

**From prophetic voices to lack of voice:
Christian Churches in Kenya and the dynamics of voice
and voicelessness in a multi-religious space**

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Abstract

Based on recent ethnographic research carried out in the last five years, this article offers an examination of the changing roles of mainline churches in public life by exploring the perceived loss of prophetic voice on the part of mainline church clergy and the emergence of other voices in the context of increased ethnicity and religious pluralism in a multi-cultural space. It is argued that the emergence of new voices such as those of the Pentecostal and Evangelical clergy have not only seriously challenged the public roles of mainline churches, but have also spawned multiple and sometimes discordant voices that have further complicated an already crowded sociopolitical space. The article equally highlights the role of Christianity during the late 2007 and early 2008 post election crisis that engulfed Kenya after the bungled 2007 presidential elections. The study of Christian churches' involvement in Kenyan politics not only requires that we go back to history to retrace the ever changing and obviously ever evolving roles of Christian churches in public life, it is also imperative to analyse the collective, individual and institutional relations between Church and state over the last five decades.

Introduction

The relationship between Kenya's Christian Churches and politics has always been complex, ambivalent, even paradoxical. At the same time Christian churches and politics interact in many different ways and at different levels. Yet mainline churches have had a long history of involvement in Kenyan politics. Having played prominent roles as midwives of the democratic process in the early 1990s to the beginning of the new millennium, mainline churches and clergy were largely perceived as the prophetic voices and conscience of society. A decade later, these churches can no longer be described as the voices of the voiceless.

Given the significant and prominent roles played by Kenya's mainline churches and individual clergy in the late 1980s and early 1990s, from one single police state to a multi-party democracy, it comes as a great surprise to find that, just barely a decade since then, church-state relations have changed tremendously and in significant ways. Today, Christian churches can no longer be described as the voice(s) and conscience of society or the spokes persons of the poor and vulnerable. The culmination of this voicelessness on the part of mainline church clergy became increasingly evident during the post election crisis that gripped the country after the bungled presidential elections in late 2007 and early 2008. During this period of tremendous national crisis Christian clergy was increasingly accused of abdication of their prophetic call and voice to speak out against bloodletting, injustice, rape and failed to give badly needed moral direction. In fact, some Christian clergy and institutions were increasingly accused of being Partisan and divided along ethnic divides. There were legitimate concerns about the decline if not the death of public theologies in respect of mainline churches' role in Kenya's public life during this crisis. While Christian churches continue to play integral roles in nurturing both spiritual and national development, they are no longer viewed by the Kenyan public as the custodians of democratic values, champions of the constitution and voices of the poor and vulnerable.

This article is therefore a reflection of the changing roles and loss of prophetic voice(s) among Christian churches in Kenya. Yet, for us to understand the changing roles of mainline churches in the public sphere, it is imperative to go back in time and understand this through the prisms of history. This chapter therefore unfolds in four parts: first we retrace church state relationships with Kenya's successive regimes starting with presidents Jomo Kenyatta, Daniel Moi and Mwai Kibaki. During each of these regimes, we analyse the roles played by Christian churches and what has changed since then. Second we examine the entrance of new players and voices into public life and assess their impact or lack thereof. Third we examine the failure of Christian churches during the post election crisis that

gripped the country in early 2008 and after. Lastly we analyse the roles of these churches before and after the promulgation of the new constitution.

Voice(s) of mainline churches in Kenyan politics; a brief history (1970-2000)

Since Kenya's independence in 1963, Christian churches, particularly a variety of mainline churches and their clergy, have been in a sort of ambivalent and complicated relationship with the successive Kenyan governments from the country's first president Mzee Jomo Kenyatta (1963-1978) right to the second president, Daniel Arap Moi (1978-2002) and to the third president, Mwai Kibaki (2003-2010). Each of these presidents had different relationships with Christian churches.

From colonialism to Jomo Kenyatta's rule

During the colonial period, Protestant denominations and missionary societies could be described as being political quiescent (Mue 2011). They resisted the Mau Mau rebellion, which had been cast as anti-Christian largely because of their oath-taking ceremonies and other such practices. This gave the impression that these Christians lacked nationalistic interests. After independence, the National Christian Council of Kenya shifted its focus towards reconstruction efforts while its members became increasingly both theologically and socially engaged.

This social engagement coupled with evangelistic undertakings led to a sort of cordial relationship with the new Kenyatta administration. After independence, and given the fact that many of the clergy from mainline churches were primarily Kikuyu, it seems to me that both church and state had cordial relations. As one commentator observed, "When you have religious and political elites controlled by the largest ethnicity, one would expect relative amicable relations, and when this balance is upset, a decline in conviviality" (as quoted in Njonjo Mue 2011:180). Hence it seems to me that the country's first president, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta largely maintained an amiable affiliation with Kenya's religious groups during his time in office (1963-1978).

From prophetic voice(s) to custodians of democracy and human rights: Christian churches during President Daniel Moi's Regime (1978-2002)

However, during President Daniel Arap Moi's regime (1978-2002), Christian churches, particularly mainline Protestant and Catholic churches, varied in their support and opposition of the state. On his ascension to power in 1978, Moi gradually consolidated his reign under his infamous Nyayo Philosophy (Nyayo means "footsteps" in Swahili) and expressed Moi's determination to walk in the footsteps of founding president of the Republic of Kenya, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta. Over the years this philosophy, according to Gifford (2009), mutated into the demands that all Kenyans walk in his footsteps. Mainline churches were suspicious of this philosophy and although he tried to co-opt the clergy, this was resisted by the mainline churches. Yet Moi was nevertheless determined to tighten his grip over the country.

By about 1985, he had centralised power under the one party state, a party that was increasingly becoming supreme over parliament and cabinet. His regime was increasingly autocratic, characterised by greed, corruption, tribalism, nepotism, patrimonialism, abuse of human rights and poor governance (Gifford 2009), see also (Wrong 2008; Gifford 2009).

Civil society and various political groups wanting to press for a more democratic dispensation had asked Christian churches to spearhead the constitutional process because Christian churches and individual clergy had remained the only credible and organised network that could stand up to an increasingly autocratic regime (Ndegwa 2001). These clergy constituted tremendous pressure on President Moi and continued to preach against the high level political power monopoly by the ruling party, KANU, corruption in government, tribalism, nepotism and human rights abuses (Gifford 2009; Chacha 2010; Mue 2011).

It was at this point that a number of clergy from mainline Protestant denominations became extremely vocal in their demands for multiparty elections in the early 1990s. Scholars have noted that it was individual Anglican and Presbyterian clergy who came together under the umbrella body of the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK) rather than individual churches that played significant roles in Kenyan politics during this time.

The Catholic Church had, at the beginning, hesitated to join the rest of the clergy in the clamour for change. But with the publication of pastoral letters in 1992 and operating as a unified voice, the churches had begun to exert even more pressure on the government. These protestant clergy were later on joined by Catholic bishops who jointly mounted tremendous pressure on President Moi's

increasingly autocratic regime by demanding a new constitutional dispensation and a return to a multiparty democracy. This led to increased and sustained pressure for even wider democratic and constitutional reforms.

Christian clergy such as Bishop David Gitari of the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK), Rev Timothy Njoya of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) and others were influential figures who made significant contributions in the dismantling of Kenya's one party and autocratic regime. We can demonstrate this with numerous examples. In 1989, for example, the late Bishop Henry Okullu, David Gitari and Timothy Njoya called for the repeal of the 1982 clause mandate that had made Kenya a *de jure* one party state. Bishop Okullu pressed for a constitutional change and demanded that Kenya discards the one party state, but also specifically demanded a two-term limit to the tenure of any future president.

Bishop Okullu argued that it was a mistake in the first place to make Kenya a *de jure* one party state and called for its reversal. In his opinion, power corrupts even persons with the best of intentions and that there was a need for checks and balances.¹ Similarly, retired Presbyterian Church cleric, the Rev Timothy Njoya, while delivering a sermon at Nairobi's St Andrews Church on New Years' Day 1990, called for an end to a one party state. He denounced one party states in Africa and argued that they were doomed to fail the same way they had failed in Eastern Europe and called for its abolition. A few years back in 1986 he had earlier on delivered another sermon where he launched scathing attacks on the oppressive KANU regime.²

Another example where mainline church clergy showed tremendous involvement in the democratisation process was during the 1988 general elections. In 1986, Moi abolished the secret ballot preferring the infamous *mlolongo* or queue-voting (where supporters line up in front of a picture of their chosen candidate) for KANU's primary voting. This election was marred by irregularities and was shameless rigged, especially given the *mlolongo* style of voting (Gifford 2009). This move was condemned and fiercely resisted by the clergy who argued that it was not only unacceptable and unbiblical, but was also a travesty to political justice and amounted to intimidation of the electorate.

Although, according to Gifford (2009:35), Moi conceded exemption of the clergy, the clergy sustained tremendous pressure on Moi's autocratic acts. This time, not only as individual clergy but also under the NCKK whose Secretary General was Methodist clergy, the Rev Samuel Kobia. During this time, resistance was organised and coordinated by this giant religious organisation which had by this time become the country's biggest development Faith Based Organisation and partner with outreach and tremendous resources throughout most of the country. Armed with these resources, established networks and extensive outreach, public goodwill, and the backing from the international community, NCKK was able to stand up against Moi's dictatorial regime.

Regarding the social and political roles of mainline Christianity in Kenya and elsewhere, there is extensive literature on the involvement of Christian groups in the struggle for democratisation. This has been underscored by several studies such as Paul Gifford (1999; 2004; 2009); Hansen and Twaddle (1995); John Lonsdale (1978; 1992; 2005), David Throup (1995); Throup and Maupeu (2004); Mugambi and Kuschner-Pelkmann (2004) Galia Sabar-Friedman (1995; 1997), Henry Okullu (1979; 1984); Timothy Njoya (1987); David Gitari (1990); Chacha (2010); Njonjo Mue (2011); Ntaragwi (2011).

All these studies have not only underscored the roles of mainline churches in the democratisation process and their provision of social services, but they also underscore and demonstrate the profound importance and significance of the Christian message on the Kenyan sociopolitical scene from the 1960s to the late 1990s. Thus, during the turbulent years of the eighties and nineties the mainline church clergy generated a lot of heat and gained the reputation of "radical theologians" and "social activist" and had been appropriately christened the "firebrand".

This small cadre of radicalised clergy garnered disproportionate influence within the Kenyan community in the span of a decade. Their achievements stemmed in large measure from the alacrity with which they were able to fashion a bold self-image structured around such elements as commitment to social change, a penchant for high social visibility, and last, though certainly not least, a conscious decision to focus on the political sphere as their primary target for social action (Chacha 2010; Mue 2011).

As such, the church acted as the voice of the voiceless and the conscience of society and time and again questioned the one party rule excesses from the pulpit. And they spoke with one voice as the men of cloth and honour. Indeed, the clergy constituted a central place in the body of the then reformers in Kenyan politics – they were not only motivated by faith, but repeatedly used religious

¹ Roy Gachuhi, Bishop Henry Okullu: Legend of the Quest for a New Constitution, special report, Sunday Nation 1/5/2010 p. 10-11.

² Church is consistently opposed to change, says Njoya, special report, Sunday Nation 1/5/2010 p. 10-11.

language to argue for their cause. The mainline churches could be described as the conscience of society, the watchdog of the nation and the voice of the voiceless.

At best, these churches developed a critical theology of protest and engagement in which they interrogated the excesses of the state (Gifford 2009; 1998, 1995). Thus religious organisations have to a large extent shaped the constitution review process as much as they played significant roles in the transition to multiparty democracy in Kenya. These churches no doubt articulated a social and political discourse by bringing pressure on Moi's regime.

Yet, some of these clergy paid heavily for their criticism of Moi's regime, some at great personal costs. The outspoken Anglican Bishop Alexander Muge was for example mysteriously killed in a car accident in 1990 because he defied a warning from Moi's government that his life would be in danger if he visited a particular region (Gifford 2009). In 1997, during the seven-year commemoration of the 1990 Saba Saba Massacre where over twenty people died when rallying for multiparty elections, the Rev Timothy Njoya, then pastor of Saint Andrew's Presbyterian Church, was attempting to peacefully lead the commemorators out of All Saints Cathedral after paramilitary police had fired tear gas into the sanctuary. He was severely beaten to the point of being in a coma. This followed years of torture and humiliation by Moi's government due to Njoya's incessant demands for democratisation in Kenya and the attention he drew to human rights' abuses. As though that was not enough, the Rev Njoya was defrocked by the Presbyterian churches. Yet he remains an activist to date and is not afraid to point out any forms of injustices in Kenyan society.

Anglican Bishop Henry Okullu, another vocal critic of Moi's government, also suffered a number of frustrations and personal inconveniences for his criticisms of the regime. The development of his political theology has been well documented and shed important light on the rationale for opposing a political regime. Yet, Muge, Njoya and Okullu represent not only high-profile clergy in the 1990s who expressed their criticism of the government, but they also all had well developed personal political theologies that under-girded their political action and their calls for civil disobedience. These leading clergy and theologians viewed their roles and mission of fighting Moi's dictatorial regime as part of their prophetic and civic duty. They took it as their prophetic obligation to resist all forms of injustice and oppression and used religious language, symbols, pulpits, pastoral letters, episcopal conferences, interviews, print, electronic and private media to stand up to Moi's excesses.³

It is clear that actions undertaken by these churches and their clergy have not only shaped the country's democracy, but have also helped create political and social awareness in all Kenyans. Their criticisms of the managers of the state sometimes drew sharp responses from several government quarters, some of whom considered the clergy's actions unpatriotic. It is therefore unsurprising that church-state relations at this point in history were strained.

But even as individual bishops from mainline churches as well as the National Council of Church of Kenya (NCCCK) and later the Catholic Episcopal Conference were taking on the Moi dictatorship, Moi closely aligned himself with Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. These Evangelical and Pentecostal groups not only supported Moi's autocratic regime, but they also continued to portray Moi as a God-fearing leader, who was guided by principles of peace, love and unity (Akoko 2004:31; Gifford 1995), even as his regime was increasingly accused of corruption, nepotism, torture and complete disregard for human rights (Mue 2011).

Stephen Ndegwa (2001) has noted that the Evangelical and Pentecostal churches were co-opted by Moi to countercheck the opposition from mainline church clergy. For example, as Moi faced increased pressure to lift the ban he had imposed on opposition parties, he attended a Redeemed Gospel Church service in which Bishop Kitonga delivered a forceful pro-Moi sermon.⁴ In this sermon, which was televised by KBC TV, Bishop Arthur Kitonga of the Redeemed Gospel Church (RGC) alleged that Kenya had been like heaven for years under Moi's leadership. He opined that Moi had been appointed by God to lead the country, and Kenyans ought to be grateful for the peace prevailing. He lambasted the mainline churches for pressing for sociopolitical reforms, and termed their leaders rebels, who preached their own gospel, not that of Jesus Christ.

Other clergy who supported President Moi include the Rev Denis White, formerly of the Nairobi Pentecostal Church (Valley Road) who publicly endorsed former President Moi (a frequent worshipper in the church in the 1990s despite being an astute member of the African Inland church AIC) as God's elect and one whose reign had seen the tremendous growth of Christianity in Kenya because he upheld the constitution which promoted and respected freedom of worship in the country (Gifford 2009). Bishop Gaitho of the African Independent Pentecostal Church (AIPC) also threw his weight behind President Moi. Others who threw their weight behind Moi include clergy from a number

³ Ibid

⁴ Pew Forum on Religion and Public life documents: Historical Overview of Pentecostalism in Kenya www.pewforum.org/doc.

of Pentecostal and African Instituted Churches such as the Redeemed Gospel, Deliverances Churches and the Nairobi Pentecostal Church Valley Road and African Instituted Churches such the African Independent Pentecostal Church (AIPC) led by the late Bishop Gaiho respectively.

Evangelical and Pentecostal churches supported Moi because they viewed him as their own In fact, some Evangelical churches like AIC, to which Moi is a bona fide member and a staunch Christian who never skipped Sunday services, even withdrew their membership from the NCKC primarily not just over the issue of political involvement (Olouch 2006), but also for opposing Moi's regime. Ndegwa (2001) has noted that the Evangelical and Pentecostal churches were co-opted by Moi to countercheck the opposition from mainline church clergy.

Moi increasingly used Bishop Arthur Kitonga of the Redeemed Gospel Church to attract the support of the Pentecostals whom he used to counter the attacks from mainline clergy. For example, as Moi faced increased pressure to lift the ban he had imposed on opposition parties, he attended a Redeemed Gospel church service in which Bishop Kitonga delivered a forceful pro-Moi sermon.⁵ Evangelical and Pentecostal support for Moi can be explained variously.

For one, it is important to note that at this point, many Pentecostal churches had not developed any social activism that allowed them to offer any constructive criticism of the government. As Lonsdale (2004) points out, Kenya's Evangelical churches, with a conservative theology, were more preoccupied with a call for the personal brokenness of being born again to salvation that did not depend on political activism but upon faith. Besides, many believed and still believe that by praying for the president, the government of the day or those in authority, they are performing their civic and prophetic duty. To many Pentecostals, prayer is a sort of civic engagement and a political praxis where true Christians must pray to God to establish his kingdom on earth. This is a kingdom of righteousness, corruption free and where peace prevails (Kalu 2008). In the understanding of many Pentecostals, this is even more effective than engaging in a more combative way.

At the same time, analysts have argued that Pentecostals align themselves with the rulers for respectability and to benefit from the states' largesse. It is not lost to many that numerous Pentecostal Churches were rewarded for their support for Moi's regime. Many received access to state controlled media, and they continually and increasingly portrayed Moi as God's appointed leader for the country (Gifford 2009).

From the foregoing analysis, it is clear that mainline churches played critical roles in Kenya's public life particularly during president Moi's rule, while Evangelical and Pentecostal churches played less prominent roles but undoubtedly did not hesitate to come to Moi's side when he was facing increased pressure from mainline churches. Mainline churches, besides keeping Moi's government in check, also played significant civic and public roles particularly in civic education, monitoring and observing elections and in some cases even documenting the outright electoral malpractices and abuses of human rights, pushing for constitutional reforms particularly in the early 1990s.

These churches remained engaged in issues in civic and public life until the 2002 general elections that brought an end to KANU's 39-year-rule. While the roles of mainline churches in the democratisation process from 1970-2000 is thoroughly researched, developed and highlighted, their roles and shifts in civic and public life since 2000, particularly their interaction with politics during President Kibaki's two terms, has not been critically examined.

From loud voice(s) to muted or stifled voice(s): Church-State relations during President Mwai Kibaki's regime (2002-2006)

In the 2002 general elections, Moi considered but eventually decided not to challenge the constitutional ban on a presidential third term. His once vice-president and later rival, Mwai Kibaki, was elected Kenya's third president. As a practicing Catholic, Kibaki maintained close relationships with church officials during his opposition to Moi's government. According to Gifford (2009:40), the churches were less prominent, but undoubtedly on Kibaki's side during the 2002 general elections. Even throughout much of his reign, mainline churches were on his side, the Catholic Church definitely and enthusiastically viewed him as a prominent member of the church.

Yet, developments since Kibaki took over power in 2002, show that mainline churches have displayed an increasingly "worrisome trend"⁶ in respect to their prophetic voice, civic and public engagement. Observers have noted not just the initial silence, but also these churches' reluctance to criticise Kibaki's government even as the new NARC coalition crumbled under the weight of a pre-

⁵ Pew Forum on Religion and Public life documents: Historical Overview of Pentecostalism in Kenya www.pewforum.org/doc.

⁶ The statement 'Worrisome Trend' is attributed Kenneth R. Ross 2004, 'Worrisome Trends': *The Voice of the church in Malawi's Third Term debate*, African Affairs The Royal African Society vol 103, no 410, p99f

election memorandum of understanding that Kibaki refused to honour following the 2002 general elections coupled with allegations of grand corruption such as the Anglo-Leasing scandal, increased allegations of tribalism and many other such injustices. Observers have described this as the litmus test in respect of church-state relations during the first term of Kibaki's rule.

This worrisome trend on the part of mainline church clergy has various explanations. Gifford shows how a new crop of mainline church clergy that took over the leadership of mainline churches after the 1980s and 1990s reformers, which also coincided with the election of President Mwai Kibaki in 2002, became lenient. According to Oloo (2005) for mainline churches, the election of the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) the ruling party and President Kibaki presented a new dilemma and challenge to them. As Oloo (2005) correctly observes, the mainline churches had been partners with the opposition (now the ruling party) against KANU.

With the former opposition now in power, the mainline churches had to resolve the dilemma of how to be the conscience of the nation without damaging the good relationship with Kibaki's government. This is because, for mainline church leaders, NARC's victory was also their victory (Oloo 2005). They felt obligated to defend the administration that they helped come to power. It is against this background that mainline churches have supported the government or remained mum on pertinent issues affecting the nation. This is because they see themselves as partners with the Kibaki administration (Oloo 2005).

At the same time, observers believe that the election of Kibaki in 2002 coincided with the election of new mainline church leaders such as Anglican Church Bishop Benjamin Nzimbi who replaced vocal David Gitari who retired while the Presbyterian Church got a new leader, the Rev David Gathii, who replaced the Rev George Wanjau. The Methodist Church also witnessed such changes after Rev Zablon Nthamburi retired. Except perhaps for controversial Presbyterian Church minister the Rev David Gathii, the other mainline church leaders are less controversial, less vocal and less political than their predecessors. None of them has seriously interrogated the state excesses and they seemed unusually silent about sociopolitical issues affecting the country. At the same time they seemed to lean strongly towards the state as evident by their silence on social issues and the stand they took on the constitutional draft document in 2005/6 (Oloo 2005).

A third explanation given is that the mainline churches have been heavily compromised and co-opted as partners in the governance processes by President Kibaki's regime. With examples, Gifford (2009) shows how clergy from mainline churches were co-opted into state through appointments. Gifford (2009) cites the example of the hitherto outspoken NCCK under secretary general the Rev Mutava Musyimi who changed from 'principled opposition' to Moi's regime to 'principled cooperation' or from fierce criticisms to principled cooperation with Kibaki. Rev Musyimi was soon appointed as the head of the steering committee on Anti-Corruption, an appointment that seemingly appeared to have gravely compromised his ability to independently condemn massive corruption in government especially during Kibaki's first term. Rev Musyimi eventually resigned from his post in 2007 as secretary general of NCCK to join politics, sponsored by Kibaki's party of National Unity (PNU). He won a parliamentary seat and promptly fell silent on public issues sparking off public debates as to what happened to this fierce critic.

Another example cited by observers is that of the Artur Commission of Inquiry saga where Bishop Horace Etemesi was appointed commissioner. The Artur brothers were international crooks/drug barons who entered the country mysteriously and bridged national security when they drew guns at customs officials at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport and seemed to enjoy state security. The press heavily linked the trio with powerful persons in government while other sources linked them to a member of the first family. The Artur brothers were later deported after a public outcry and a commission of inquiry was appointed to carry on investigations. While there is nothing wrong with such appointments, they are largely viewed as a strategy to win the regimes' support and heavily compromise their ability to speak out against sociopolitical injustices and the state excesses. Some of these clergy were fiercely opposed to Moi's excessive and autocratic regime but were correspondingly silent in the Kibaki years.

But state cooption is not the only avenue that corrupts clergy. The clergy are largely also coopted by politicians who are invited to fundraise for the churches. Related to state cooption and compromise, another likely explanation given for the mainline clergy's laxity and lack of voice in the public sphere is that the clergy appeared caught by the tribal bug that has sadly come to characterise Kenya's politics particularly in the recent past.

Gifford (2009) is equally critical of mainline church clergys' apparent lack of immunity against the cancer of tribalism, nepotism and patrimonialism. He cites the examples of Catholic bishops led by Cardinal John Njue who seem to favour President Kibaki's rule. He further cites other examples where a group of Catholic bishops from Central Province were perceived to form a block sympathetic to

Kibaki and the Gikuyu-Embu and Meru political aspirations (GEMA), particularly during his first term (2003-2007). The reasons given for this studious silence on the part of Catholic clergy and according to Gifford is that Kibaki is a Catholic and from Central Province and that, Anglo-Leasing not withstanding, the Kibaki regime had a far better record than Moi's (Gifford 2009). But it has also been suggested that mainline church clergy from western Kenya and Luo Nyanza were sympathetic to honorable Prime Minister Raila Odinga before and after the 2007 general elections.

It is not a surprising that when violence broke out after the bungled 2007 presidential elections, Kenyan Christian churches were already compromised, coopted and indecisive, a move that heavily compromised their ability to speak up and give moral direction during a particularly difficult moment.

According to Gifford, Kenyans were naturally disappointed by this lack of voicelessness on the part of Kenyan mainline clergy as expressed in newspapers, radio, phone-in and general public debates and discourses. A significant number of Kenyans have equally and increasingly voiced tremendous concerns and disillusionments about the contact of Christian clergy particularly those from mainline churches with regard to the apparent loss of their prophetic voice in national politics as expressed in newspapers, radio, phone-in and in general public debates and discourses.

The high moral conscience that the mainline church clergy had in society was therefore missing in the quest to check the states' excesses particularly during president Kibaki's first term (2003-2006). In conclusion therefore, and in comparison with Moi's regime, church-state relations during the Kibaki era changed significantly. However, the Kibaki era from 2002-2007 heralded two important and significant developments in respect of the roles of Christian churches in the democratisation process: the retreat of mainline churches from the public sphere and the entrance of the new Pentecostal churches into the same.

Yet, the single most significant development that surprised many observers was the retreat, if not a perceived decline, in the public and civic roles of mainline churches. Scholars and social commentators have decried the disappearance of "public theologies" who could reach a large civic audience. Scholars and the public decried what was increasingly perceived as the "lack of voice", "muted voices" or "stifled voices" on the part of mainline church clergy who many observers believe are no longer the "voice and conscience of the voiceless and the oppressed". It appeared as if either mainline churches' public profile and voice had collapsed, or that their political energies are fainting.

Yet the perceived loss of prophetic voice on the part of mainline churches preoccupied many observers and analysts and masked new developments in the Kenyan social political sphere: that is the emergence of the new Pentecostal and charismatic movements in public life and the resultant introduction of a multiplicity of discordant voices in public life. Equally troubling though less commented upon is the recent resurgence of Pentecostal and Evangelical Christian sociopolitical activism and voice in the public sphere, a venture that appears to have posed serious challenges to the public roles of mainline church clergy.

Since the unprecedented growth and explosion of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in the public sphere, the mainline churches that were for many decades regarded as the voices of the voiceless and the conscience of society were now increasingly faced with the difficult and complex challenge of maintaining not just their own influence and significance, but also their sociopolitical voice and activism in an increasingly multi-religious, multi-denominational, and multi-ethnic society. The Pentecostals, it seems to me, have further introduced multiple voices into the public sphere and upset the country's religious equilibrium and topography and strained inter-faith relations and dialogue. Let us examine this in more detail.

From voicelessness to discordant voices: the rise of new and multiple voices in Kenya's public sphere

As the mainline church public theologies and prophetic voices were declining, new voices were emerging in the sociopolitical scene. These are voices of the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches that were increasingly emerging by the dawn of the new millennium, but especially in the run up to the referendum on the new constitution for the country in November 2005. The Pentecostal and charismatic clergy that had previously played less prominent roles suddenly woke up from political hibernation to full sociopolitical engagement.

According to Gifford (2009), in November 2005, and amidst heightened political activities and anxieties, Pentecostal clergy mobilised themselves and rallied their members to defeat the draft constitution during the first national referendum held in November 2005. Together with the help of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) led by the then Hon Raila Odinga and the Prime Minister, and others mobilised the public to vote and defeat the draft constitution proposed by President Kibaki because it permitted abortion under certain conditions and provided for Islamic *Kadhis* courts. Other

contentious issues opposed by Christian churches in the draft were clauses that touched on social and ethical issues such as same-sex unions and pornography.

However, the 2005 referendum became the new frontline for forces aligned to President Kibaki and those coalescing around his former ally turned political foe, Raila Odinga, who was then leading a group of rebel ministers who had been frustrated by the failure of Kibaki to honour a pre-election Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). These disgruntled politicians opposed the constitutional draft arguing that it was meant to consolidate power in the hands of the Kikuyu elite who wanted to maintain the status quo (Mue 2011:182).

These groups of rebel ministers were joined by a section of clergy mainly from Evangelical and Pentecostal clergy who opposed the constitutional draft for a different reason altogether: that is resisting the inclusion of Kadhi or Islamic courts in the draft constitution. Leading Pentecostal clergy and churches that opposed the passage of the Bomas constitutional draft include Bishops' Boniface Adoyo of Nairobi Pentecostal Churches, also known as Christ is the Answer Ministries (CITAM), Margaret Wanjiru of Jesus Is Alive Ministries (JIAM), Arthur Kitonga of Redeemed Gospel Church (RGC), Wilfred Lai of Jesus Celebration Centre and Mark Kariuki of Deliverance Churches (DC) and many other religious organisations including the Evangelical Alliance of Kenya (EAK).

At the beginning of the referendum campaigns, a vocal segment of the church including mainline protestant and catholic clergy mobilised their followers to reject the draft and publicly and vehemently stated their positions. However, with time, many key Kikuyu church leaders backtracked and counselled their followers to "vote with their conscience" (Mue 2011:182; Chacha 2010; Parsitau 2011; Gifford 2009). This was interpreted by the 'No' camp (those opposed to the constitution) to indicate that the Kikuyu church leaders' change of heart was ethnically motivated. The majority of Pentecostal Church clergy vehemently opposed the draft constitution and helped defeat it during the November referendum.

Following this humiliating constitutional defeat, opposition leaders held a breakfast meeting with the Kenya Church bishops to celebrate. At an opposition rally in Nairobi, Pentecostal clergy led the crowd in prayer (*Daily Nation*, 26 November, 2005). In August 2006, top representatives of KANU and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) officially registered the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM); it was composed of those who opposed the Kadhi courts, as a new political party to compete in the 2007 general elections (*Kenya Times*, 25 August, 2006).

The entrance of the new Pentecostal movements to the public arena further complicated matters as it introduced a multiplicity of voices in an already complicated multi-religious space. In the course of these happenings, Pentecostal clergy and the groups they represent became highly visible and influential in both electoral politics and constitutional matters while some clergy emerged as leading opinion shapers in national politics. It was the search for a new constitution and the opposition to the inclusion of the Kadhi's courts and clauses on the chapter on the Bill of Rights that touches on reproductive health and same-sex relationships in the new constitution that further propelled the Pentecostals into the public limelight.

In 2005, Pentecostal clergy mobilised themselves and rallied their members to defeat the draft constitution during the first national referendum held in November 2005. It is telling that Bishop Margaret Wanjiru of Jesus Is Alive Ministries, the first woman to be ordained as a bishop of a Pentecostal church in Kenya and who emerged as the face of resistance to the inclusion of Kadhi courts in the draft constitution in 2005, announced her intention to join politics immediately after the defeat of the draft. But it was also around this time that Pentecostal Christianity emerged as a critical sociopolitical force, where a significant number of clergy from these churches began to show increased interest in elective politics.

But more importantly, the clergy's opposition to the constitution propelled them into the centre of national discourses and debates. In fact, opposition of the constitutional draft launched a number of their clergy such as Bishops Margaret Wanjiru of Jesus Is Alive Ministries (JIAM), Pius Muiru of Maximum Miracle Centers (MMC) and Mike Brawan into politics (Parsitau 2009, 2010, 2011). This was soon followed by many other clergy who have since developed an interest in politics particularly elective politics. During the 2007 general election for example, an unprecedented high number (about 23) of clergy from a variety of Neo-Pentecostal churches contested for civic, parliamentary, and even presidential elections. In 2007, Bishop Wanjiru contested the Starehe Constituency (a Nairobi constituency) and was elected as a Member of Parliament. Although many of them lost, (only Bishop Wanjiru of JIAM was successfully elected to Parliament and went on to join cabinet as an Assistant Minister for Housing and Shelter), the move showed that Neo-Pentecostals have come to view elective politics and other rituals of democracy as Christian projects in which they can rightly participate.

While this move drew tremendous criticism from media, mainline clergy and the public, the move not only enlarged the space for Pentecostal clergy, but also increased their personal public

profiles and that of their churches. For example, some Neo-Pentecostal and Evangelical clergy such as Bishop Margaret Wanjiru of JIAM and the Rev Mutava Musyimi (former general secretary of the NCKK – a giant religious organisation and development partner) successfully contested elective politics. Both clergy now serve in the Kenyan Parliament. Many others contested but failed to get elected. The 2007 general elections and events after heightened Pentecostal political activities and enlarged the sociopolitical roles of these clergy and their churches.

While this sudden interest baffled many social commentators and scholars of religion and politics alike, including members of the public, the move enlarged the social and political roles of Pentecostal clergy and their movements. Members of these churches also began to witness shift where many no longer viewed politics as a preserve of politicians, but that even men and women of the cloth and Christians can rightly participate. They demystified the dictum that religion and politics are strange bedfellows. Bishop Margaret Wanjiru has continued to serve not just as the presiding and founding bishop of JIAM ministry, but also as a legislator for the Starehe Constituency in Nairobi and as an Assistant Minister for Housing and Shelter (Parsitau 2011a; Parsitau & Mwaura 2010a).

All these events, shifts and developments have not only heightened Pentecostal political practice and activities, but have also and seemingly ushered in periods of increased sociopolitical participation on the part of Kenyan Pentecostals by providing opportunities that further propelled them into public life. Yet with this freshness and eagerness have come excesses and intolerance not only with members of non-Christian faiths, but also between church and state. At the same time, the enthusiasm and energy of their political involvement may signal a pointer that shifts can occur within a short space of time and that these shifts present possibilities and new opportunities for greater involvement in the democratisation process. Yet, many contradictions emerged at this point in Kenyan politics. After the rejection of the November 2005 constitutional draft, Pentecostal clergy became increasingly vocal in issues in public life.

However, the most significant development of the 2005 constitutional referendum is not the defeat of the draft, but the emergence of strains and tensions not just between Christians and Muslims, but also between church and state. Another significant development was the fact that the mainline clergy were increasingly viewed as partisan and divided along ethnic lines and serving narrow political interest depending on the ethnic group to which its leaders belonged. The prophetic role and voice of the church to act as the conscience of society was lost, and the church did nothing to evaluate its own role even after the people voted to soundly reject the draft constitution.

Towards the end of 2006, the NCKK comprising 37 mainline churches in Kenya, formerly a worthy, neutral and credible public watchdog, was being accused of continued political partiality, soft stance and cooperation with the Kibaki government. Joining the bandwagon, the Kenya Catholic Episcopal Conference was also consistently accused of direct political support to the incumbent president Mwai Kibaki. In a report, one Obongo had commented:

NCKK's recent omissions and commissions clearly suggest that the faith group's leadership has failed to exercise wisdom and restraint when commenting on issues relevant to the 2007 campaigns, thereby alienating sections of their members with different political preferences (Obongo 2006).

Approaching the 2007 general elections

Despite increased sociopolitical involvement on the part of Kenyan Neo-Pentecostal clergy, tensions and paradoxes emerged not just within Pentecostal clergy and groups, but also within the Christian church as a whole. In the run-up to the 2007 general elections for example, the Christian churches both mainline, Evangelical and Pentecostal were seen as being openly partisan along ethnic lines. They failed to speak out against sociopolitical issues facing the country even as it emerged that Christian clergy were increasingly divided along ethnic divides and were plagued by increased cooption, ethnicity and a loss of its prophetic voice (Parsitau 2011c&d; Mue 2011, Chacha 2010, Branch 2010). The Christian churches were thus seen as divided and serving narrow political interests depending on the ethnic group to which its leaders belonged.

By the time of the 2007 election, the voice of the clergy, particularly mainline church clergy, became increasingly discordant even as a section of clergy began to show signs of cooption as clergy backtracked and counselled their followers to vote with their conscience. At the same time, and according to Mue (2011), Christian believers were further and clearly confused by conflicting "prophesies" of prominent Christian leaders, which predicted victory for various candidates and prayed and anointed them as God's choice for president.

The uncertainty generated by these conflicting views, coupled with other social, political, economic and historical issues and injustices, culminated in the resulting post-election violence that gripped the country after the disputed 2007 general elections (Mue 2011; Ntaragwi 2011; Parsitau 2009, 2011a&b). Against this backdrop, it is unsurprising that when the political crisis erupted leading to widespread violence in the wake of disputed presidential elections results, the church and its clergy had lost almost all of its credibility and legitimacy. They were no longer viewed by the public as neutral arbiters and their mediation efforts were largely unsuccessful (Parsitau 2011). Many were increasingly accused of failing to speak out against politicians' determined provocation of ethnic emotions and tensions long before the country went to the polls.

One remarkable but shocking fall-out of the post election violence was the burning of churches. Rural churches were sites of horrific massacres, and there is evidence that certain churches were implicated with inciting violence in some areas. Some churches were actually implicated in ethicising their pulpits (Babere Chacha 2010) while others responded with peace-building and reconciliation efforts (Parsitau 2011c). As such, church leaders could not rise above their partisanship and give the country a clear moral direction. Instead, the church was reduced to a helpless spectator to the emerging tragic drama. As Mue (2011:183) so aptly reflects "the burning of over 400 churches during the violence was a sad reminder that many had come to regard churches not as sacred and neutral places of worship, but as part of the contested terrain of partisan and ethnic politics".

This appears to have been the case during the post election crisis in Kenya in 2007/8, when the role of the church in public life was especially compromised. It is no wonder that at the height of the violence in January 2008, when asked to comment on the role of the church, a political analyst famously quipped, "During this crisis, we have seen the Church of PNU and we have seen the church of ODM but, pray tell, where is the Church of Jesus Christ?"⁷

The resultant post election violence that followed the 2007 general election therefore put Christian churches under sharp focus with regard to their roles in and after the violence. After the violence, the church struggled to find its voice and legitimacy amid severe criticism from an increasingly critical and disillusioned public that held the church to account. The overwhelming impression was that Christians had been betrayed by their clergy (Mue 2011; Ntaragwi 2011; Parsitau 2011c). Many Kenyans who previously had great respect for Christian clergy, after the violence stated that they no longer trusted religious leaders since they failed to rise above tribalism and ethnicity in the run up to the elections.

This anger was clearly evident in newspaper commentaries, editorials and calls to radio stations with a recent study by Kenya's leading pollster, Synovate Kenya, attesting to this feeling and frustration. According to this survey, 38% of Kenyans stated that they do not trust religious leaders at all, a considerably larger number than the 22% who said they do not trust politicians (see Menya 2010; Parsitau 2011c).

However, after the peak of the post election violence churches reached out through the inter-religious forum, proposed a peace plan, interacted with politicians engaging in a national prayer day and healing exercise, and called for healing and reconciliation, indicating that these clergy were keen to rebuild not just their lost credibility and legitimacy, but also to recover their lost prophetic voice. The NCKK began by apologising for "... sins of among others taking partisan positions on national issues" and is now frequently in the news issuing statements critical of the excesses and failure of the Grand Coalition Government (Mue 2011; Parsitau 2011a, b, c&d).

The post election violence in Kenya demonstrated the risks of perception of faith-based actors in such ethnically politicised environments. Regrettably, this coincided with increased disregard for sanctuary space (Parsitau 2011). Yet, the burning of churches points to underlying tension and contradictions not only in Christian churches, but also in the country at large (Parsitau 2011; Gifford 2009).

Given these ironies and paradoxes in respect of the role of Christian churches in public life, one can conclude that the relationship between church and state is not always cordial and predictable, neither is it altogether antagonistic. Christianity in Africa is complex and no easy explanations suffice. Sometimes the church reflects the same political-structural tendencies associated with state machinery, while in others the church is an alternative system to the state, offering the citizenry a platform to express discontent and disapproval of the political, economic, and cultural realities of the day (Ntaragwi 2011).

In the run up to the 2007 general election, the church was increasingly viewed as openly partisan, along ethnic lines. Christian believers were clearly confused by conflicting prophecies of prominent Christian leaders, which predicted victory for various candidates and prayed and anointed them for victory as God's choice for president. The uncertainty generated by these conflicting views

⁷ P.L.O. Lumumba, interview with a Kenyan Radio Station, January 2008

fuelled the divisions within the church. In Nakuru and the larger Rift Valley region church leaders used civic education, prayer meetings and other occasions to openly campaign for their preferred parties and candidates. In the Presbyterian churches in Nakuru town, PNU calendars were distributed to adherents after the church service. Churches also invited their preferred candidates to greet people during services while unpopular candidates received a cold reception.

Yet, the resultant post election violence that followed the bungled 2007 general election put all Christian churches under sharp focus with regard to the roles they played in and after the violence. This is largely because Kenyan churches did not escape unscathed. One of the most remarkable highlights of the post election violence was the burning of churches. Rural churches were sites of horrific massacres, and there is evidence that certain churches were implicated in inciting violence in some areas. The post election violence in Kenya demonstrated the risks of perception of faith-based actors in such ethnically politicised environments which regrettably, coincided with increased disregard for sanctuary space. Yet, the burning of churches points to underlying tensions and contradictions not only in Christian churches, but also in the country at large that needs to be further investigated.

It is no wonder that at the height of the violence in January 2008, when asked to comment on the role of the church, a political analyst famously quipped, during this crisis, we have seen the Church of PNU and we have seen the church of ODM but, pray tell, where is the Church of Jesus Christ? Against this backdrop, it is unsurprising that when the political crisis erupted leading to widespread violence in the wake of disputed presidential elections results, the church struggled to find its voice and legitimacy.

Given these ironies and paradoxes in respect of the role of Christian churches in public life, one can conclude that the relationship between church and state is not always cordial and predictable, neither is it altogether antagonistic. Christianity in Africa is complex and no easy explanations suffice. Sometimes the church reflects the same political-structural tendencies associated with state machinery, while in others the church is an alternative system to the state, offering the citizenry a platform to express discontent and disapproval of the political, economic and cultural realities of the day. This appears to have been the case during the post election crisis in Kenya in 2007/8, when the role of the church in public life was especially compromised following the post election violence of early 2008.

Yet, the year 2007 provided a period of complete departure from the conventional relationship between religion and politics in Kenya. Events and developments before and after the highly contested 2007 general elections and its aftermath put the Christian churches in a bad light as it emerged that even Christian churches were bedeviled and characterised by negative ethnicity, cooption and a loss of a prophetic voice to speak for and on behalf of the people of Kenya. By the time of the 2007 elections, Christian churches had lost almost all credibility. As the post election violence (PEV) broke out, all churches advocated for peace and reconciliation. Some even offered to mediate for peace. But it soon became clear that the churches no longer had the authority to perform any such functions.

From multiple and discordant voices to one voice: Christian churches and the promulgation of the New Constitution (2008-2010)

After the chaotic 2007 general elections and the subsequent 2008 post election violence, a coalition government was put in place and tasked with the responsibility of putting the country back on track. After a year of squabbles and threats, the coalition government finally settled down to work and several commissions were appointed to try to help the country back on its feet. One of these many commissions was the establishment of the Committee of Experts (CoE) in 2008 to draft a new constitution. This commission led by Nzamba Kitonga spent about two years collecting the views of the public and harmonised these and previous views collected by other constitution review bodies. The CoE came up with and published a harmonised draft constitution that was both debated by the public and Parliament. On 1 April 2010 the Kenyan Parliament passed the harmonised draft constitution presented by the CoE, which went to the national referendum on 4 August 2010. The draft was overwhelmingly approved by a huge majority of Kenyans.

No sooner had the draft been published and passed by Parliament, the Secretary General of the National Council of Churches of Kenya, Cannon Peter Karanja and Cardinal John Njue, the head of the Catholic Church in Kenya, both emerged as fierce critics of the proposed draft constitution.⁸ Cannon Peter Karanja, the general secretary of the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK), a powerful political player in a deeply religious country which includes twenty-four Christian denominations,⁹ emerged as the face of mainline churches' resolve and opposition to the proposed new constitution

⁸ Makau Mutua, Why the No Campaign could destroy the Church, Sunday Nation May 9/2010, p.21

⁹ In Harms way: the Impact of Kenyans' Restrictive Abortion Laws, Centre for Reproductive Rights accessed at <http://reproductiverights.org>.

unless the provisions and clauses allowing for the inclusion of the Kadhi courts and abortion are deleted.

The mainline churches were joined by the Evangelicals, Pentecostal and Charismatic Church clergy who equally opposed the draft constitution. While the Protestant and Pentecostal churches seemed more aggrieved by the Kadhi courts, the mainline churches, especially the Protestants, had their own raft of complaints and concerns. The Catholic Church was particularly concerned about clauses on land, perhaps not surprising considering that the Church owns massive tracts of land in the country. The Catholic Church was also particularly concerned and vehemently opposed a provision in the draft constitution that includes emergency exceptions to the country's abortion ban, arguing that they would pave the way for mass abortion subsequently leading to a moral degeneration. All these Christian groups argued for a secular constitution that treats all religions equally.

The Pentecostal clergy was mostly irked by clauses that they perceived to allow for the inclusion of the Kadhi courts and vowed to shoot down the draft. These clergy argued that the clauses on the Kadhi courts favours and elevates Islam, a minority religion in Kenya and this would in their view harm Christianity. A coalition of Christian clergy from different Christian denominations formed the Kenyan Leaders Constitutional Forum to oppose the draft.¹⁰ Right from the publication of the harmonised draft constitution to the national referendum held in August 2010 (where an overwhelming 67% of Kenyans accepted it, a huge majority compared to 30% who rejected it), the clergy drawn from various religious denominations mounted tremendous opposition to the search for a new constitutional dispensation because these groups opposed certain clauses in the draft constitution that in their interpretation seemed to allow for abortion, same sex marriage and the inclusion of the Kadhis' courts.

From the publication of the harmonised draft constitution in 2010 to the national referendum that was held on 4 August 2010, a large number of contradictions emerged in Kenyan discourses and debates. One of the most interesting contradictions that emerged during the 2010 referendum was therefore the ecumenical spirit portrayed by Kenyan Christian churches. In a rare show of unity, a coalition of Christian clergy drawn from various Christian denominations formed a body called the Kenya Christian Leaders Constitutional Forum (KCLCF), comprised of all those who opposed the passage of the new constitution.

As one body, these clergy mounted huge nationwide public rallies guised as "mega prayer rallies" urging all Christians to reject the constitution because of the inclusion of Islamic courts.¹¹ For example, in a large crusade held at Uhuru Park, Nairobi and attended by hundreds of Christians and a couple of legislators opposed to the draft, these clergy officially launched the *No Campaign* which was composed of all those who opposed the new constitution but guised as a national prayer day or rally.

According to Branch (2010) "the men and women of cloth stood alongside an unedifying band of politicians at the head of the 'No Campaign', largely spearheaded by these politicians and Christian churches". The "No Campaign" which was symbolised by the colour red, signifying danger, held massive rallies and campaigns to sway the public, particular Christians, to reject the draft.

On several occasions, these clergy threatened the government to dare include the contentious issues in the draft, in which case they would mobilise their members against the 2010 national referendum if it included language allowing Kadhi courts and abortions under any circumstances.¹² Christian clergy equally used tremendous resources and appropriated mass media communication technologies such as newspaper advertisements, radio and TV announcements, press releases, posters and many other means to warn Christians against voting for a draft that they claimed was poisonous and detrimental to the health of the nation.¹³

Jointly as the Kenya Christian Leaders Constitutional Forum, they issued press releases in leading newspapers. For example, in a paid up press advert, signed by the NCKK, Anglican Church of Kenya, Methodist Church of Kenya, Friends Church, and the Evangelical Alliance of Kenya, these clergy dared the government to include the controversial courts in the draft.¹⁴ Kenya's leading televangelists from the newer Pentecostal churches, for example, devoted more than two minutes each of air time during their televised religious programmes to not only urge viewers to reject the draft constitution, but also to inform the public where the next prayer/public rallies would be. All these Christian clergy also mounted tremendous civic education in their respective churches.¹⁵ The

¹⁰ A recent study links the ban to the death of at least hundreds of women a year. <http://reproductiverights.org>

¹¹ A paid up Statement from Christian Leaders in Kenya reads Entrench Islamic Shariah Law in the Constitution at your Own Risk, *The Standard*, Wednesday 3, 2010, p.11

¹² A recent study links the ban to the death of at least hundreds of women a year. <http://reproductiverights.org>

¹³ Sunday Standard Team 'Churches Campaign against the Referendum', *The Sunday Standard* August 21, 2005.

¹⁴ A paid up Statement from Christian Leaders in Kenya reads Entrench Islamic Sharia Law in the Constitution at your Own Risk, *The Standard*, Wednesday 3, 2010, p.11

¹⁵ I attended a significant number of these civic education drives in various Christian churches in Nairobi and Nakuru in order to gain better perspective of what type of civic education was being rolled out. By and large, much of it concentrated on

combative zeal and tone of these prayer rallies not only shocked many, but also portrayed the church negatively and as intolerant towards members of non Christian faiths, particularly Muslims.

One of the most surprising contradictions to many was the shift in the position taken by mainline churches, particularly the NCCCK and others such as the Catholic Church, concerning the issue of Kadhi courts. Of particular concern was the view that mainline church clergy stood in the way of a new constitution and emerged as the main stumbling block to a new constitutional dispensation.

As already pointed out, the mainline churches have had a long standing and checkered history of democratic and constitutional reforms especially in the 1980s and early 1990s, when these churches were at the forefront of a sustained campaign for constitutional reforms (Gifford 2009). However, despite the churches' role in Kenya's democratisation movement from the mid 1980s onwards, there has been continuing, if only half voiced, dissent to that involvement in secular affairs. Indeed as Branch (2010) aptly points out, "The uneasy relationship between religious groups and the Kenyan state is the ostensible reason for at least the Protestant churches' objection to the new constitution."

Another significant shift that is of particular interest to me is the mainline churches' attitudes towards Kenyan Muslims. This is notably important given the fact that for a long time mainline churches enjoyed cordial relationships with people of non Christian faiths, especially Muslims and Hindus. During the interfaith forum in the 1990s and early in the new millennium, Christian churches displayed an ecumenical spirit and worked in an environment of mutual respect and dialogue. Yet the advent of the newer Evangelical and Pentecostal churches into the public sphere brought about a paradigm shift in interfaith relations.

Some clergy vehemently opposed the passage of the new constitution while others supported the document. This clearly showed that churches were not united with one voice nor did they speak about issues affecting the country. Yet Kenyans overwhelmingly supported the passage of the new constitution. These badly dented the image and credibility of clergy who were left struggling to regain voice amid serious legitimacy and moral issues. The NCCCK that played a major role in opposing the passage of the new constitution was left with egg on its face. Such a defeat can raise questions about the legitimacy of the church in Kenya to claim any moral leadership in matters political. What role does the church in this case play in influencing and shaping society?

It is important to note that not all Christian churches or even clergy are opposed to the inclusion of the Kadhi courts in the draft constitution. Retired Anglican bishop, the Rev David Gitari and Presbyterian Church retired clergy, the Reverend Timothy have heavily criticised the clergy who are opposed to the draft.¹⁶ Rev Timothy Njoya during a TV interview accused these clergy of being Islamophobic, Xenophobic and intolerant. Both clergy played significant roles in multi-party democracy, called for a new constitutional dispensation and mounted tremendous challenges to the autocratic rule of president Moi in the 1990s. Other churches that are supporting the draft constitution include the Seventh Day Adventist Church estimated to have about two million adherents and an assortment of African Instituted churches represented by the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC).

From the foregoing analysis, it seems that the roles of Christian churches in Kenya's public life are undergoing tremendous transformations. At the same time, the relationship between Christian churches and politics is not only complex, but also ambivalent though nevertheless significant. This article has attempted to retrace this relationship by focusing not just on the loss of voice(s) on the part of mainline churches, but also the emergence of discordant voices from new religious players mainly from Evangelical and Pentecostal churches.

highlighting the issues that the churches viewed as contentious such as Kadhi courts, abortion, homosexuality and the bill of rights. Much of it was complete misinterpretation, distortions and alarmingly misleading. On several occasions, I challenged and gave my perspectives on what I thought were misleading facts, something that was not kindly received by some clergy

¹⁶ Bishop Wanjiru' sermon on Christmass Eve 2007. This message is equally posted on her church website at www.jiam.org.

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