

**FROM TENSION TO VIOLENCE:
Identities and Perceptions in Kenya's Post-Election Conflict**

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ABSTRACT

The hopes of African democracy enshrined in Kenya's 2007 presidential election fell apart when alleged rigging of the votes caused mass rioting across the nation. Previously assumed to be the most stable state in East Africa, both Kenyans and the international community were shocked at the month-long violence that ensued. Traditional theories of ethnic, political and socio-economic conflict emerged in an attempt to understand and explain the root causes of violence. However, these approaches fail to account for the variations in the motives of violence as well as the time frame in which it occurred. This paper seeks to establish a proper framework to analyse violent conflict based on constructivist approaches. I will demonstrate the role of identities and perceptions in shaping motivations for conflict. Each individual possesses multiple identities that frame their perception of the world. These perceptions are reproduced through everyday social discourses and define boundaries of normative and rational action. However, given a shock to the social environment, such as a rigged election, perceptions can be shifted in such a way that threats are created and exaggerated, therefore warranting previously abnormal actions, such as violence, to be perfectly rational within the new context.

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Introduction

In December of 2007, the once presumed peaceful state of Kenya erupted into widespread violence amidst the instalment of an incumbent president despite flawed elections. Considered to be the most stable and progressive nation in East Africa, Kenya shocked the world as riots instantly broke out across the country. Acts of destruction, theft and mass killings brought about eerie echoes of the Rwandan genocide just over a decade ago. Though the intensity of the Kenyan riots never reached the scale of Rwanda or most other African states for that matter, questions still arose as to whether Kenya was truly a model for a stable African democracy, or if it had simply descended into the stereotypical war-torn African state. Though the event was a localised domestic affair, its outcome and analysis has significant implications for the international community. The amount of diplomatic attention Kenya received revealed the common understanding that internal stability within certain states is a crucial prerequisite to regional and subsequently global stability. Therefore, a proper diagnosis of the event and accurate prescriptions for the prevention of future conflicts are necessary to achieve such goals. Theories of African conflict once again emerged in great array, from explanations of longstanding ethnic tensions to weak political institutions to grievances over economic disparities. However, these common approaches fail to account for the variations in the nature of violence and the motivations driving it, thus providing inadequate solutions for sustainable peace. A more comprehensive analysis requires a constructivist approach that takes the roles of individual identities and perceptions into consideration when examining motives and actions. This framework allows us to appropriately understand how and when tensions between communities transition into violent conflict, and thus be able to take the necessary actions to prevent such results.

This case study in Kenya's post-election violence is situated amongst an overwhelming amount of studies on internal conflict in Africa. The events of the past two decades have generated significant attention into the domestic affairs of states due to the realisation of increasingly porous state borders and the growing influence of non-state actors. A Kenyan crisis is no longer seen as an isolated issue, but understood as having considerable political and economic effects on its surrounding region as well as on key stakeholders globally. Therefore, much of international relations (IR) theory has been adapted to context-specific internal conflicts in an effort to understand and resolve them. In reviewing the span of literature, three distinctive theoretical perspectives on conflict arise. Needless to say, these categories are by no means self-contained, but rather have significant overlap. I will review these discourses by providing their particular narratives of interpretation on Kenya's history and the course of the post-election. First, the *ethnic conflict* approach derived from anthropological studies looks to the long history of tensions between ethnic groups as the primary fuel for current grievances. Though varied in its discourse, the primordialist version of the thesis recognises different cultural values as essential fault lines for conflict. Second, neoliberalism considers flawed political systems as the cause of *political conflict*. Henceforth, there is a strong emphasis on the strengthening of accountable governance and greater democracy to attain civil stability. Third, a neo-Marxist approach formulates a theory of

socio-economic conflict, in which tensions are created along the divisions of socio-economic class. Unequal resource distribution and the gaping disparity between the elite and the poor create a volatile environment susceptible to violence, especially among those in absolute poverty. I will demonstrate, though, that these three views of causal factors in violence will not suffice in and of themselves. Their collective fault is the flawed assumption that social groups have unitary interests and therefore all individuals will react similarly in correlation with certain external conditions. However, the variance in reactions even among members of the same social group reveal that different individual frameworks of rationale are at play.

To formulate a more comprehensive and viable framework for understanding inter-group conflict, I will draw upon various constructivist arguments to establish the theoretical foundation for the importance of identity and perception. The main premise is that individuals, even in similar social environments, have multiple identities rooted in their various communities. Each identity carries with it a set of values that forms one's perception of the world, therefore framing rational or normative courses of action. Shocks or sudden changes in the social environment, such as a flawed election, may cause either a shift or amplification in certain perceptions. Therefore, former worldviews that framed docile behaviours may be shifted over to another worldview that sees a usually abnormal behaviour, such as violence, to be perfectly rational in the given situation. I will analyse key events taken from journalists and surveyors to demonstrate that in the case of Kenya's riots, the publicised rigged elections altered the balance in threats and interests for different communities, thus individuals readjusted their sets of conceivable courses of behaviour, much of which included participating in violent attacks. To conclude, I will propose a few considerations to take into account for Kenya's recovery process and prevention of future conflict.

Overview of the Elections and Riots

In recent years, the Horn of Africa has suffered extensively from instability, conflict and poverty. Sudan's north-south conditions continue to deteriorate and are further strained by the exacerbation of its Darfur conflict. Ethiopia's recent war in Somalia, along with Somalia's continual decay as a state from being overrun by warlords, creates a complex humanitarian crisis in the region. Uganda's protracted civil war with the Lord's Resistance Army adds to the fragility of its sovereignty. Rwanda, even after more than a decade, struggles to recover from its 1994 genocide and continues to wage a war against rebels in the DRC. Though Kenya is not without its own set of problems, it is comparatively more stable economically and politically than its African counterparts. Because of this, the international community has key investments in the continued stability of Kenya. The United Nations African headquarters are based in the capital of Nairobi. Kenya is a key ally to the United States' war on terror. Development groups often use Kenya as their base of operations for the East African region. Also with Kenya being the most industrialised country in East Africa, often considered its economic hub, surrounding neighbours such as Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi depend heavily on Kenya's resources and transport. Moreover, Kenya has also been able to

take in refugees from its less-together neighbours.¹ It is not a surprise, then, that when Kenya's society began to fall apart, it received a tremendous amount of attention from the international community, with figures such as U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Graca Machel (Nelson Mandela's wife), and a host of African presidents and leaders going into Kenya to lend assistance in resolving the crisis.² This is significant in contrast to the issues of surrounding neighbours such as Zimbabwe's deteriorating economy, the DRC's ongoing civil war, and Sudan's Darfur conflict, all of which were experiencing conditions far worse than Kenya's at that time, and for much longer.³

Much of the attention can be attributed to the high expectations of a landmark election in Africa, one that would set yet another precedent of successive democracy for other states to follow. Much of the anticipation followed from the previous election, to which Kenya seemed to put its shadowy political past behind itself. During its first few decades, Kenya's one-party state under Jomo Kenyatta and later Daniel Moi held consecutive elections, but were able to prevent any public resistance through the political suppression of dissident voices. However, with the restoration of multiparty competition in 1991, public violence has been rather commonplace. Daniel Moi won both elections in 1992 and 1997, though they were not without targeted political attacks and clashes between communities.⁴ The elections of 2002 resulted in the first democratic transfer of power in Kenya and proceeded in a fairly calm atmosphere. As the opposition to Daniel Moi's chosen candidate, Mwai Kibaki and his Party of National Unity (PNU) won the election, signalling a dramatic step forward in Kenyan democracy. It is no surprise, then, that there were high expectations for the 2007 elections, both from Kenyans and the international community.

The primary candidates in the election were the incumbent Mwai Kibaki of his newly formed National Alliance of Rainbow Coalition (NARC) and opposition Raila Odinga of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM). The time leading up to the election was quite hopeful and the day of the election, the 27th of December, went rather smoothly according to many observers and journalists. However, confusion and tension began to rise towards the end of the tallying process. The Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK), the constitutional body that administers the elections, was apparently appointed without proper consultation of opposition bodies and lacked experience to carry out their responsibilities.⁵ The following is documented by domestic observers from Kenyans for Peace with Truth and Justice (KPTJ), which is an account of the irregularities that showed up on the 29th and 30th of December, the last two days during the tallying

¹ Jacqueline Klopp and Prisca Kamungi, "Violence and Elections: Will Kenya Collapse?," *World Policy Journal* Winter (2008): 16.

² Nick Wadhams, "Kenya: In Diplomatic Intensive Care," *Time*, February 1, 2008, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1709156,00.html>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *OHCHR Fact-finding Mission to Kenya*, February 6, 2008, 6, <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Press/OHCHRKenya-report.pdf>.

⁵ Ted Dagne, *Kenya: The December 2007 Elections and the Challenges Ahead*: CRS Report for Congress (Congressional Research Service), 2, fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/104721.pdf, 2.

process. All had run smoothly until about 3:00pm when unusually long delays in receiving ballots started to concern ECK Commissioners, since none were experienced in the 2002 election.⁶ At around 4:00pm, discrepancies began to show up in the tallying between the main ECK tallying centre and the local constituency tallying centres.⁷ Throughout the night, tensions heightened in the ECK as serious anomalies arose. First, the forms that were received did not match up with the results that were phoned in. In many cases, the documents were photocopied (law requires that they be originals) and many were submitted without the proper signatures of agents and officers at the local stations.⁸ ECK Regulations also state that any results showing a voter turnout of 100 percent or higher should not be accepted. However, there were many cases of ECK Commissioners allowing the officers to “correct” the mistakes and resubmit them. An example is a result from Maragwa, which showed a 115 percent voter turnout. However, the officer was allowed to alter the result to 85.24 percent and was accepted by the ECK.⁹ Despite all the inconsistencies and violations, results were still being announced, though it was against law as well.¹⁰

Around midnight, one of the ECK senior staff disclosed to a KPTJ observer that discrepancies had been systematically planned and not accidental, a scheme involving most of the ECK Commissioners.¹¹ On Sunday morning, ECK Commissioners began printing up tally results that were much higher than submitted results and denied observers the opportunity to verify files.¹² On Sunday afternoon, the ODM party announced that poll results had been manipulated by the ECK and demanded a resolution.¹³ During the majority of the voting time, Raila Odinga held a lead of over one million votes ahead of Kibaki. Yet only hours before the closing of voting, that lead transformed into a thin margin of victory for Kibaki. The result was also in stark contrast with ODM’s parliamentary votes, which won 99 seats to the PNU’s 43 seats.¹⁴ At around 5:30pm the ECK Chair announced Mwai Kibaki as the winner of the presidential election. Yet only an hour later, he was sworn in as President in a rushed and private ceremony, despite hesitation within members of the commission. The chairman was reportedly under political pressure to do so.¹⁵

Immediately after the election results were announced and in some cases before, acts of violent protests erupted across Kenya. The forms of violence as well as justifications came in many different forms and will be discussed later in correspondence to the

⁶ Kenyans for Peace with Truth and Justice, *Kenyan Elections Observers' Log*, December 29, 2007, 1-2, www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/ke_elections_2.pdf.

⁷ Ibid, 2.

⁸ Ibid, 2-3.

⁹ Ibid, 3.

¹⁰ Ibid, 4.

¹¹ Ibid, 5.

¹² Ibid, 6.

¹³ Ibid, 7.

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, “Ballots to Bullets,” *Human Right Watch* 20, no. 1 (2008): 22.

¹⁵ Dagne, “CRS Report Kenya,” 2-3.

differing perspectives on conflict. They occurred over the course of the following month, with certain periods of intense violence. The United Nations OHCHR Mission to Kenya noted roughly 3 periods of heightened conflict: immediately after the elections, mid-January (16-18) and during the last week of the month.¹⁶ The initial wave of violence occurred in the form of riots and demonstrations, and was mostly spontaneous and unorganised. It was primarily a reaction from angry ODM supporters who felt the election was stolen from them, and stormed the streets in large crowds.¹⁷ Seeing the reaction of the public, the Kibaki government placed a blanket ban on all public demonstrations, which is actually illegal under Kenyan law, but justified it as a necessary means to prevent further violence and chaos. However, the requirement of a heavy police presence resulted in numerous deadly clashes between police and crowds.¹⁸ Though Kenyan police were sent to disperse rioters, some reports indicate that they targeted specifically opposition supporters and assisted pro-government gangs.¹⁹ As the clashes went on, they became more targeted, deliberate and ethnicised.²⁰ Primarily Kikuyu communities seen to be supportive of Kibaki were driven from their homes and killed. The final wave of violence occurred at the end of January as a Kikuyu retaliation for the first attacks. After the violence had subdued, reports indicated about 1,220 deaths and 41,396 houses burned.²¹ Though sources vary, most estimate that approximately 300,000 people were displaced during the riots, most of them still living in IDP camps right now.²²

Perspectives on Conflict

African conflict studies and internal conflict studies in general, have gained prominence among IR discourses in the past decade as small-scale internal violence emerges as competitive a threat to global stability as interstate warfare. In the past, internal conflict was limited to the realm of domestic issues and existed only in fields like sociology, anthropology or comparative politics. States remained the only actors of relevance in high politics, and to an extent, that perception is still very prevalent. However, the 1990s and the turn of the century saw a significant wave of democratisation that spread through former autocracies, carrying with it all the violent conflict of armed struggles against state power. Internal struggles for independence and succession resulted in the creation of new states and territories. Protracted civil wars led to the crippling of state power and their ability to function effectively on the international platform. Jackson describes this situation across sub-Saharan Africa as “the decay of the Weberian state,” in which states are unable to maintain order through the monopoly on violence. This results from the containment of multiple nations into what are commonly known as quasi-states - political entities formally acknowledged as states but lacking in empirical

¹⁶ UNOHCHR, "Fact-finding Mission to Kenya," 8.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ HRW, "Ballots to Bullets," 24.

¹⁹ Dagne, "CRS Report Kenya," 6.

²⁰ UNOHCHR, "Fact-finding Mission to Kenya," 9.

²¹ Ibid, 15.

²² Dagne, "CRS Report Kenya," 6.

attributes.²³ As states are weakened, their borders become more porous and domestic issues spill into other states. The transnational issues of trafficking, terrorism, refugees and armed groups affect states regionally and globally. Due to this reality, there has been an increase in attention given to domestic issues and their incorporation into the greater IR discourse. Academics and policy-makers alike have given greater consideration to subjective and variable factors such as ethnicity, culture, religion and class. I will focus on three main perspectives that emerge out of academia, media, governments, and NGOs that reflect on the dynamics of Kenya's riots: ethnic, political, and socio-economic.

Ethnic Conflict

When entering into a discourse about Africa's violence, ethnicity and tribe always make their way into the discussion (for the purposes of this paper, I will use *ethnicity* and *tribe* interchangeably). However, ethnicity in itself is a problematic term to define and there is extensive diversity in analyses on what it is and the influence it has. For the purposes of this paper, I will not delve into the particulars of this field, but will refer to ethnicity as the self-defined term that Kenya's tribes identify themselves by. The term 'ethnic conflict' began to saturate literature in the 1990s, as anthropologists traced ethnic cleavages to longstanding grievances. Explanations of ethnic conflict delineate into three main views. One is the constructivist approach, which argues that ethnic identities are socially created, while the instrumentalist approach differs slightly by saying that ethnicities were purposefully created by colonialists.²⁴ I will address these two views in a later section. The third view is primordialism, which is a form of essentialism that sees ethnic differences as innate and unchanging. This view further goes on to explain that ethnic conflicts are a result of irreconcilable differences between two groups, whether they be arbitrary physical qualities or specific cultural values.²⁵ Most ethnic analysts and journalists that hold to this view will often make such implications through discourses of 'long-standing tensions' or references to 'historical differences' which become the basis for modern day conflicts. There is no question that ethnic loyalties play some role in the formation of competing groups; the question is to what extent conflict derived from these ethnic tensions is actually inherent. It is due to the strong saturation of tribal loyalties in society and politics, its easily distinguishable markers and hence its organising mobility, that ethnicity becomes such an important factor to consider.

In IR studies, there is generally little consideration given to ethnicity or culture. However, I will briefly point out the significance of Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* on ethnic studies. Though his focus is on differences between civilisations, his insights on cultural lines of conflict hint at ethnic essentialism, saying that the differences between civilisations will be the new 'fault lines' of conflict. Huntington notes that differences in cultural values are basic and fundamental. Though they do not imply conflict, the

²³ Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

²⁴ David Welsh, "Ethnicity in Sub-Saharan Africa," *International Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1996): 480.

²⁵ James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Review: Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity," *International Organization* 54, no. 4 (2000): 849.

longest and most violent conflicts have been along such differences. In addition, ethnic identities are less mutable than political or class identities. As Huntington writes, "In class and ideological conflicts, the key question was, 'Which side are you on?' and people could and did choose sides and change sides. In conflicts between civilizations, the question is 'What are you?' That is a given that cannot change."²⁶ Such 'givens' are the foundations for ethnic conflicts - old, inherent and unchangeable attributes and values that clash between ethnic groups.

In African studies and in most cases of former colonies, ethnic tension is almost invariably linked back to the pseudo-construction of today's nation-states. The 'carving up of Africa' divided existing tribes and forced together multiple tribes with arbitrary political boundaries. This thesis looks back to the era of colonialism in Africa as an explanation for present-day animosities, and in the case of Kenya, the animosities between 42 different tribes. During colonialism, the British restricted political associations within the borders of their governing districts, which were ethnically defined.²⁷ Therefore from the onset, political life already formed along ethnic lines. The leading political party was the Kenyan African National Union (KANU), formed mostly of Kikuyus and Luos. The other smaller ethnic groups formed the Kenyan African Democratic Union (KADU) out of fear of being dominated by the larger ethnic groups.²⁸ When KANU won the first election and established a one-party state with a centralised government, KADU dissolved a year later.²⁹ For the larger part of Kenya's history, the Kikuyu, which is Kenya's largest tribe, also controlled much of its power.

The practice of patronage, in which politicians reward certain groups for their support with money or special benefits, greatly exacerbated ethnic tensions. This system of ethno-politics is deeply saturated in Kenya's history and was a strong part of the 2007 elections. When Daniel Arap Moi assumed power in 1978, he diverted resources from Kenyatta's Kikuyu tribe to his own Kalenjin tribe.³⁰ Because politics in Kenya have always been formed around ethnic lines, many believe that ideology has little or no influence in government. Rather, ethno-regional alliances become the means for providing a stable political system.³¹ Therefore, when multiparty politics returned to Kenya, the new political space allowed long-suppressed ethnic tensions to ignite, resulting in the conflicts throughout the 1990s.³² Ethnic lines and bases of support continued to influence the most recent campaign process. Though both Kibaki and

²⁶ Samuel P. Huntington, "Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993), <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/19930601faessay5188/samuel-p-huntington/the-clash-of-civilizations.html>.

²⁷ Stephen Orvis, "Moral Ethnicity and Political Tribalism in Kenya's "Virtual Democracy"," *African Issues* 29, no. 1/2, Ethnicity and recent Democratic Experiments in Africa (2001): 8

²⁸ David Throup, "Elections and Political Legitimacy in Kenya," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 63, no. 3 (1993): 372.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 373.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 371.

³¹ Axel Harneit-Sievers and Ralph-Michael Peters, "Kenya's 2007 General Election and Its Aftershocks," *Afrika Spectrum* 43, no. 1 (2008): 134.

³² *Ibid.*

Odinga held support from multi-ethnic constituencies, their coalitions were established in specific tribes. Kibaki, a Kikuyu, drew support from the Kikuyu, Embu, and Meru tribes, while Odinga, a Luo, represented the Luo, Luyha, and Kalenjin tribes.³³

As soon as riots broke out after the election results, media all over world began reporting on Kenya's 'descent into tribal violence.' When attacks in the following weeks continued to target specific ethnic groups, fears of genocide and "another Rwanda" spread like wildfire. As one Kenyan described, "I hope this doesn't degenerate into a Rwandan-style genocide."³⁴ Many described it as an 'ethnic cleansing,'³⁵ and there is certainly validation in this claim. The first waves of violence occurred in Kenya's Rift Valley, where violence was targeted at Kibaki's Kikuyu tribe. In Eldoret, which suffered the most violence, mobs of Kalenjin and other tribes supportive of Odinga's party destroyed specifically Kikuyu homes and displaced Kikuyu families.³⁶ In a Human Rights Watch Interview with a Kalenjin man involved in the Eldoret killings, he said, "If we met a Kikuyu, we just beat him...the first killing, they approached him politely and asked him to produce his ID card. The one who got the card announced the name very loudly - it was a Kikuyu name. And the mob just attacked him. Those who produced IDs with Kalenjin or Luo names, they let them go."³⁷ In the same way, Kikuyu militias made retaliation attacks targeting the Luo, Luyha, and other tribes seen as hostile towards them.³⁸ Describing one incident of a Kikuyu attack, a boy said, "Their plan was to destroy, they were looking for Luo houses, only Luo."³⁹ Mwalimu Mati commented, "Everyday, you've got more deaths, and these are in the slums; they say Kibaki supporters were attacked or Odinga supporters were attacked, that's just code for Kikuyu and Luo."⁴⁰

Bates describes how the traditional logic of African studies follows that poverty is a result of instability, which comes from ethnic diversity. Therefore, ethnicity is not only the main cause of violent conflict, but the root of Africa's development challenges as well. He points out, though, that it is an overestimation of ethnicity due to the large number of cases where ethnic diversity exists without any conflict.⁴¹ It is undeniable that ethnicity plays an important role in conflict as an organising tool for defining groups and as a target of focus for manifesting a threat. However, many would disagree that

³³ OHCHR, "Fact-finding Mission to Kenya," 7.

³⁴ Kosilbett, in "Kenya: Eyewitness Accounts," *BBC News*, January 28, 2008, <http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7213854.stm>.

³⁵ Harneit-Sievers & Peters, "Kenya's 2007 general election and its aftershocks," 139.

³⁶ Chris Albin-Lackey, *The Immediate and Underlying Causes and Consequences of Flawed Democracy in Kenya* (Human Rights Watch, 2008), <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/02/06/hearing-immediate-and-underlying-causes-and-consequences-flawed-democracy-kenya>.

³⁷ HRW, "Ballots to Bullets," 41.

³⁸ Albin-Lackey, "The Immediate and Underlying Causes."

³⁹ HRW, "Ballots to Bullets," 47.

⁴⁰ Wadhams, "Kenya: In Diplomatic Intensive Care."

⁴¹ Robert H. Bates, "Ethnicity and Development in Africa: A Reappraisal," *The American Economic Review* 90, no. 2 (2000): 131-133.

ethnicity is the main causal factor in conflicts. Tribes most likely do not see ethnic markers as the object of threat or scorn, but rather associate other tensions with those markers. So though ethnicity may be a key issue in many conflicts, it takes second place to other motivators. For most analysts, rather than concluding that ethnicity is the prime, irreducible factor in conflict, many see that current struggles between groups are becoming ethnicised and are being framed in such terms.⁴² Brubaker and Laitin note, "Ethnic violence warrants our attention because it is appalling, not because it is ubiquitous."⁴³ Others argue that it has much less significance than given credit, or is not even a consideration at all. Gilley notes that rather than seeing an actual rise in ethnic conflict, there is rather a rise in "the characterisation of diverse conflicts as 'ethnic'."⁴⁴ Collier believes that the reason there is such a focus on history and ethnicity in conflict is due to the discourse that group leaders often use. There is a need to build a sense of collective grievance in order to instigate collective violence, so ethnicity becomes both a stimulus and an image needed for such conflicts.⁴⁵

Another struggle that ethnicity often presents is its ambiguity. There is still controversy over defining and understanding it due to the difficulty in developing a proper theoretical framework for the concept.⁴⁶ Gilley writes:

"Political science operates best with its tried and true notions like class, citizenship, freedom, equality, security, order and power. Ethnicity and ethnic conflict do not offer avenues for political scientists to make good causal inferences. No doubt sociologists, historians, and anthropologists will continue to research the meanings of these things, and rightly so. But political science requires a ranking of the truth content of various interpretations and, because ethnic conflict makes it hard to do this, it is almost always going to be less useful than other concepts."⁴⁷

Political Conflict

In rejecting the notion of tribal conflict, political violence is the primary descriptor used by most Kenyans, Western governments and civil society groups. Derived from a neoliberalist stance, this approach sees social instability as the result of an inherently weak political system. The key tenets of liberalism focus on the inherent natural rights and freedoms individuals and see the government's role in securing those rights, for which democracy is deemed as the best form. Western governments will tend to advocate for stronger democratic institutions while human rights NGOs call for anti-corruption policies and accountability. The violence that ensued from the general public is both explained and often justified as a fight to restore freedom and democracy. Therefore, a political trigger set off a reaction driven by political motives.

⁴² Rogers Brubaker and David D. Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 425.

⁴³ Ibid, 424.

⁴⁴ Bruce Gilley, "Review: Against the Concept of Ethnic Conflict," *Third World Quarterly* 25, no. 6 (2004): 1157.

⁴⁵ Paul Collier, "The Market for Civil War," *Foreign Policy*, no. 136 (2003): 40.

⁴⁶ Brubaker & Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence," 426.

⁴⁷ Gilley, "Against the Concept of Ethnic Conflict," 1161.

Though Kenya was technically a democracy and held successive elections throughout its history, autocracy was the *de facto* government through successful political suppression. A year after Kenya's first elections in 1963, the only opposition party, KADU, was dissolved and KANU became the sole party in Kenya. Many of KADU's leaders joined KANU in order to share in the rewards rather than remain the opposition, thus reaffirming a one-party rule.⁴⁸ In 1966, an opposition party, the Kenya People's Union (KPU) was formed, but was never able to take power due to KANU's varied and creative ways of keeping the KPU repressed.⁴⁹ Though Kenya technically had an open and free political space during its first few decades after independence, KANU used all means necessary to keep challenging political groups from actually becoming prominent and legitimate.⁵⁰ As KANU's power and legitimacy began to wane due to excessive electoral rigging and corrupt schemes, the party became even more autocratic, and in 1982 introduced the single-party constitution, thus dissolving all legitimate forms of opposition.⁵¹

Another critique of Kenya's political system is its corruption. Olivier de Sardan notes that corruption is so embedded within the African political culture that it has become commodified into a daily transaction.⁵² During his rule, Kenyatta easily offered patronage to local leaders and allowed them to have relative autonomy as long as they did not publicly question the central power of the government.⁵³ Despite having complete autocracy, Kenya's ruling party grew even more corrupt, so much so that the blatancy of its practices became impossible to ignore by the international community. Continued pressure from civil society groups and foreign governments, and ultimately the suspension of \$350 million aid money, forced President Moi to relieve KANU's monopoly on power and return to multi-party elections in 1991.⁵⁴ However, even though Kenya turned into a free multi-party democracy, the regime constantly harassed and intimidated the opposition enough to maintain power, but allowed them to exist to maintain the flow of aid money.⁵⁵

The incidence of violent clashes occurring around election times, particularly the recent ones of 1992, 1997, and 2002, becomes a strong indicator of politically motivated conflict. Following in suite with its recent history, Kenya began experiencing violence well before the actual voting took place. Starting in August 2007, European Union observers recorded 34 election related deaths and 190 violent incidents, all before

⁴⁸ Orvis, "Moral Ethnicity and Political Tribalism," 8.

⁴⁹ Throup, "Elections and Political Legitimacy in Kenya," 373-375.

⁵⁰ Throup, "Elections and Political Legitimacy in Kenya," 376-377.

⁵¹ Ibid, 387.

⁵² J.P. Olivier de Sardan, "A Moral Economy of Corruption in Africa?," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 37, no. 1 (1999): 36-38.

⁵³ Orvis, "Moral Ethnicity and Political Tribalism," 8.

⁵⁴ Throup, "Elections and Political Legitimacy in Kenya," 387-390.

⁵⁵ Orvis, "Moral Ethnicity and Political Tribalism," 9.

voting ever started.⁵⁶ In addition to anger over political corruption, sentiments of betrayal derive from another political grievance. When Mwai Kibaki won the 2002 elections, Raila Odinga and prominent ministers left the former ruling KANU party to join Kibaki's PNU. The draw was a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that Kibaki issued, which promised Odinga a role as Prime Minister upon the renewal of the constitution. Kibaki never honoured that MoU, and thus many supporters of Odinga felt betrayed.⁵⁷

The initial reaction to the election results was mass protesting and demonstrations. Since Kibaki was sworn in despite ballot irregularities, supporters of Odinga's ODM party saw it as a direct abuse of power both on the part of politicians and those who supported them. Therefore, anger was directed at those believed to be responsible. In the Central Province, large groups of people burned and looted government buildings and property belonging to PNU party members, Kikuyu families or anyone perceived to be supportive of the PNU in general.⁵⁸ In several communities, violence was not merely against Kikuyu, but political supporters in general. Mobs threatened and attacked Kalenjin supporters of Kibaki and his PNU because they had failed to support the ODM.⁵⁹ Similarly, large groups of hundreds or thousands in the Rift valley conducted raids and attacks on communities that were non-Kalenjin, or perceived to be ODM opponents.⁶⁰ The reaction to the violence by police and their supposed neutrality was also in question too. There is suspicion to the politicised nature of law enforcement during the riots. According to interviews by Human Rights Watch, officers were quick to use lethal force in opposition areas such as slums in Nairobi and Kisumu. However, in Naivasha and Nakuru where pro-government mobs attacked, the police made little effort to intervene.⁶¹

Though what was initially political in nature quickly formed along ethnic boundaries, Kenyan civil society and human rights groups deny 'tribal conflict' as a proper descriptor of the violence, claiming that the trigger was political - a rigged election. They explain that supporters of the opposition saw the move as a loss in the democratic gains and feared a return to dictatorship.⁶² Kenya has been on a slow but steady path towards greater democratic freedoms. With each election, from the opening up of multiparty elections in 1992 to the first successful transfer of power in 2002, another step in advancement had been made. Therefore, the publicised rigged elections undermined such progress and the desire to protect these freedoms mounted into physical violence.⁶³

⁵⁶ European Union Election Observation Mission, *Preliminary Statement* (Nairobi, January 1, 2008).

⁵⁷ Harneit-Sievers & Peters, "Kenya's 2007 general election and its aftershocks," 134-135.

⁵⁸ OHCHR, "Fact-finding Mission to Kenya," 8-9.

⁵⁹ HRW, "Ballots to Bullets," 42.

⁶⁰ OHCHR, "Fact-finding Mission to Kenya," 9.

⁶¹ HRW, "Ballots to Bullets," 25.

⁶² Dagne, "CRS Report Kenya," 6-7.

⁶³ Maina Kiai, "The Crisis in Kenya," *Journal of Democracy* 19, no. 3 (2008): 166.

While there were certainly incidents of undeniable targeted violence that occurred well outside the parameters of political motivation, the other possible factors of ethnicity or class are acknowledged but downplayed in the shadow of broken institutions as the real culprit. When Human Rights Watch presented their report to the US Senate Committee, Albin-Lackey listed all the longstanding socio-economic tensions that spilled over into violence, but ultimately stated that it was the fault of the Kenyan governments that failed to address these issues overtime.⁶⁴

To further support the political conflict thesis, the violence receded upon the news of a political resolution. On January 22, Kofi Annan arrived in Kenya to begin aid in resolving the crisis. Due to his tremendous reputation and high expectations for his skill in mediation, Kibaki and Odinga were brought to the table for negotiations and violence quickly subsided.⁶⁵ The hopes of negotiations and the eventual solution of a restructuring of government to allow a power-sharing deal was enough to end the spree of attacks. Therefore, since violence has historically occurred around elections, was triggered by a rigged election, often instigated by politicians, and ended with a government deal, politics becomes very central in conflict analysis.

The approaches to restoring stability to Kenya in the aftermath also reflect neoliberal values. From Western governments and donors, the emphasis is on the strengthening of democratic institutions. One example is in a specific shift in the US government's aid budget. For the 2009 fiscal year, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) requested approximately \$569 million USD towards program operations in Kenya. Almost all of the major program budgets remained the same, with only marginal changes. Only one program area saw a significant increase - *Governing Justly and Democratically*. Its budget request doubled from that of 2008, from approximately \$5 million to \$10 million, with the sub-category of *Good Governance* tripling from \$2 million to \$6 million.⁶⁶ The budget request specifically notes that the increase is a direct response to the 2007 election crisis with two main objectives: good governance and stronger civil society. The first targets specifically the political structure and anti-corruption efforts, while the second is to help the public "better demand good governance."⁶⁷ Both objectives provide notable insight into the US neoliberal perception of conflict. The former makes a claim regarding the inherently flawed democratic institutions that led to eventual conflict. The latter suggests that civil society is either not capable or unwilling to hold its government accountable to legitimacy, and therefore the cause of conflict is an indirect result of a weak public voice.⁶⁸ Also in a press conference

⁶⁴ Albin-Lackey, "The Immediate and Underlying Causes".

⁶⁵ Harneit-Sievers & Peters, "Kenya's 2007 general election and its aftershocks," 141-142.

⁶⁶ "FY 2009 International Affairs Congressional Budget Justification: Request by Region - Africa" (USAID, October 14, 2008), 57-58, <http://www.usaid.gov/policy/budget/cbj2009/101438.pdf>.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 59-61.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 57-58. It is important to note, however, that the US does not see democratic institutions as the sole solution to Kenya's challenges, or even the primary one. The *Governing Justly and Democratically* Objective represents less than 2% of the requested aid budget to Kenya, while over 90% of the budget is aimed at health initiatives. This is to indicate that the targeted increase since the elections reveal the general perception of conflict.

with former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, she noted that “it’s Kenyans who are insisting that their political leaders, their political class, find a solution to this crisis so that Kenya can move forward,” and that “this is a country that is and has been on the road to more democracy and to better governance, and it needs to return to that road.”⁶⁹ All her answers reflected a need to build a better government, without any mention of ethnic tensions or inequality to be addressed.

For many civil society and human rights organisations, there is a strong emphasis on justice through the prosecution of perpetrators and accountability of current leaders. For example, Human Rights Watch blames the reoccurring violence in Kenya on the impunity of former leaders who incited it. On one of their reports, they state, “Peace and justice will remain elusive unless there is sustained action to address the long-term crisis of governance that has led to rampant corruption, impunity and the denial of Kenyans’ democratic, social, and economic rights.”⁷⁰ Gagnon from HRW writes, “For the new government to function and earn the people’s trust, it needs to first heal the wounds by prosecuting those behind the violence.”⁷¹ The OHCHR’s primary recommendation is for the creation of independent bodies to “bring the perpetrators, including planners and organizers, of post-electoral violence to justice.”⁷²

Still, many doubt that liberal democratic institutions can provide adequate stability. While such may be the case in Western states, it does not seem to be as influential in Africa. Democracy fails to reduce the risk of conflict, and Collier points out that politically repressive societies are at no greater risk of civil war and full-fledged democracies.⁷³ Some also argue that in addition to democracy not being able to reduce conflict, it may actually increase it in cases of ethnic diversity. For example, the political liberalisation that occurred in Kenya in 1991 initiated mass violence that had never occurred under autocracy. Orvis calls this ‘unprincipled political tribalism,’ in which the suddenly open space causes groups to compete for available resources.⁷⁴ Despite these critiques, strong advocates of democratic institutions argue that in the rare instances that conflict actually is ethnic, it is the result of “imperfect democracies [that] bring nationalist or ethnic mobilisation.”⁷⁵

Socio-economic Conflict

A third dimension of analysing the lines of tension is through the lens of socio-economic class. Traditionally, this often refers to the stratification of strictly economic tiers, based

⁶⁹ Condoleezza Rice, “Next Steps for Resolving the Crisis in Kenya,” February 18, 2008, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2008/02/100977.htm>.

⁷⁰ HRW, “Ballots to Bullets.” 68.

⁷¹ Human Rights Watch, “Kenya: Justice Vital to Stability,” *Human Right Watch*, March 16, 2008, <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/03/16/kenya-justice-vital-stability>.

⁷² OHCHR, “Fact-finding Mission to Kenya,” 16.

⁷³ Collier, “The Market for Civil War,” 40.

⁷⁴ Orvis, “Moral Ethnicity and Political Tribalism,” 9.

⁷⁵ Gilley, “Against the Concept of Ethnic Conflict,” 1160-1161.

on the accumulation of wealth and control of production. However in Kenya, the formation of an elite class is two-pronged: through politics and land distribution. The first case is common in most African states where wealth is accumulated through public office. Therefore, politicians and civil servants become a class of their own, possessing levels of wealth well beyond their civilian counterparts. This class, especially upper-level politicians, seeks to hold onto office not so much for rule of power, but more for economic security. Due to a lack of opportunity to advance in society other than through the channels of the state, politics then becomes the avenue for accumulating wealth personally and collectively. This is the basis for patron-client relationships when politicians rally their particular tribe.⁷⁶ Larry Diamond, in observing class formation in Africa, defines a class as having similar economic opportunities, but also adds that they have control over dominant political institutions and are able to politically maintain that position.⁷⁷ In establishing patronage, another class is created under politicians, but still elevated above the general population. This class consists of business owners and farmers who have connections to the political class, mostly through tribe, and are able to curry favour when it comes to land allocation. With an economy so dependent upon agriculture and tourism, land ownership essentially translates into wealth and power, and is the primary marker for class standing. Commercial farmers have privileged access to subsidised credit and equipment, thus marginalising and displacing small producers. In the city, urban elites enjoy favourable credit and loan plans from the state, giving them an advantage in real estate.⁷⁸ Therefore, the riots were directed at business owners and farmers who owned tracts of land that had been illegally purchased, with the purpose of the attacks to reclaim land perceived to be rightfully theirs. This tension between groups over land ownership dates back to pre-independence.

During British colonial rule, large tracts of fertile land were taken by the British colonists, and the region of land in Central Kenya became known as the 'White Highlands.'⁷⁹ Jomo Kenyatta and mostly Kikuyu tribesmen led the Mau Mau rebellion against the British in the 1950s, which eventually resulted in independence in 1963. Kenyatta quickly centralised power in the Presidency, which gave him control over the process of land distribution. Land that was reclaimed from white settlers was resold. Rather than restoring collective land rights for communities, the new government adopted the British concept of private land ownership at the 'willing seller, willing buyer,' concept.⁸⁰ Elites, including Kenyatta and his family, were able to purchase large areas of land, while the poor were pushed into informal settlements. Thus, from the onset, a socio-economic class rift formed, not between tribes, but within the same tribe. Among the marginalised were also poor Kikuyus, many of whom had fought in the rebellion as well.⁸¹ It is

⁷⁶ Larry Diamond, "Class Formation in the Swollen African State," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 25, no. 4 (1987): 581.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 571.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 591.

⁷⁹ Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, "Unjust Enrichment: The Making of Land Grabbing Millionaires," *Living Large* 2, no. 1 (2006): 1-32, www.knhcr.com/dmddocuments/unjustenrichment.pdf.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Klopp & Kamungi, "Violence and Elections," 13.

ultimately poverty that forms ethnic and political strife. As Collier argues, conflicts arise not out of ethnic divisions or weak institutions, but rather out of poverty, noting that the risk of conflict is highest in countries with the lowest income.⁸²

When Daniel Moi assumed power, he followed the same policies. Though the ethnic perspective sees that he diverted resources to his own Kalenjin tribe, the economic perspective identifies that those resources were directed specifically to the *elite* Kalenjin, leaving the poor within his own tribe still marginalised. During his presidency, he was able to amass for himself reportedly \$100 million in real estate, transport, an oil company, and a cinema chain.⁸³ For the first four decades, both Presidents Kenyatta and Moi stayed in power through forms of economic patronage, such as rewarding a small group of supporters with business incentives and land.⁸⁴ Therefore, due to the centrality of the presidency and its power in distribution, land becomes a currency for maintaining support and building alliances in the political field.⁸⁵ This becomes the foundation for creating a separate elite class of politicians and those who have connections.

Politicians are only able to uphold their wealth and the class status of their clients through sidestepping any state regulations in the allocation of resources, making public office the most desired position for the patron-client relationship.⁸⁶ The income and benefits generated from holding public office most certainly places politicians and public servants in the top economic class of their state, as well as matching the standard of living of their former European colonial class. However, there is an awareness that there is still a great divide between them and the upper classes of Western nations. Though African politicians are comfortably separated and above the rest of society in their own countries, there is a new aspiration to match the statuses of the global elite. Therefore, Africa's "Big Men" have sought to hold on to office and excessively hoard state resources in order to attain this international prestige,⁸⁷ thus further widening the gap between socio-economic classes. This creation of a separate political class through corrupt patronage and unequal distribution has resulted in Kenya being among the top ten most unequal societies in the world. According to the World Bank, the top ten percent possess 42 percent of the country's wealth, while the bottom ten percent barely survive on less than one percent.⁸⁸

Therefore, in the lead up to past elections and particularly the most recent one, land has been a major topic of the campaigning platform since so much of distribution power is harnessed within the Presidency. One of the primary promises of the ODM was to

⁸² Collier, "The Market for Civil War," 40.

⁸³ Diamond, "Class Formation," 581.

⁸⁴ Klopp & Kamungi, "Violence and Elections," 13.

⁸⁵ OHCHR, "Fact-finding Mission to Kenya," 6.

⁸⁶ Diamond, "Class Formation," 582.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 583-584.

⁸⁸ OHCHR, "Fact-finding Mission to Kenya," 6.

ensure marginalised groups would be given proper rights to land ownership.⁸⁹ Violence thus arose out of longstanding inequalities between classes, and is evidenced in cases of attacks on business and land plots. In certain areas, the victims of the attacks had been middle to upper class Kenyans from diverse ethnic backgrounds.⁹⁰ The situation of extensive poverty in the majority of the population is responsible then for creating two prime motivators of class conflict. First, it creates a sense of disparity and restlessness that results in a higher probability of conflict in lower socio-economic classes. People in poverty, especially absolute poverty, are more likely to engage in violence to achieve a certain goal due to the concept of having 'nothing to lose.' Political and community leaders who have sufficient funds have capitalised on this by paying people to carry out attacks. Due to the lack of employment opportunity, especially for youth, many vigilante groups and gangs have formed over the past decade from the attraction of informal income, with some of these gangs being hired to carry out targeted attacks.⁹¹ Many Kenyans were paid to attend violence-planning meetings and carry out the attacks. One of them commented, "This was not done by ordinary citizens, it was arranged by people with money, they bought the jobless like me. We need something to eat each day... We were paid 200 shillings for going to the meeting, and we were told we would get the rest after the job, it was like a business."⁹² Other people said they were offered 7,000 shillings for participation and 10-15,000 for each Luo they beheaded.⁹³ This is further supported by the fact that most of the violence occurred in villages, slums and settlements - all areas of poverty. The capital of Nairobi, home to Kenya's political and business elites, was largely absent of violence. One resident of Nairobi said, "We in Nairobi go about our business as 'normal',"⁹⁴ and another expressed, "Though Nairobi is calmer than the rest of the towns hit by the latest violence, some of us have started to fear that the chaos may spread, even to Nairobi."⁹⁵ Such feelings indicate that even among its own residents, Nairobi is seen as a community that is progressed and civil, absent of the disorder that affects other Kenyan classes.

The second motivation that mass poverty creates is the desire to make right the inequalities. That is to say, the attacks were intended to settle longstanding disputes over land ownership. Those who felt that land had been unfairly taken away from them therefore saw an opportunity to reclaim their rightful portion of resources. In a Human Rights Watch interview with David Anderson of Oxford University, satellite mapping of the violence in the Rift Valley reveals that 95 percent of the clashes occurred on land that had been sold under illegal allocation schemes.⁹⁶ The nature of these clashes indicated that the primary purpose was to reclaim land. OHCHR noted that as opposed to previous election violence in which most Kikuyu families were temporarily displaced

⁸⁹ Klopp & Kamungi, "Violence and Elections," 13.

⁹⁰ Dagne, "CRS Report Kenya," 7.

⁹¹ OHCHR, "Fact-finding Mission to Kenya," 7.

⁹² HRW, "Ballots to Bullets," 44-45.

⁹³ Ibid, 48.

⁹⁴ Sonia Gakuru, in BBC News, "Kenya: eyewitness accounts."

⁹⁵ Peter Mochama, in BBC News, "Kenya: eyewitness accounts."

⁹⁶ HRW, "Ballots to Bullets," 14.

from their homes, this time property was systematically burned down and many villages were renamed in Kalenjin. It was an obvious statement that this was a permanent resettling of what they believed was rightfully theirs.⁹⁷ In all cases of ethnic violence against Kikuyus, interviews indicated that the aim seemed to be more of driving Kikuyus permanently away from the land, not killing them.⁹⁸ In Turbo, one lady recounted, "They told us to leave the house with what we could carry, and then got into the house, took the rest and completely destroyed the house."⁹⁹ This reveals that there was no intent of physical harm, but rather the desire to reclaim land.

Challenges to the Convention

Though these three perspectives are certainly credible and shed important light in understanding conflict, they are only applicable to a certain extent. At a glance, two immediate shortcomings arise in their addressing of conflict, particularly the Kenyan riots: their failure to account for variations in conflict and the periodicity of conflict. First, they fail to provide an explanation for courses of action and stated motives that were contrary to the assumed interests. That is to say, it is impossible to attribute a primary causal factor on all or even the majority of society when such a blanket does not exist. For example, though much of the riots resulted from angry political protest, incidents of targeted ethnicity clearly reveal that politics was not the source of grievance. Therefore, one would be forced to acknowledge all three perspectives, and any other additional ones, as being correct, but only for a certain segment of the population. This is problematic since it allows for any and all assumptions to be valid, yet unable to claim primacy. Thus the stated framework for conflict analysis loses its prescriptive authority for a general approach to resolution and making it irrelevant to policy makers. The second failure is that of explaining why conflict erupts at certain times and is not continuous. The obvious answer would be that a trigger like elections sets off pre-existing tensions. However, both before and after elections, relative peace and stability is the norm for the majority of the time though the same conditions for conflict still exist. The Kenyan government has been corrupt for decades, not only during election times. Likewise, ethnic differences or widespread poverty has always existed in Kenya's history, not once every five years. The point is that the proposed causal factors of conflict, being in constant presence, should therefore cause continuous conflict, if not at least the majority of the time. The fact that violence subsides despite the lack of decline in these variables indicates that such causal factors are not really causal at all.

The inability to adequately address the causes of conflict lies in the theories' fundamental flaws in logic. First, these alleged factors of conflict are based on external characteristics that are assumed to have collective effects. Ethnic, political and socio-economic factors are the product of social conditions, such as corruption or poverty. These conditions are applied to a collective group and assumed to be internalised into

⁹⁷ OHCHR, "Fact-finding Mission to Kenya," 10.

⁹⁸ Albin-Lackey, "The Immediate and Underlying Causes," OHCHR, "Fact-finding Mission to Kenya," 9

⁹⁹ Jance Njeri Karare, in BBC News, "Kenya: eyewitness accounts."

each individual universally, thus creating the same 'causal factors' that would motivate everyone to the same course of action for the same reasons. In other words, individuals become reactors instead of actors in a structure, which if a certain event occurs, a population will behave in such a way. This assumption is invalid because it ignores the spectrum of possibilities in the convergence of external factors and internal deductions. Throughout an individual's life, there is a myriad of social conditions (dynamics in government, economy, culture, etc.) that is context specific to time and location. Therefore, even if a single factor such as political corruption were to uniformly affect a society, it would still produce a variance in reactions due to diversity in individual rationales that have been framed by their differing social experiences. The second flaw is derived from the first, in that if certain events or conditions within a structure cause certain reactions in people, then the assumption is that cause-effect events in society are fixed. In other words, threats to a society will always generate the same responses in people, and therefore diagnostics of problems become based upon social reactions as if they were immutable symptoms. So if a society responds to a rigged election with mass violence, then it is assumed that a rigged election will always cause people to riot. This false blueprint for conflict management ignores the reality that social environments and values are transient, not to mention the changing frameworks of rationale in individuals themselves.

A Constructivist Approach

A constructivist approach offers a more comprehensive framework for understanding the factors that drive individuals to violent conflict. The model that I will present borrows different theoretical concepts from two main schools of thought: the IR paradigm of constructivism and the anthropological study of culturalism. The IR constructivist approach was developed in response to neorealism and the security dilemma that states face in an environment of anarchy, offering alternatives to diminish suspicion and create trust. Culturalism emerged as a rebuttal to primordial ethnicism, arguing that ethnic differences are not given but constructed and do not necessitate antagonistic relationships. The common themes in both of these schools of thought is the emphasis on identity and perception as constructing how actors interpret their world and act within that worldview.

Constructivism can be described as a critical or alternative theory to the dominant realist perspective on state relations. Realism presents a security dilemma between two actors under conditions of anarchy, in which they act towards each other with suspicion, each seeking their own self-interest. Therefore, non-aggressive actions may be misinterpreted as threats, causing one to counter with an increased defensiveness or pre-emptive aggression. However, constructivists argue that antagonistic relations are not automatic, but that friends and enemies are framed through the history that both actors share. Therefore, applied at an inter-group level, relations between communities are dependent on how they perceive each other based on their shared history. This is not to say that communities with a history of conflict will remain that way. On the contrary, constructivists argue that relations can be changed through reframing the perceptions of each other's identity. Culturalism places an emphasis on how culture

defines and shapes communities and their values. Though culturalist work is often in reference to ethnicity, its concepts can easily be applied to any social category. Identities are said to be rooted in communities, and individuals act according to those identities, thus reproducing the cultural context that defines oneself and community.

I will utilise portions of the varying perspectives from the noted theoretical arguments to formulate a paradigm for understanding the shift to violence in the case of Kenya's post-election riots. The line of argument follows as such: Individuals possess multiple identities due to their membership in various overlapping communities. Each identity frames how they perceive the world, ordering values, interests and threats. Shifts in the external environment do not cause automatic reactions in people, but rather a re-evaluation and selection of a certain identity-perception, upon which the individual engages in courses of action consistent with that particular framework. By applying this model to the events of the post-election violence, we can better understand when and why non-violent tensions spill over into physical conflict.

Identities

Identity is an important concept to consider in conflict because it defines the boundaries of communities and orders the normative actions that are taken in correspondence. At its most basic level, an identity can be described as a definition of oneself. However, this definition is not always unified, as it varies from what one believes to what one projects to what others believe. In short, people have multiple identities, but the boundaries of those identities or the hierarchy in which they exist are not definite, but rather quite fluid. As I will show through some of the following analyses, it is difficult to understand how people identify themselves and which identities take more prominence.

An identity can also be synonymous with a social category, that is, a label attributed to members of a certain group. Such social categories can be defined by the rules of membership and the content of that group's definition, such as beliefs, attributes, behaviours, etc.¹⁰⁰ In other words, one's identity comes from the community they belong to, and thus are defined by that community's characteristics. Someone who identifies themselves as a Kikuyu would be associated with the community that identifies themselves as a tribe with a similar language, bloodline, and heritage. Another aspect of identity construction is the necessity of distinguishing oneself from the Other. Due to the inescapable dilemma that defining one's own group involves contrasting differences with other groups, there is the potential for an antagonistic and possibly violent relationship with the other.¹⁰¹

If identity is rooted in community, and people belong to multiple communities, than any one person has multiple identities simultaneously which are rooted in different categorical environments such as geographical communities, political ideologies, socio-economic strata, and many others. Ross, in describing the nature of cultural identities

¹⁰⁰ Fearon & Laitin, "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity," 848.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 851.

being rooted in community, notes that these communities develop multiple loyalties. Some are in harmony with each other while others have obligations pulling in different directions.¹⁰² For the most part, having multiple identities and loyalties coexist without intrusion into other spheres of life. A person can be a teacher (professional community) and a daughter (family community) at the same time with no conflict of interest. It is when the latter occurs, when loyalties are diverged and interests clashed, that we encounter the dilemma of who people consider themselves to really be.

The issue with identities is that they are neither definite nor, in some cases, substantially rooted in actual history. In many cases, the identities of communities have been fabricated instrumentally. An example is the Hutu and Tutsi groups of Rwanda. There is no evidence that the two communities have any true history of ethnic identity, and yet they have been labelled as ethnic groups. Research indicates that the dichotomy was originally a class separation of ruling elite and subservient peasants, a creation of the European colonisers. The boundary lines of these two groups were in fact quite porous but hardened over time as a result of further reinforcement by Rwandan elite that adopted the colonial ideology to maintain power.¹⁰³ Though the identity of Kenya's tribes are not as dubious, having traceable lineage and distinct languages, perceptions amongst the tribes of each other have certainly taken on additional attachments. As noted previously, Kenya's Kikuyu tribe have a history of maintaining strong influence in public office as well as success in business. Though these are obviously not rigid boundaries (members of other tribes have succeeded in business and politics, while poor Kikuyus have been marginalised), the ethnic identity of being Kikuyu has been synonymous with being the political elite and wealthy class.

Bratton and Kimenyi conducted a survey prior to Kenya's 2007 election to study voting patterns. Through their surveys, they discovered several inconsistencies with how Kenyans chose to publicly identify themselves and how such identities were revealed in how they voted. When asked how they would identify themselves as a sub-category to being Kenyan, only 20 percent chose to use an ethnic descriptor such as tribe or language. 43 percent used other descriptors of identity such as occupation or social class. Even more interesting, 37 percent rejected the questioner's instructions of using a sub-category and insisted that they were above all, Kenyan.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, when asked whether they identified themselves as being more Kenyan or of their ethnic descent, about half indicated that they felt more Kenyan, a third said both identities co-existed equally, while only 14 percent indicated that their identity was more tied with their ethnicity. As Bratton and Kimenyi observe, Kenyans are not the stereotypical African people driven by ethnic interests, or at least in self-depiction and projection.¹⁰⁵ Whether this is actual or not, it reveals that most Kenyans at least prefer to not have association

¹⁰² Marc Howard Ross, "The Relevance of Culture for the Study of Political Psychology and Ethnic Conflict," *Political Psychology* 18, no. 2 (1997): 303.

¹⁰³ Fearon & Laitin, "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity," 857-858.

¹⁰⁴ Michael Bratton and Mwangi S. Kimenyi, "Voting in Kenya: Putting Ethnicity in Perspective," *Afrobarometer*, no. Working Paper No. 95 (2008): 3, <http://www.afrobarometer.org/abseries.html>.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

with their ethnic community as a primary identity, but prefer to project a nationalist identity of being Kenyan.

Maina Kiai, chairman of the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, explains that the cause of the riots was the result of citizens desiring political freedom and better governance. Moreover, though he does not condone the violence, he goes on to praise the Kenyan people for being “ahead of their leaders...regardless of political or ethnic affiliation.”¹⁰⁶ However, he does not mention all the accounts of violence that were apolitical in nature. Almost all Kenyans polled said that they would vote for candidates based upon qualifications and experience, while less than one percent said they would vote based upon ethnic ties. As Bratton and Kimenyi postulate, “Either voting in Kenya is genuinely non-ethnic, or Kenyans are describing their political world in a way they want it to be, rather the way it really is.”¹⁰⁷ As shown from the examples above, Kenyans prefer to identify themselves as being united and peaceful, unaffected by any ethnic tensions that may be presumed.

I have established that though people have multiple identities, there is a preference or hierarchy to which of those identities take prominence. As a generalisation, one can conclude that though Kenyans have both a national identity and an ethnic identity, the majority prefer to project the national one. This is important because each identity has a set of values that are attributed to it. To be Kenyan is to hold values as pride in country, unity among citizens, and a downplay of tribal differences. To Kenyans, those values are more noble, so to say, than the perceived values that tribalism holds. Therefore, each social category that a person belongs to has its place in an order of preference to that individual.

Perceptions

Each identity forms a perception, an attached set of values that determine how an individual interprets one’s surroundings and acts accordingly. It can also be termed a worldview, for it is how individuals and communities perceive the external environment. One’s perception determines and orders friends, enemies, interests and threats. Since perceptions are interpretations of the world, they often do not coincide entirely with reality, but are rather subjective to the individual or community and therefore contain many misconceptions of reality. These misconceptions either diminish or exaggerate certain aspects of reality, especially when an individual’s worldview is merged with that of a community. Solidarity within the community becomes exaggerated while similarities with ‘others’ become diminished. Likewise, differences within the same group are neglected while threats from outsiders are magnified. Through the everyday reinforcement of such perceptions, frames of rationality are formed to which one acts.

Depending on one’s identity, perceptions of the same issue can invoke different responses. During the election campaign, a concept known as *majimbo* became a

¹⁰⁶ Kiai, "Crisis in Kenya," 166-167.

¹⁰⁷ Bratton & Kimenyi, "Voting in Kenya," 4-5.

prominent issue of debate. Dating back to independence, majimbo was popularly supported by the opposition KADU party and many of the smaller tribes. It proposed a federalism of semi-autonomous regions based on ethnicity, which opponents called chauvinist and tribalist.¹⁰⁸ The surface debate occurs between those who see the central government as having too much power, while others fear federalism may threaten Kenya's unity. However, a poll reveals that about a quarter of Kenyan's interpret majimbo to mean the redistribution of people to their land of origin. 43 percent of Kikuyus saw this as the meaning of majimbo. The opposition party advocated in favour of a decentralisation of political power to the outlying provinces, which implied moving it away from the Kikuyu-dominated Central Province.¹⁰⁹ For the Kalenjin in the Rift Valley, it meant a reversal in the distribution of land after independence, which they took to understand as "an invitation to conclude business left unfinished in the 1990s,"¹¹⁰ that is, the driving out of all Kikuyu settlers in the region. Though the ODM tried to detach itself from the ethnic and violent stigma of majimbo, it knew that the fluidity of the term would raise greater support among the minority tribes in the Rift Valley that were weary of Kikuyu occupation.¹¹¹ The idea was favoured among provinces in Kenya that had been neglected by the government, and saw it as an opportunity receive more resources and get "a bigger share of the national cake."¹¹² The same concept is perceived both as an interest and a threat, depending on which community one identified themselves with.

Another example of perception based on identity is discrimination. Although all ethnic groups will feel a certain level of discrimination, it is interesting to see the inverse relation of threat perception from two of Kenya's major ethnic groups, the Kikuyu and the Luo. As noted earlier, the Kikuyu constitute the majority group and have historically dominated public office and corporate business. When asked about their economic position in relation to other groups, 12 percent of Kikuyus thought they were worse off, while 66 percent of Luos thought they were worse off. Similarly, only 2 percent of Kikuyus thought the government treated them discriminatorily or unfairly, contrasted with 52 percent of Luos who felt the same way.¹¹³ While it may be true to an extent that the government treats non-Kikuyu groups less favourably because it is run by Kikuyu, being a member of certain communities significantly affects what one perceives as threats.

As one begins to recognise the threats that exist in their world, a perception of others' identities are formed and the values they are assumed to hold. In other words, who are friends, who belong, who are outsiders and who are enemies. Bratton and Kimenyi's survey reveals that though Kenyans may view or project themselves in better light, their

¹⁰⁸ HRW, "Ballots to Bullets," 15.

¹⁰⁹ Bratton & Kimenyi, "Voting in Kenya," 10

¹¹⁰ Harneit-Sievers & Peters, "Kenya's 2007 general election and its aftershocks," 136

¹¹¹ International Crisis Group, *Kenya in Crisis*, February 21, 2008, 10, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5316&l=1>.

¹¹² Harneit-Sievers & Peters, "Kenya's 2007 general election and its aftershocks," 136.

¹¹³ Bratton & Kimenyi, "Voting in Kenya," 6.

perceptions of others around them are not as noble. The Kenyans surveyed were less trusting of others' intentions the further away they were socially, starting from the immediate family to the community to their tribe and to those in other tribes. Even more interesting is that they tended to describe conflict and social strife as increasing with greater social distance from themselves. For example, many saw political conflict as being more present in other tribes, as well as accused political leaders with different ethnic backgrounds as organising along tribal lines and governing with discrimination. Bratton and Kimenyi interpret this correlation between trust and perception of conflict to mean that Kenyans tend to view strangers and outsiders as potentially more threatening.¹¹⁴ In short, the Kenyans surveyed perceived those within their closer community as possessing attributes and values similar to them, while viewing others outside their community with scepticism and antagonism because of perceived faults. Therefore, the 'outsider' or 'other' becomes framed as a potential threat.

Threats to one's community, whether actual or merely perceived, are often constructed through the distortion of narratives and misrepresentation of identities.¹¹⁵ For example, in most cases of illegal land allocation in the Rift Valley, the purchasers of the land were not directly involved with the corruption. The political leaders they had bought it from acquired it through illegal means, but were able to grant the purchasers 'legal' entitlement. Yet local grievances against the Kikuyu settlers who bought the land increased, and local politicians were able to use that to incite further public animosity against them for their own campaigns, while the public often ignored the leaders who were actually behind the corruption.¹¹⁶ When solidarity is built upon a common grievance, the loss of land, the perceived 'enemy' is narrowly defined and exaggerated among the wide spread of people who could constitute a threat.

The construction of threats do not arise instantly, but are rather formed and reformed through daily actions and language. Described as social construction through discourse, cultural habits, symbolic imagery or everyday discourses frame the perceptions and actions of individuals. Individuals identify themselves with a certain social category and set of values, going through their day acting according to those expectations. In the course of following those social conventions, they are in fact producing and reproducing the very frameworks that order their actions, and thus reinforce established norms.¹¹⁷ There is debate over whether such discourses develop independently of any human intention or are strategically framed by specific individuals seeking to create such a misperception. There is, however, evidence of both occurring prior to the election and during the violence afterwards.

During the campaign trail, the local media played a major role in the process of reinforcement. In the past few years, the state monopoly on radio broadcasting was broken as local radio stations airing in ethnic languages began to proliferate. Originally,

¹¹⁴ Bratton & Kimenyi, "Voting in Kenya," 5-6

¹¹⁵ Brubaker & Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence," 442.

¹¹⁶ HRW, "Ballots to Bullets," 14.

¹¹⁷ Fearon & Laitin, "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity," 851-856.

these programmes were intended to be entertainment talk shows, but were transformed into open forums for public debate as disenfranchised voices found them to be outlets for frustrations. Though this was a good way to relieve tensions through dialogue rather than violence, the radio announcers admitted to never having any formal training in mediating political discussions, especially those related to conflict. Therefore, during times of political intensity, such as before and after the elections, most talk shows were dominated by those with the strongest voice.¹¹⁸ Though there were no explicit messages in radio broadcasts to kill or harm anyone, L. Muthoni Wanyeki of the Kenya Human Rights Commission says there were definitely “prejudices spread, ethnic stereotypes made and the fear created,” which “played a role in my opinion in the escalation of the violence.”¹¹⁹ Mitch Odero of the Media Council of Kenya says the talk shows were more direct, saying politicians would call in and “sometimes literally calls on the youth to rise up and fight.”¹²⁰ Waruru Wachira, Director of the Royal Media Service, sees the danger of local radio stations. Since they are tailored to serve a particular community, that community will have its own political orientation and would only want to hear their own views. Being non-partisan would result in a loss of their audience. Therefore, as Wachira says, “Objectivity and neutrality is often seen in these areas as a sign of hostility - people say you have to be with them 100%.”¹²¹ The radio stations themselves were not the source of reinforcement, but rather the tool to which local communities voiced their perceptions and in turn heard their own perceptions reiterated to them.

In environments of intense social instability and heated emotions, the reproduction of perceptions can intensify and be exaggerated. Threats become escalated and as well as the need to respond to those threats. Often in the build up to elections, there was an increase in clashes between ethnic communities resulting from both the creation and inflation of differences.¹²² According to Human Rights Watch investigations, much of the continued violence was spurred on by the spread of false information and hate speech. For example, just after the elections announcements, rumours spread by text messages reported false stories of Kikuyu committing horrible acts, which provided ample justification for aggression against the Kikuyu communities. In Eldoret, rumours were spread that armed Kikuyu militias were hiding in IDP camps planning attacks on the local Kalenjin. Though obviously false, it was enough to persuade local groups to attack the camps.¹²³ As survivors fled from the violence in Eldoret to Molo, Nakuru and Naivasha where there was a larger Kikuyu population, they brought with them all the horrific stories of the attacks on Kikuyu. The areas they fled to had been peaceful during the first few weeks the riots had been going on. Yet upon hearing these stories,

¹¹⁸ Jamal Abdi Ismail and James Deane, “The 2007 General Election in Kenya and Its Aftermath: The Role of Local Language Media,” *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 13, no. 3 (2008): 322-323.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 323.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 324.

¹²¹ Ibid, 325.

¹²² Anders N rman, “Elections in Kenya,” *Review of African Political Economy* 30, no. 96, War & the Forgotten Continent (2003): 344.

¹²³ Albin-Lackey, “The Immediate and Underlying Causes”.

tensions were ignited among the Kikuyu residents and local leaders began organising self-defence forces. Kikuyu militias began going through their own towns targeting Luo, Luhya, Kalenjin and anyone else associated with ODM or anti-Kikuyu violence in general. Violence spread from these areas to other parts of the country, and resulted in a week of reprisal attacks and deaths.¹²⁴ In those communities, the reframing of perceptions to exaggerate existing threats or create new threats incited intentions of violence that were not previously existent.

Perception is not only an internal framework that is constructed through the course of events in a society, but can also be a strategic tool formed by elites to generate violence in an effort to gain or hold on to power.¹²⁵ There is strong evidence that individuals, particular politicians and local community leaders, capitalised upon misconceptions to magnify fears and incite violence. Cultural mobilisation is built upon individual perceived threats that are internalised and reinforced through group interaction and solidarity.¹²⁶ Therefore, politicians will mobilise their support base through the politics of tribalism. By creating ethnic division and fear through the demonisation of other tribes, the Kenyan political class was able to divert attention away from the inequalities of class formation. Thus the awareness of the general public towards class division is masked by surface factors like tribalism, enabling politicians to keep their place.¹²⁷ According to Diamond, the patron-client system in Kenya's political class may "purchase sufficient acceptance of, or even identification with, the system at the mass level to pre-empt any serious lower-class challenge."¹²⁸ Though the lower class may be significantly separated from the wealthy political class, they will continue to support a particular politician if the patronage benefits given to them raise them above others in the lower class, thus creating an "upper-lower class" clientele. Therefore, even though Kibaki was ethnically Kikuyu, he had a unified support base during the first election because he was seen as representing "the people" in opposition to the dominant, wealthy political class. In the case of Kenya and many other areas that have experienced conflict, false discourse is constructed and reproduced both through the general public and through specific individuals that form it.

There may be difficulty in bridging the link between a perceived threat and acts of intense violence. How is it that viewing another person as corrupt or wealthier is enough to drive someone to murder? Perceptions do not merely construct an image, but rather a rationale. Some analyses of ethnic conflict focus on the concept of the cultural construction of fear. The 'other,' usually defined in terms of ethnic markers due to its identification, is demonised or dehumanised through a constant process rhetorical reinforcement. Therefore, "once such ethnically focused fear is in place, ethnic violence no longer seems random or meaningless but all too horrifyingly meaningful."¹²⁹ In other

¹²⁴ HRW, "Ballots to Bullets," 43.

¹²⁵ Fearon & Laitin, "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity," 853

¹²⁶ Ross, "The Relevance of Culture," 315.

¹²⁷ Diamond, "Class Formation," 586.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 585.

¹²⁹ Brubaker & Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence," 442.

words, the process of construction and reinforcement has such a strong influence that to act violently toward a perceived threat no longer becomes a deviation, but a normal, rational act.

Situational Worldviews

I have established that all individuals possess identities that derive their characteristics from the communities that they associate themselves with. Each identity carries with it a perception, or a certain analysis of their surrounding world. Since individuals have multiple identities simultaneously, and therefore have multiple sets of perceptions, it would be deductive to conclude that there should occur obvious conflicts of interest. Of course, many identities can overlap harmoniously because of similarities in values. Yet how do individuals cope with values that are at odds with each other? This question was manifested in the nature of Kenya's riots, most evidently in incidents of people turning on their own neighbours. The sudden explosion of mass violence absent of extensive planning or coordination reveals that the boundaries of identities and perceptions are not rigid, but rather extremely fluid and situational.

In addition to defining how one sees the world, identities and perceptions create a field of possible actions that are normative and expected, and excludes actions that would be seen as abnormal or irrational. For example, one's professional identity as a police officer would deem carrying a gun during work as acceptable, while such an action would be inappropriate for a teacher. In the case of most identities, acts of extreme violence would be abnormal except in special circumstances. If there were a threat to a community or its values, then the value of self-preservation would take greater priority. In other words, culture defines priorities, in that it orders what "people consider valuable and worth fighting over."¹³⁰ This hierarchy of values becomes the structure for how conflicting perceptions are dealt with internally. If one identity perceives someone as a threat while another identity perceives the same person as a friend, one of those identities will take precedence over the other. As a hypothetical example, suppose two Kenyans are neighbours; one is a Kalenjin and the other is a Kikuyu. The Kalenjin man's ethnic and socio-economic identities may perceive the Kikuyu as a threat because he has purchased his farm through corrupt politicians, has settled in historical 'Kalenjin' land, and therefore receives a higher income. However, their shared history of being neighbours for several years frames the Kikuyu as a friend. So while the 'submissive' perception of scorn for his neighbour may still exist, the prominent perception of a friend overrides the other. This situation is common all across Kenya. The question is then how the recessive perception rises in the internal hierarchy to take prominence, an event that resulted in the sudden and mass conflict in Kenya.

If identities and perceptions are constructed and therefore subjective, than their boundaries and attributes are prone to change over time. Many variables can enter a society and affect the worldviews of communities and individuals, such as major events, social leaders or just the general evolution of everyday discourse as mentioned before.

¹³⁰ Ross, "The Relevance of Culture," 302.

Due to the constructed nature of identities, they are fluctuant enough for identification with a certain group and dissociation with another group to be selective and situational. Therefore, mobilisation of a group is easily done on the basis of exaggerated perceptions similarities and differences convenient to the context of the situation.¹³¹ In the context of an election campaign, mobilisation around a political identity that may sever relations from a residential identity becomes quite easy. People may favour siding with their political party over maintaining friendly relations with their neighbours. Such gradual shifts in identities occur out of changes in the external environment that cause people to re-evaluate their interests and threats. Boundaries defining particular groups can shift over time depending on the status of other groups and what the stakes are in a conflict.¹³² The perception of a threat may be enough to shift one's identity in order to adequately meet that threat. For example, Bratton and Kimenyi's survey revealed that the majority of Kenyans did not consider themselves to be driven by ethnic interests. In addition, 59 percent said the characteristic they disliked most about opposing political parties was tribalism. They were referring the general reputation of parties to vote together as an ethnic bloc. Bratton and Kimenyi then suggest that individuals may act with ethnic interests, such as voting based on a candidate's ethnicity, even if they do not hold those same principles. They only need to be motivated by the fear that other groups will exclusively vote ethnically, and are therefore pressed to do the same in defence rather than on other prior considerations.¹³³ The fear and perception of another group being ethnicised was enough to cause Kenyans to become ethnicised themselves, an attribute they despised yet took on in order to guarantee security.

Such an act is common in the IR concept of a security dilemma, which in interstate relations, a non-aggressive move by another state may be perceived as threatening, and therefore one reacts by increasing one's own level of aggression. This dilemma between states can be applied to intrastate conflicts between multiethnic communities. The 'conditions of anarchy' existent in IR is paralleled with the collapse or decreased level of central authority, which is seen as a window of opportunity or vulnerability by which any form of mobilisation by one group may be perceived as an act of aggression, thus triggering pre-emptive attacks.¹³⁴ This 'window of opportunity' is triggered by a sudden shock to the social system that alters pre-existing perceptions. This shock could be a variety of changes in social conditions, such as a coup d'etat, an assassination, a change in leadership, a natural disaster, an economic collapse or in Kenya's case, a rigged election. Such an intense system shock produces a categorical shift in identity and an internal re-evaluation of assumptions. An individual either selects a subordinate identity that justifies the perception of certain threats, or allows a currently perceived threat to become magnified to the extent of warranting violent measures to neutralise it. In this process, previously fluid boundaries of community could be hardened and differences be perceived as irreconcilable.

¹³¹ Ibid, 312-313.

¹³² Ibid, 306.

¹³³ Bratton & Kimenyi, "Voting in Kenya," 7.

¹³⁴ Barry R. Posen, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict," *Survival* 35, no. 1 (1993): 27-47.

Weingast's studies in inter-group conflict further reveal how frameworks of rationality can change easily given a shift in the external environment. If group leaders indicate that their particular group has become a target for extermination, individuals will quickly and rationally take up arms even if there is a low probability of that statement being true. If the extent of threat could yield an extreme consequence, such as the suggestion of a genocide or long-term rule, then the decision to engage in conflict becomes the most logical deduction for the given situation.¹³⁵ In Robert Bates' analysis of the correlation between ethnic diversity and political violence, he indicates a 'red zone' in which protests can turn into violence. As the largest ethnic group grows, there is the possibility of political domination and exclusion of minority groups. Therefore, when faced with greater benefits or greater losses, people are more willing and likely to switch from protest to violence in a "go for broke" scenario.¹³⁶ Behaviour then, is the result of a given worldview in connection to one's identity, which sanctions certain actions and rejects others. A shock to the system that causes one to switch identities therefore "renders certain actions reasonable and removes alternatives which on other grounds might be equally plausible."¹³⁷ Therefore, the rioting and killing that occurred in Kenya was not so much mass hysteria or heightened irrational emotions, but rather courses of action that fit within a specific frame of rationality.

The simplest form of an intense shock that causes an immediate shift in values is mere coercion. A significant portion of those who engaged in violence were not driven by any perceptions of enemies or significant interests and gains, but merely out of a fear from the mob atmosphere. According to interviews done by Human Rights Watch, people were threatened into attending meetings of planned violence, and intimidation kept many quiet from speaking out against it or preventing it. One elderly man said, "It is hard to disagree with 300 youths who are advocating violence."¹³⁸ In these instances, perceptions were instantly altered. The internal value of safety and self-preservation had overridden any values attached with other identities. Though killing may have been an inconceivable act previously, in light of the context of having a threat on one's own life, it becomes the most rational choice of all.

In most other instances, this created a tension between the multiple identities and perceptions that were subservient to the dominant one. For instance, using the previous theoretical example of the two neighbours. The Kalenjin man could view his Kikuyu neighbour as both a friend and a threat, but due to their shared history, a friend is the dominant perception. However, as discourses are reproduced during the campaign, there is further evidence for the Kalenjin man to see his neighbour as a threat. A combination of the rigged elections and mass violence would be enough of a shock to shift identities in which the perception of the Kikuyu neighbour as a threat not only takes

¹³⁵ Barry R. Weingast, "Constructing Trust: The Political and Economic Roots of Ethnic and Regional Conflict," in *Institutions and Social Order*, ed. Karol Soltan, Eric M. Uslaner, and Virginia Haufler (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998).163-200.

¹³⁶ Bates, "Ethnicity and Development in Africa," 133-134.

¹³⁷ Ross, "The Relevance of Culture," 304.

¹³⁸ HRW, "Ballots to Bullets," 38.

dominance, but is also amplified to an extent that warrants attacking him as a rational act of self-security. This accounts for the multiple incidents in which the survivors told Human Rights Watch that those who attacked them were their neighbours, people whom they knew very well.¹³⁹

Challenges

There are several challenges to the constructivist approach, but I will address three of main ones. First, the primary challenge that such a theory encounters is the problem of quantifiable analysis. Ideas of identity, perception and culture are already nebulous descriptors in and of themselves. For political science, taking such an approach makes it impossible to define units of analysis, which are generally easily identified in quantified factors like states, income, or organizations. Such fluid concepts as culture prove to be quite immeasurable. Economic factors can be determined by definite statistics of income. Grievances over distribution could be easily rectified through a simple analysis of allocation records and readjustment of percentages. Laws, liberties, crimes, and punishments are clearly defined in writing and fairly sound judgements can be made off of such standards. Even an abstract idea like freedom can be measured by the amount of civil liberties citizens have. Yet identity and perception, given their internalised natures, can at best produce generalisations and trends off of surveys and interviews.

Second, the stated attribute of perception being in continuous change through the reproduction of discourse makes it difficult to isolate time frames for analysis. If social and community perceptions are constantly evolving through reinforcement of individuals, and individual perceptions are constantly changing from the culmination of their multiple communities and contexts, then it is almost impossible to know what causes a perception to change or when it happens. Other than the occurrence of shock events that are clearly evident, such as the Kenyan elections, minor undertones that occur in everyday life affecting how people perceive the world go unnoticed. This could involve arguments with neighbours, phrases mentioned in media, or changes in occupation. Any seemingly insignificant factors in the scope of all social activities have a compounded affect on individuals' perceptions, and combined with this process of internalisation in all individuals within a society, significant changes in values can occur without trace. A related issue is what Ross describes as 'the boundary problem.'¹⁴⁰ If we use culture as an example of analysis, it is difficult to describe where one ends and another begins. States or political parties have definite boundaries; one is either a part of it or not. Yet in the case of overlapping identities and perceptions, there is no line of separation. If someone identifies himself as both a Kikuyu and a Kenyan, how do you measure the prominence of either ethnic interests or national interests over the other when they come into competition? The extent of identities and perceptions in relation to each other are simply indefinite and immeasurable.

¹³⁹ HRW, "Ballots to Bullets," 41.

¹⁴⁰ Ross, "The Relevance of Culture," 311.

Finally, we encounter the problem that all surveys and interviews have in general - truth versus portrayal. As discussed earlier, people have actual identities and projected identities. It is impossible to know whether the claims of values, interests, fears or threats are real, or just projected. If perceptions of threats and interests are internalised, then it becomes difficult to actually know to what extent such ideologies are held.¹⁴¹ For example, how can we know for certain that there exists resentment among the smaller tribes against the Kikuyu? If there is, how pervasive are such feelings? Going back to the example of socio-economic class divisions, a measurement like levels of income provide undeniable facts for analysis. Though the theory that such factors actually motivate conflict are only conclusive through postulated correlations, if one falls into the temptation of rendering individuals as mere reactors to external conditions, then such a deduction is not an issue. However, taking the constructivist approach of considering the influence of internal values, the problem of uncertainty is inescapable.

Conclusion

I have demonstrated that the traditional theoretical approaches to internal African conflict are not adequate to properly understanding its root causes. Instead, I have provided a constructivist framework that demonstrates how individuals' fears and motivations are ordered by their threats and perceptions, which are quite fluid and subject to instant change given an intense social shock. Based upon this paradigm, certain considerations should be made during the recovery process to ensure the prevention of future conflicts. Though it has been a year since the event, Kenya still remains a fragile and volatile environment. Collier describes a 'conflict trap' that most nations experience, in which a damaging war or incident of violence further increases the chance of future violence, especially immediately after emerging from one.¹⁴² Given the habitual tendencies for conflict over its recent history, it is imperative that proper measures be taken if there is to be any progress for Kenya and the region.

First, since most of the violence was both initiated and sustained through misperceptions and false information, efforts should be made to clear incorrect assumptions. According to OHCHR Fact-Finding team, "historical injustices', mostly linked to land but also to real or perceived discrimination in access to job and other financial opportunities were behind most of the expressions of inter-ethnic violence, especially in the Rift Valley. Those 'injustices' must be more thoroughly clarified and addressed to avoid that they be turned into divisive populist messages."¹⁴³ The post-election violence has further segregated the living spaces of Kenya's tribes. Many have been driven from their homes, and forced to move to an area where their ethnic group is a majority for safety. Slums have been carved up as well, with vigilantes from ethnic groups patrolling their section of the town.¹⁴⁴ This segregation will only act to further perpetuate and reinforce divisions and antagonistic perceptions of the other. Clarity

¹⁴¹ Brubaker & Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence," 443.

¹⁴² Collier, "The Market for Civil War," 42.

¹⁴³ OHCHR, "Fact-finding Mission to Kenya," 15.

¹⁴⁴ HRW, "Ballots to Bullets," 56.

must therefore be brought in such a way as to reconstruct a context of trust between communities.

Second, in the process of clearing lies and establishing truth, there should be caution as to not frame any further misconceptions. There is a danger in Truth and Reconciliation councils of re-demonising a certain group. Efforts to reveal and punish perpetrators of violence have the potential to create further tensions between communities. Brubaker and Laitin warn that since framing incidents in certain terms, such as labelling a conflict as being 'ethnic,' partly contributes to our perception of understanding events in a certain way, it may actually increase the real incidence of ethnic violence.¹⁴⁵ The ethnic, political, economic or any other characteristic of conflict is not intrinsic to the conflict itself, but rather interpretative claims. The contestation of the definition of conflict and the result of how it's construed feeds back into the conflict and could either prevent or generate future violence.¹⁴⁶ By reaffirming possible misconceptions of the nature of a conflict, and thus reasserting identity markers to perpetrators and victims, we may be constructing the perception that such a conflict really does exist and end up creating the conditions for another one.

Finally, in the attempts to address present and future grievances, there needs to be a consideration of how communities perceive injustices, whether actual or not. Negotiations and even completed agreements often fail when either side interprets the other as hostile.¹⁴⁷ Therefore, it is important to take into consideration the rationale of the fears and threats that parties have, whatever those may be. Ross notes that "taking seriously a group's worldview does not mean agreeing with it but rather trying to understand why a group has come to see the world as it does."¹⁴⁸ History has shown that such perceptions of grievances have a tendency to be exaggerated during election times. Therefore, both the Kenyan government and NGOs have a responsibility to mitigate the reproduction of false discourses that increase tension. The needs and grievances that inflame violence are many and varied, both real and perceived. That is not to say that the government or NGOs should give the illusion of fixing problems, but rather to target perceptions of grievances. If an issue is real, there should be obvious efforts to address it as well as reconstruct relations of trust to ease any tensions. If an issue is falsely constructed, then there should be efforts to change such misconceptions so as to not allow their continued reproduction in society. The objective is not to completely solve a single problem, as many other views suggest. Rather, it is to maintain a level of satisfaction within a society that prevents communities from shifting into a paradigm that requires violence as a means of justice. Through careful mitigation of tensions, the primary goal of sustainable stability will be achieved, which then allows for a favourable environment that is conducive to accomplish other goals of growth and development.

¹⁴⁵ Brubaker & Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence," 428.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 444.

¹⁴⁷ Ross, "The Relevance of Culture," 316.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 321.

It is no coincidence that issues of poverty and lack of development are worst in areas of perpetual, protracted conflict. Kenya was fortunate enough to escape a full-scale civil war, though prospects of such a catastrophe were quite high. Though it took over a month of negotiations for a power-sharing deal to be reached between the two opponents, violence had stopped at the first sign of negotiations. With Kofi Annan mediating talks and continued updates of the process, Kenyans received the perception that progress was actually being made, which was enough to ease perceived threats. Pacifiers of conflict will obviously vary with context, but the process of relieving false and exaggerated perceptions of threats and enemies are crucial to rendering stability, which is a prerequisite for any other goals, both in internal state affairs and in regional interstate conflicts.

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