They have not starved; they have not been subject to military dictatorship nor yet torn themselves apart in civil war like four of their neighbours, Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia; they have not undergone the great social

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costs of the failed experiment in African socialism of their fifth neighbour, Tanzania. I will not be offering any comparative reflections on why Kenya is neither Uganda nor Tanzania, but I hope I can show that an historian can say as much as the political scientist or development economist, or indeed journalist, about why Kenya is Kenya and what, for Kenyans, that might actually mean, and then offer some idea of what Kenya's past might say to Kenya's future.

The politics of modern Kenya has always been an enigma. Looking at the same events and stories, actors and observers disagree violently on what they mean. It is, and always has been, a deeply divided society and polity. This is of course true of any complex system. But it seems to be more true of Kenya than many other countries in Africa. It was certainly true of Kenya Colony, home as much to Lord Delamere and Nelly Grant as to Alibhoy Jeevanjee, or to Adonija Oginga Odinga and Kamau Ngengi, also known as Johnstone Kenyatta. And it remains true of modern Kenya. It is not just that its political culture is divided; it is difficult to agree on what it is divided about. So many divisions have been superimposed upon each other. And it is inevitably as an historian that I approach Kenya's modern political culture; I can see archaeological layers of political ideas and practice ; I can't keep up with the rush of events or the calculations of high politics. I have no means of knowing what President Moi says to Mr Biwott or Dr Saitoti, what Tiny Rowlands says to the President (not much nowadays, I imagine) or indeed what Ambassador Smith Hempstone or High Commissioner Sir Roger Tomkys may, more *sotto voce*, say to him. Nor, for present purposes, am I much interested in that sort of question.

Rather, I want to pursue ***three themes*** of change and continuity, the historian's hammer and anvil of historical process: these are, the changing nature of political identity, the great continuity, as I see it, in the moral economy of wealth and poverty, patronage and clientage, and thirdly the slowly changing, much contested, question of the nature and purposes of any power that is wider than that of the small locality. Each of these themes has a different archaeology, with different thicknesses in their layers. Which is why I find the study of Kenya's history so endlessly fascinating.

To take first the question of ***layers of identity***: precolonial ethnic groups that were *not* tribes by any definition *became* tribes in colonial times and still more so thereafter. They did so at different rates;

their nationalisms, and they were and are nationalisms, were differently constructed by enterprising politicians and intellectuals. But there is a very real question for most Kenyans as to whether they actually *matter* in politics. There are much smaller communities too, which may matter much more, agricultural or pastoral clans, village or urban neighbourhoods which have their own forms of purchase on political power. And they have their own very distinct ideas of political probity and purpose too. I like to distinguish between what I call the *moral ethnicity* of the small working community, which springs from below, and the *political tribalism* of invented nationality which may be manipulated from above. Both are calculating; moral ethnicity is not altruism but calculation between equally knowledgeable (and I stress: knowledgeable) social actors within attentive small communities. Political tribalism deals with the unknowable, the nightmare future of exclusion from power for instance. Moral ethnicity and political tribalism deal in mutually non-convertible currencies: the hard-earned money and vulnerable personal commitment of known clients in a small society have to be traded against the promises of a patron with rumoured friends in high places and cash from one knows not where. From below, it is a necessarily corrupt relationship, however personally honest a political patron may be: small society has no means of knowing.

I also want to look at layers of ***political ideas*** as they have to do with wealth, poverty and obligation. Native Kenyan political thought is in reality primarily moral or individual rather than preoccupied with political structures, more theological than political. It has found imported western Christianity congenial to its outlook, or at least Protestant Christianity, since this has historically in Kenya been conservative, even fundamentalist, rather than liberal or critical in its theology. There is a thick layering here of very similar ideas, remarkably unaffected by the radical economic, social and political changes that Kenyans have encountered in the last century.

But neither native political thought nor western Christianity has greatly helped Kenyans, to introduce my third theme, to think about the ***nature of the state***, distributive justice, or the highly abstracted collectivity of 'the nation' to which the state might in theory be responsible, or even by which it might be held accountable. Kenyan university graduates, a rapidly increasing number, conceptualise the state in much the same utilitarian manner as we might in the west. But their thin layer of specifically political thought sits awkwardly, if not indeed irrelevantly, on top of Kenya's thick un-

derlying layer of moral thought. It is a situation in which class thought or class action, to add another layer of identity, becomes difficult to project, whether intellectually or in political practice. But not impossible, which is one important reason why Kenya has followed an exceptional path: it has had, and has, pushy capitalists, alert and grasping small farmers, professional professionals, even honest politicians, all self-consciously working for collective interests distinct from that of tribe. This sense of corporate and professional self-interest may be the real legacy of white settlement. British settlers had the best-informed self-interest of any of Kenya's ethnic groups. They knew how to call government to account. Kenya's colonial government was probably the most efficient in colonial tropical Africa as a result, and in the 1950s it was the training ground for the men who became Kenyatta's top civil servants.

So much by way of introduction to my organising ideas. I want to develop them - identity, moral thought, and the nature of specifically political power - in three phases, precolonial, colonial and post-colonial. But it is all, of course, very recent history:

Precolonial Kenya.

In the nineteenth century, in precolonial times, what became Kenya was an open arena of peoples. They were ethnic groups but scarcely political tribes, and for 5 reasons:

1) none had any unified government.

2) none had a a unified line of patriarchal descent from some point of origin; even *myths* of origin were more often plural than claims to a single.ancestry.

3) virtually no group practised only one mode of subsistence even if most were predominantly either farmers, or herders, or fishers, or hunters. But each group had different ways of doing things (the things which make up a 'culture') and they all traded with each

other as a matter of necessity. The big men in each group exercised authority because they knew how to profit by marriage and alliance with the big men of their ethnic 'others'. These richer families invested in friendly insurance schemes registered with their ethnic neighbours who practised a different form of livelihood further up in the hills or lower down in the plains and who might therefore offer asylum when localised drought or disease struck one's own community. The poor will then more likely have died, for want of alternative patrons, that is, employers, elsewhere as much as because of the emptiness of their own granary. Trans-ethnicity, in other words, was practised most vigorously by the rich; the narrow ethnicity of the poor could be their undoing.

4) no ethnic group had a standard language, whether Luyia, Kamba, or Pokomo, and so on, but clusters of dialects that shaded into each other.

5) finally, and it was this that was to change most in the twentieth century, there was no power larger than the small community, no structure of competition therefore that might encourage leaders to try to control their ethnic group in order to turn it into a team - a 'political tribe' - against other such groups.

Turning to moral ideas, it seems that everybody thought wealth meritorious, poverty delinquent. And these ideas are the most lasting part of Kenya's political culture; they constitute a natural high Tory sense of what rich and poor owe to each other. Men and women were justified by works. Fatness was fertile, poverty a life-sucking parasite. That was because men could prosper only in co-operation. Wealth demanded management, of dependent women and men. Successful management required obedience; household disciplines were strict; there is a rich vocabulary of delinquency in the two or three dictionaries I have looked at. But wealth also needed generosity, because there were few economies of scale in the use of human labour. The more land one had, the more livestock, the more the labour of their production and the consumption of their product had to be shared out. There was a limit, as Max Gluckman once famously observed, to the amount of porridge one man could consume. Wealth ineluctably incurred obligations; the poor, if they were to survive, inevitably owed obedience. That was one of the two foundations of calculated moral economy. The other was the still open frontier of human colonisation, thanks to a sparse

population in relation to abundant natural resources. So the moral maxims of equal opportunity that drove the poor to work for their own posterity did in fact convey some truth. Here were the twin foundations of moral ethnicity. What made one properly Luo, or Maasai or Nandi or Kikuyu, and so on, was disciplined adherence to canons of labour and obedience when young, and then the expanded use of well-managed resources to build up a following and, with that, proven wisdom, when head of household. These were all fee-paying societies. Wisdom was proven by the wealth that gave entry to higher levels of consultation and judgment. Dr Louis Leakey once calculated that it required the ritual payment of 170 goats to one's elders and betters through a long life-time for a Kikuyu to make a good death.

But, thirdly, what of wider forms of power than those that were visibly and daily exercised in the household or clan council? That sort of power was certainly needed, whether to divine and to take steps to control the future, or to bring rain and fertility or to trade in the esoteric knowledge of healing and magic. It was by definition impossible to apply practical local tests of virtue to people whose services were expert precisely because their knowledge was from outside any settled community. They were people one needed but could not trust. Once a definition of the witchdoctor it now applies as much to politicians. The 'otherness' of nineteenth century ritual experts, more openly displayed than that of modern politicians, was their professional licence, their craft. Whether they were Kalenjin *orkoik*, Luo *jobilo*, Maasai *laibon*, or Kikuyu *arathi*, they scandalise the elders who had to call on their powers. Only by flouting parochial moral norms could they provide essential knowledge that was wider than conventional, practical, local wisdom could ever know.

In the Kenyan past it is arguable that such esoteric knowledge was all the more occult because there were no structures of secular politics wide enough to match it or compete. There were scarcely any concentrations of political power; spears and bows and arrows were too democratic a means of killing for that; and without concentrations of power it was, as I have suggested, unnecessary and probably indeed unthinkable, to convert the separate civil moralities of ethnicity into a system of competitive political allegiance. Rather, there were layers of social, religious and political knowledge and practice that people learned to operate in different situations of need. This layered quality of political and moral perception, where rules of behaviour appropriate to one's own family or clan are inap-

propriate to the needs of survival among others, has become still more pronounced in recent times. Kenya has no one political culture; no unified concept of representation, accountability, legislation, probity and law.

Colonial Kenya:

If precolonial Kenya was an open arena of peoples colonial Kenya was rather like the Habsburg Empire, a prison-house of nations. Two things had happened. First, the British imposed a conquest state. It had enough power to make some people pay the costs of other people's benefits. Political constituencies mattered as never before; there were hierarchies of power. The racial hierarchy was the most obvious one, but the ethnic hierarchy among Africans in the long run the more important. The British had their own tribal stereotypes, and Africans found that it paid to conform to them. Moreover, this new hierarchy overturned some existing values in a rapidity of change which probably made people think yet more furiously about the meaning of their 'identity'. Ethnic groups became political tribes. Precolonially herdsmen such as the Maasai and Kalenjin had led the more meritorious lives, if also the most fragile. Cattle were wealth in its most honourable form. But in colonial times farmers, like the Luo, Luyia and Kikuyu made money and got education, and had to work out how to make these honourable too.

So the British were not solely responsible for the invention of political tribes. Africans were their own self-inventors. For the second major development in the colonial era was the growth of a literate tradition of historical thought, first stimulated by the history book that all who could read did read, the Bible. This was soon made available in a number of standardised vernaculars that for the first time put a premium on linguistic conformity. Once a people is given a Bible it becomes a tribe. And one, moreover, with a politically interventionist God and human saviours, Moses or David: it is difficult to exaggerate the importance of the Bible in giving those who read it in their vernacular a sense of being a chosen people. Conversely, the Bible also gave one's enemies divinely approved

names. Pharoah and Goliath were both British; in biblical Kikuyu *kaburu* was at once a corporal of police, a Boer farmer on the 'White Highlands' and an Egyptian taskmaster from whom the children of Israel had fled in search of the promised land; Judas Iscariot was all the chiefs who signed the petition for the deportation of the first modern nationalist, Harry Thuku in 1922. I shall return to this biblical imagery later; it has a powerful hold on the modern Kenyan imagination. Ngugi wa Thiongo has complained that he, an atheist, can nonetheless not shake it off however hard he tries.

Meanwhile, between the wars, the biblical narrative was the medium in which tribal nationalisms took root, nationalisms of endurance in the wilderness, of lamentations by the waters of Babylon, ruled over by hired servants, the British-appointed chiefs. There was little cash value in these nationalisms when the first generation of literates, or readers as they are called, *wasomaji, asomi, athomi, josomo,* first excitedly explored their possibility. Rather, they were the answer to an intellectual and moral challenge: how could Christians, so outrageous in their behaviour and beliefs, redefine their local moral ethnicities in such a way that they were included in its wider relevance, not simply excluded by their inability to participate fully in family ritual. The thinking of contemporary Kenya's professional middle classes goes back a long way. In the 1930s Harry Thuku's veranda'd and whitewashed farmhouse, surrounded by hedged and contour-terraced fields, became an icon of Kikuyu progress -- despite its stark difference from the village of a conventionally wealthy man -- because it could be given the added authority of biblical reference: the farm was called *Paradise.*

Taking up again, then, my second theme, of social oligation, the moral economy of wealth and poverty, it seems clear from the example of Harry Thuku that mission Christianity scarcely revolutionised attitudes, however much it first took root, in some places, among orphans, landless tenants and runaway wives. But full church membership demanded successful work in a money economy; it was a message of soap with salvation. Many memoirs remark on the smart clothes, the clean and healthy bodies of the first converts. Pictures of early marriages feature excruciatingly uncomfortable-looking white dresses, white suits for the grooms and shiny, tight-looking black shoes. The style of dress of the young Kenyatta was positively foppish. The rosebud buttonhole that marks the uniform of Kenya politicians was copied from an early Scottish missionary. Some Christians then adopted the Muslim

term *shenzi*, a dirty heathen, to show their disdain for their unlettered cousins. By the 1930s some readers were so little worried about continued exclusion from their own society that they used their control of church committees to exclude others from the benefits of literacy. That turbulent political priest, Archdeacon Owen, scourge of the settlers who knew him as the Archdemon of Kavirondo, complained of his Luo Anglican leaders that they made sure that such bursary money as was available to help the poor went in fact to the children of their friends who could afford the fees. The same attitudes exist today (and they are not, of course, peculiar to Kenya): there seems to be little *abstract* sense of responsibility for the poor among the rich - only , reciprocally, for those poor to whom one is related or whose service one needs. Reciprocity, after all, as the Kikuyu say, is not altruism.

But the fault was not of course all African. Missionaries, however little they could afford the living standards of white society, lived far better than their African flocks. For decades the only expatriate organisation to try to alleviate the conditions of Nairobi's poor was the Salvation Army. There *were* churches that championed the needs of the poor, especially of the many women whose husbands were away at work, leaving them otherwise legally defenceless in any local land dispute. These were the independent African 'spirit' churches, the various *dini ya Rohos*. But they were a minority; they catered only for individual misfortune; they had no concept of structural sin. And they were despised - not only by white missionaries but also by the more politically minded African independent churches and schools that emphasised worldly improvement and progress rather than spiritual healing. The incipient African middle classes were as nervous of the Holy Ghost as their British counterparts.

African secular political discourse in colonial times also seems to have retained its respect for wealth, its contempt for poverty. It is important to understand why. And there is none better to explain than Henry Muoria Mwaniki, the man who was Kenyatta's press officer in the late 1940s, at the time when the latter was the President of the first national party, the Kenya African Union, KAU. Muoria was one of the first editors of a vernacular newspaper after the second world war, *Mumenyereri*, the 'Guardian'. He published a booklet, *What can we do for our own sake*, which reads like a primer in self-help. Muoria's basic premise was theological, as much indigenous as Protestant. God, he wrote, wanted good things for his people,

but he had to rely on human hands. Idleness insulted him; and to pray without action was to believe in magic. God loved a hard worker. It was a mistake to believe that poverty was saintly: Christ had condemned not wealth but greed. But Muoria's most strongly felt argument was entirely Kikuyu, drawing on centuries of struggle against the physical and psychic dangers of the wilderness by which Kikuyu agricultural civilisation was surrounded. He concluded his booklet with the thought that 'Wealth is like a big broom with which one sweeps away all the bad things so that the good things can be kept intact... All sorts of poverty and all needs are swept away. This enables the rich man to live in peace.' Light should stream in through the rich man's windows. The ignorant built their huts 'full of darkness and the smell of goat's urine and their droppings' as in the old days. His readers, he went on, must not be upset by this suggestion that white men had brought improvement. Rather, they should be emulated.

After all, the history of the British could be turned against them - a theme he pursued in his newspaper: the English, it was said, were a nation of shopkeepers, why not the Kikuyu? Most African businesses failed. And what was the reason? He did not mince his words: traders were ignorant, thieves, jealous of their partners. They had to change their ways. But they could do so only if the state changed too. Africans must be allowed freedom of assembly. For trade caused disputes, discussion brought understanding, understanding engendered cooperation and cooperation ensured progress. Without debate therefore there could be no schools, no trade, no escape from colonial slavery. It was true, he admitted, that Kikuyu had more need for democracy than others of Kenya's nationalities. That was not because they were proud but because they were richer; they therefore had more internal conflict that needed to be resolved. Muoria wrote all this over 40 years ago. Exactly the same arguments can be found in Kenyan newspapers today. There is the same deep-rooted drive for the cleansing of the wild that is now called 'development': the Kalenjin have the same wonderful word for each concept, *tililindo*. But there is also the same regional, ethnic, inequality of access to any free market in production, trade and power that its critics, President Moi chief among them, aver that multi-party democracy can only widen.

It came as some surprise to me to discover that there was this same admiration for wealth and contempt for poverty even in the Mau Mau movement, whose insurgency in the 1950s finally persuaded

the British government that white settler resistance could not exempt Kenya from the general pattern of decolonisation that led to African majority rule. The chairman of the movement's central committee, Eliud Mutonyi, could scarcely have put it more plainly. After listing his business successes in his memoirs he wrote, 'poverty knows no patriotism' - an adaptation of the old proverb 'poverty has no responsibilities' which is also to say that the poor can exercise no moral agency and can therefore know no freedom. It is an attitude that seems to have little room for representative democracy. The most radical leader of Mau Mau thought, Bildad Kaggia, just before his arrest, left instructions that his tailor and his laundryman should be paid - cleanliness again - but made no attempt to join the forest fighters. The memoirs of the forest fighters show that they respected wealthy rural traders provided they were known to be honest, and took care not to loot them. Their chief nightmares were bandits nicknamed *komerera*, a term which connotes idleness, and a dissident gang known as either the Musical or the Moscow society, whose programme included the abolition of property. One of the forest fighters' songs admonished: 'Vagrancy and idleness will never benefit the country'. And they tore themselves apart on the issue of literacy and superstition. The literate, Bible-carrying Dedan Kimathi, whose official portrait showed him with two fountain-pens in his breast-pocket, triumphed, and brutally, over the leader of the unlettered, Stanley Mathenge, whose men were more likely to listen to the traditional Kikuyu seers whom Kimathi's literate lieutenants despised. Kenyatta was by no means the only man to call Mau Mau *imaramari*, which is to say disobedient hooligans, loafers.

What then, finally, of the African experience of and attitude to power that was wider than the locality in colonial Kenya? I want to look at three sorts, the power of official chiefship, of Kenya's first black civil servants; And then at the different kinds of power that first Mau Mau and then the constitutional nationalists tried to put together.

Except among the Luo and some of the Luyia peoples no Kenyan people had known anything like colonial chiefship, and it is significant that the history of chiefship in western Kenya, the Nyanza basin, was noticeably less stormy than elsewhere. But chiefship illustrated the sharp difference between the publicly known moral economy of the small community, its moral ethnicity, and the amoral, unknowable, uncontrollable power of the state. The colo-

nial government was rather like a collective *laibon*, unpredictable, malevolent, necessary. The wealth of colonial office, above all, was both ambiguous in ways in which it had not been before and potentially more intrusive on the wealth of others. The problem was accentuated by monetisation. Cash was not goats or cows. Previously the lubricant of power had been livestock. Everybody knew whose they were, whether given upwards to patrons or loaned downwards to clients. It was difficult to nod and wink in such a moral economy; deals were openly calculable by all. But cash was private, it could be pocketed. Chiefs' salaries, admittedly derisory, came from outside and had no moral connection with local social relations at all. Big men had always arbitrated local disputes but they were local big men who had to carry opinion with them. Chiefs could now appeal to, and reasonably expect the support of District Commissioners who did not know the language and who would be gone, posted elsewhere, before an aggrieved plaintiff could put his case more convincingly together. Not only was state power to that extent irresponsible, the state also, very deliberately, installed new forms of wealth, of capital. DCs encouraged chiefs to open markets, policed by their own retainers; to instal water-powered maize-mills, rather like a medieval baronage; to sponsor all manner of improvements whose benefits were divisible and in which chiefs would not be the last to share. It was no accident that many of President Kenyatta's cabinet ministers and senior civil servants were sons of chiefs. The distinction between meritorious, knowable, wealth accumulated in the small community, a source of authority, and unknowable, and thus almost by definition, ill-gotten gains, possibly as a result of sorcery, remains at the root of Kenya's political culture.

But if the power of the colonial state had an amoral unknowability about it in Kenya's hundreds of small communities, the larger power that Kenyans tried to put together themselves was scarcely less alarming. Mau Mau terrified most of the lineage elders of Kikuyuland, the men whose wealth and remembered wisdom normally gave them control in agrarian society. Their authority was moral; it was inherited from those who had first cleared the wilderness for civilised living. But they were also powerless; they could not, fragmented as they were, get rid of the British. Only those without land, the young, the outcast of Nairobi and farm squatters on the 'White Highlands' wanted to fight; but then, poor and landless as they were they would have no legal title to exercise power.

Mau Mau terrified whites because of its violence. It terrified Kikuyu more because of the moral nightmare in which legitimate parochial authority could not apparently gain decisive access to the power of the state without invoking the assistance of illegal -- youthful and unpropertied -- force.

Transethnic territorial nationalism in the later 1950s faced that and another problem: the lack of a shared discourse or conceptual language of rights and obligations. The intellectuals of ethnic nationalism had hitherto managed to expand that moral discourse only from the clannish small working community to encompass the imagined large community of the tribe. Tom Mboya, Kenya's chief nationalist strategist at the time, openly recognised the problem. Kenyan nationalists, he said in his memoirs, had to take care only to demand independence; they must not discuss what they would then do with it. That would only bring division. And in his very next breath he drew the contrast with the despised tribalism, an arena wherein a joint history of moral argument enabled one to debate what one could not discuss at the territorial, all-Kenya, level: for instance, he suggested, the status of women.

Independent Kenya

Kenya has been independent for nearly 30 years. It has become customary to divide its independent political history more or less in half. The division came not so much at Kenyatta's death in 1978 as in 1982, four years into arap Moi's presidency. His preparations for a de jure one-party state were interrupted by the attempted Air Force coup - which may not have been the only coup being planned at the time. Perhaps the most searing image of that coup for all Kenyans in a job and over the age of 30 was that of the hungry mob of the poor from Nairobi's slums who swarmed across the city, especially its most vulnerable Indian areas, in a paroxysm of looting, at last getting their hands on the most material of the fruits of independence, the *matunda ya uhuru*.. This is what middle class Kenyans fear most - as wealthy Kikuyu once feared the hooliganism of Mau Mau.

This conventional chronological division has much to be said for it. But it has as much to do with the timing of the oil shocks as the mortality of Kenyatta. Kenyatta was a lucky President in terms of the world economy, Moi unlucky. The lessons to be drawn from distinctions between the two Presidents may not be quite so clear as may be generally thought. I can show my doubts with reference to my three themes, ethnicity, moral economy and wider, now state, power.

Kenyatta's state was a federation of tribal baronies, not because that was inevitable but because that is what he intended. The politics of redistribution which he faced were more easily managed in that way, but they created still greater problems of distribution for his successor. Kenyatta's first and greatest challenge was the redistribution of the White Highlands as most white settlers left under schemes financed from Britain. This was a new colonisation, one of Kenya's many, and not its last. But it was a colonisation quite unlike those of precolonial times. Then there had been colonisations of ecological zones, indeterminate and shifting. They had been managed, and I mean managed, by big men whose authority came from their skills in herding and cultivating, their marriage alliances and their trans-ethnic trade and insurance agreements. This new process was a cartographical colonisation, a planned movement into districts with boundaries, with farm surveys and hydrological reports, of fences and cattle-dipping regimes. It was controlled not by colonising communities on the ground but by men in distant offices who wielded the power and credit of the state. Even the big politicians who were allotted the larger farms were, at best, 'telephone farmers'; their power came not from accumulated labour on and expert knowledge of the land but from their alliances, which may still have been trans-ethnic but which carved out protected tribal constituencies rather than opened up mutually beneficial exchange relationships on the ground. The politics of land settlement ,that underwrote the transfer of power, transferred power to gratefully politicised tribes. It was the founding experience of the new Kenya, and one whose implications the country is still working out, in blood.

Kenyatta set rules for the political game; he both encouraged the creation of ethnic baronies and tried to devise means for their control, both from below and above. He encouraged the baronage partly by neglect; he paid little attention to the organisation of his party, KANU. In this he was quite different to his young neigh-

bour, Julius Nyerere, who set up a bureaucratic, centralised TANU against his own regional barons or district bosses. Kenyatta's toleration of open and competitive elections -- once, that is, he had crushed the opposition Kenya Peoples Union -- also encouraged the rise to parliamentary prominence and ministerial power of older, wealthier men. Kenyatta seemed, perhaps deliberately, to be trying to resurrect the political principles of stateless precolonial society in which private wealth had demonstrated public virtue.

But Kenyatta, again I think deliberately, also devised rules that would tie political activity to localities much smaller than any tribal barony and be at least partially independent of them. I refer to the institution of *Harambee*, the Swahili term for cooperative self-help. The *harambee* idea was the foundation of Kenyatta's political success, but it was also the source of Moi's problem. It helps to explain why Kenya once went 'right', but also why that might in the end have been 'wrong'.

Harambee encouraged different levels of cooperation. At the bottom, small communities had to get together to collect their own voluntary resources of cash and labour, in order to qualify for state aid in the provision of services. At the top government bureaucracies, especially those of education and health, had to respond to local demands for the provision of trained staff. In the middle, incumbent MPs competed with their rivals to be effective brokers between top and bottom. *Harambee* has had three main effects, two of them clearly positive, the third dangerous:

i) it attached small communities to the state: in that local MPs could only negotiate with the Ministries of Education or Health for resources by building networks of alliance with other MPs from elsewhere, in order to tap into the national pool of Harambee-giving. This was a good test of politicians' effectiveness both locally and nationally, so long as elections remained free (as they more or less did until 1983)

ii) it helped to make these big men to some extent accountable to small communities: the *harambee* committees. One of the great benefits of the growing rate of literacy is the existence of local committees who can read balance sheets and thus have the confidence to ask awkward questions. Again, here was an effective instrument of popular accountability so long as elections were free enough to allow people to turn rascals out of power; it may be that this is the strongest popular argument in favour of multi-paraty democracy.

Furthermore, the only seriously statistical study of *harambee* suggests that, in general, *harambee* is an form of mildly progressive taxation, redistributing resources from the rich to the relatively poor -- but not to the destitute who cannot afford the fees demanded for all levels of education.

iii) while *harambee* made practical day-to-day politics a matter of much smaller communities than political tribes and allowed tribal politicians to be questioned by their fellow tribesmen it is also, and in the end more importantly, true that the main flows of *harambee* private giving and state aid were and are directed along lines greased by high-political corruption and intrigue.

Harambee: therefore carried an enormous cost: the gains of self-help went to the already advanced regions, those which had local resources to mobilise, thanks to the sale of coffee, tea, maize and so on; which had longer histories of education and therefore more members of the political elite. *Harambee* therefore, despite all I have said in its favour, helped to widen inter-ethnic differentials, especially differential access to the pork-barrel of official corruption. Kenyatta's Kenya was governed by the wealthy men of the wealthy regions. They were people and regions who knew how to turn the public goods of the state to private benefit in ways that enlarged Kenya's productive capacity as a whole. It was an era of what one can call productive corruption. But it also caused factional strains. We must remember that Kenyatta did not stop short of apparently condoning murder as a means to end political competition, two decades before Moi's government seemingly took the same road.

The two largest changes between the Kenyatta and Moi regimes are these: First, in the Kenyatta era, state power was more dangerous to those who wielded it than to its subjects. One has only to think of the unexplained deaths of J.M. Kariuki and Tom Mboya, perhaps of Ronald Ngala too, and a number of other convenient deaths by homicidal motor traffic. Under the Moi regime -- at least until the death of Robert Ouko -- power has been much more dangerous to less prominent Kenyans, especially to those who have dared to criticise the government of the one-party state; and this continues to be the case, if one thinks of the treatment meted out in the past few months to the 'Mothers of Freedom', mothers of political detainees and the inter-ethnic killings that have pitted Kalenjin against such opposition groups as Luo, Luyia and, more recently, the Rift Valley Kikuyu.. There has been a growing paranoia of power which has

spread fear, silence, insecurity and sycophancy everywhere. It is the fault for which Moi is most blamed. Perhaps the most serious effect this has had on Kenya's prospects is that it is now much more difficult for Kenya's talented top civil servants to exercise a critical professional judgment. Kenyatta encouraged this and it was one of the secrets of Kenya's past success.

Nonetheless, I think it is important to stress -- against the instant journalistic wisdom -- that the accumulated structure of Kenya's politics is as much to blame for the present crisis as Moi himself. This brings me to the second contrast between the Kenyatta and Moi regimes. Colonial history and then the Kenyatta presidency widened ethnic and regional divisions, not to mention the gap between rich and poor. Moi has tried to ***close*** them -- at the beginnng of his rule he even tried to close the gap between wealth and poverty by putting a ceiling on land holdings. But the inheritance of plutocratic moral theory -- of the merit of knowable wealth and the delinquency of poverty; the modern growth of political tribalism; and the distrust of the witchcraft of the state, have all made it impossible to conceive -- or at least to publicly articulate and then to put into practice -- a liberal democratic , let alone marxist, politics of redistribution, so as to bring Moi's Kalenjin and other historically disadvantaged peoples to some greater equality with the Luo and Kikuyu by open reference to positive discrimination based on the concept of equal rights of citizenship. It is, after all, hard enough to pursue that kind of politics in Britain or in the USA with their liberal traditions and secure majority nationalities. Kenya has neither, Distributional justice and 'good governance' may not be as blithely compatible in Africa as those who advocate donor pressures may wishfully think.

The only kind of politics of positive discrimination, affirmative action or distributional justice -- call it what you will -- that in Kenya's circumstances seemed possible to Moi was an underhand one, a politics of intrigue, of undermining or buying the established barons of privileged ethnic groups. Kenya's political culture is not one that can use the rhetoric of the even-handedness of the state in the face of its equally entitled citizens. And with that liberal rhetoric simply not available, the political strains that a pro-Kalenjin policy set up could be dealt with only by extra-legal means, by the use of the security forces and, increasingly, to the terrorisation of the resistance that such force evoked. By contrast with the Kenyatta era, Moi's has been a time of unproductive corruption.

But I suspect that Kenya's critics have not thought seriously enough about quite how difficult a politics of compensation for past disadvantage actually is in a society that has historically developed group identities over individual rights, despises poverty and harbours such suspicions of the state. And the external pressures from the World Bank and the donor community to withdraw the state from the market will make such redistribution still harder. The economically and ecologically privileged regions, the regions of what Kenyans call 'old money' -- which is to say private money derived from public privileges sufficiently long ago to have become respectable -- will be able to pay for political influence, The drier areas, those with less of a history of school -- precisely those areas which most depend on the state and give least return on its investment, will not. That perhaps is the most fundamental of Kenya's difficulties (perhaps of any country in Africa) but it is also the least of Kenya's immediate problems.

On these immediate problems can the historian be any more useful than the journalist or businessman? Probably not. But here are some concluding thoughts about the present and immediate future which may suggest some grounds for hope. The first is perhaps of greatest importance in securing the possibility of peaceful change; my other two reflections are more clearly related to the past and may also have more to say to the more distant future.

1) The opposition parties accuse Moi of stirring up ethnic strife not only to prove his repeatedly insisted point that Kenya is 'not ready' for democracy -- just as the British once said that she was 'not ready' for independence -- but also in order to be able to declare a state of emergency that will nullify his undertakings to call multi-party elections. But that objective may not be possible for him. The army is popularly believed to have refused to support what would such a government coup. Moi, whose legitimacy is ebbing away with every new casualty figure from the ethnic strife which the security forces are ostentatiously failing to quell, may therefore have no option but to give way with as much grace as he can muster.

2) There may also be a self-limiting quality to the fighting that is now going on. As I said earlier, the politics of the African resettlement of the 'White Highlands' at independence 30 years ago are still working themselves out. The most serious clashes have been in the ethnic border zones that this formerly white settled area represents. Kalenjin groups who know themselves to have the

longest historical claim to them have taken issue with more recent immigrants from the Luo and Luyia communities and, in the most recent and bloodiest clashes, the Kikuyu. It is a strange irony that the area in which people have fought most bloodily, Olenguruone, is generally thought to have given birth to the Mau Mau movement over 40 years ago, when Kikuyu immigrants there took an oath to resist the colonial government's demand to control the conditions of their settlement.

Sticking my neck out, to give the second ground of hope, I think it unlikely that the clashes will spread beyond these areas. These are the areas where one can most plausibly hope to alter boundaries in a situation of extreme land shortage. There seem to be three ways in which people attempt to do this. Big men can deny small men's title to land; this is the most damaging complaint against Moi's confidant, Biwott: he has seized Naboths' vineyards. Secondly, co-partners of different ethnic origin in land-buying syndicates on former white estates can fall out among themselves. Finally, neighbouring, ethnically solid, settlement schemes can come to blows. But the hopeful point is this: none of these potentially explosive situations exist over 80 per cent of Kenya's best land, in the former 'Native Land Units'. Here the closely guarded knowledge of who has right to what land should make people feel secure. And it is insecurity that makes people fight. So I think there are natural limits, set by history, to the spread of violence. Kalenjin are too weakly represented in towns to take on other people there. And in any case the Kalenjin are a small and divided minority. It would seem suicidal for them to take on the rest. Perhaps more fundamentally, I think it is true now, as it was in the time of Mau Mau, that too many Kenyan householders of whatever ethnic origin, have no wish to hand their political fortunes over to their juniors, young unmarried men whom they will see as delinquent children.

I can illustrate this point with the aid of Gakaara wa Wanjau, one of Kenya's most interesting popular writers. 40 years ago Mau Mau murdered his father, a Presbyterian minister. Gakaara himself spent many years in a colonial detention camp on suspicion of inspiring Mau Mau by his writings. He is still writing, from the rural market town of Karatina. His hero is the picaresque wa Nduuta, disrespectful to the wealthy but terrified by the popular demand for power -- 'paawa' -- that he met in the 1982 attempted coup. It was a mob madness, without authority. He felt safe, this cheeky townsman, only when he returned to his rural origins, among fellow

clansmen (not merely fellow tribesmen) where he was *known*, where the insecurity of one affected all. The low politics of small-scale society has much to be said for it as a refuge from the chaos engendered by high-political crisis. It is the most authentic expression of Kenya's civil society; it gives safety to individuals known to small society. But it is precisely what makes the politics of a wider distributional justice so difficult.

3) But, finally, and equally contradictorily, there is also the politics of what western political scientists more usually think of as civil society, those citizens consciously organised to represent their own occupational interests in groups that speak to but do not seek to run the state. The Kenyan middle class likes to see itself as too large , too sophisticated and with too keen an awareness of its own self-interest in peace to allow matters to get still further out of hand. This , if true, is vital for the future, since the present clashes between rural dwellers are unlikely to pull down Kenya generally unless the politically articulate middle class encourages their political exploitation, either actively or by abject silence. I think neither course is likely, thanks largely to the growing confidence of the most vocal institution of civil society, the church. Kenya's churches cover the whole spectrum of Christian theology. They have the strength of being both fundamentally of the people and yet also critically part of the political arena. Despite all I have said, church leaders are beginning to develop a much stronger theology of the responsibility of state power -- perhaps because the Catholic church, by far the largest, is much more vocal than it used to be and more readily accepted by the previously dominant protestants.

Popular Kenyan Christianity is well able to criticise the arrogance and corruption of political power. It does so through hymns, for instance *Mai ni maruru*, 'water is bitter', composed in Kenyatta's day. Just as Moses in the wilderness had to strike the rock to find drinkable water for the children of Israel, so Kenyans who still find the water of power bitter must pray that Jesus will free them from structural evil. Popular rumour also thrives on biblical allusion. Many Kenyans felt their suspicions of political collusion in the recent death of Bishop Alexander Muge in a traffic accident confirmed when his widow's white cockerel attacked the President <u>three times</u> when he called to offer his condolences. But church leaders too can also rely on popular knowledge of the Bible in order to voice pungent criticism of current politics by indirect means. Five years ago , in June 1987, there was great excitement in the local press

when Bishop David Gitari preached on the decision of the Emperor Darius, King of the Medes and Persians, to throw his minister Daniel into the lion's den. Darius did not want to do so, but he was trapped by his tribalist and corrupt satraps, and his failure to consult others, all qualities of government that were uncomfortably close to home. In few countries could there be such knowledgeable discussion of the nature of Darius's tyranny. There is a ready understanding in Kenya's civil society of the proper limits to the demands that the state can make of its citizens and to the duty that citizens owe to the state.

That does not mean that multi-party democracy will make it any easier for Kenyans to practice good governance. Single-party rule and its monopoly of patronage can be one way of stirring up tribal jealousy; competitive party politics another. Kenya's political culture is deeper than both forms of rule. Kenya's (and Africa's) real struggles are not between one-party autocracy and multi-party democracy but between the moral ethnicity of individual self-mastery and the political tribalism of group competition, between human rights and the patronage of wealth, and between the sorcerous unknowability of state power and new forms of public accountability. And the prospect is not all dark. As I have tried to show, Kenyans have been arguing about all these matters a long time. Their conclusions have changed in the past; debate is vigorous in the present; and few Kenyans have yet lost hope for the future.