

**MOST ETHNO-NET AFRICA PUBLICATIONS****Anthropology of Africa and the Challenges of the Third Millennium  
- Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflicts, PAAA / APA, 1999****Political Party Cooperation in Post-election as Ethnic Tensions  
(Kenyan Case)****John M. Mwaruvie**History Department, Moi University  
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Eldoret, Kenya**ABSTRACT**

*In most African states, general elections generate a lot of ethnic tensions. This is because most parties are ethnic-based or receive support from certain ethnic groups. When a party loses in an election, it is excluded from the government and the ethnic group that supported it suffers reprisals, its members are even victimized in the civil service, parastatals and other state backed institutions. This attitude has generated more tensions and conflicts. This paper attempts to give suggestions on how post-election tensions can be minimized in plural societies. Kenya will be taken to show that party cooperation between KANU, NDP and Ford Kenya has created coexistence of the ethnic groups that supported such parties. The paper also evaluates the impact of party cooperation in the future of multiparty politics in Kenya. The paper also draws examples from other countries like Zimbabwe and South Africa to show the merits of party cooperation in defusing would-be conflicts. The 1990s has witnessed a new wave of political dispensation in Africa. After practising a one-party political system for three decades, the beginning of this decade witnessed the adoption of a multiparty system. It was hoped then that political competition between parties would usher in a government that observed transparency and accountability devoid of corruption and bad governance. The clarion call then was for a change of guards at the helm. However, in many countries like Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe, the ruling parties regained their leadership. In other states like Zambia and Malawi, new leaders took over but brought in minimal changes. Most of these countries have conducted two multiparty elections and the aftermath of elections has led to the evolution of a new philosophy and attitude towards the future government. The new approach seems to be geared towards political party cooperation or the formation of a government of national unity.*

*In Kenya, after the second multiparty election in December 1997, political party cooperation has been the in thing. This is a new concept in African political thought, and possibly a political practice that is likely to dominate politics in the 21st century. It is a political philosophy that has the capacity to ease tensions between various cooperating ethnic groups. It is a political concept based on mutual cooperation between the ruling party and one or two opposition parties. The cooperation does not eliminate complete opposition politics.*

*The concept of cooperation as practised in Kenya by the Kenya African National Union (KANU) the ruling party and National Development Party (NDP) the third largest party in parliament also implies that there is concerted effort to reconcile the Kalenjin group (dominating KANU leadership) and the Luo community dominating NDP.*

*The cooperation concept is a few steps below the realisation of the government of National Unity as practised in South African and royal oppositions in United Kingdom. In the case, the government of National Unity is constituted in the constitution. The constitutional arrangement gives the parties with 5% of the national vote, a legal framework and obligation to participate in the government. In this regard, the members take ministerial posts in government. In the British system, the royal opposition party is the officially recognised opposition party. In the Kenyan case, the official opposition is the Democratic Party. (DP) of Mwai Kibaki, former Vice-President. His party is the real opposition to the ruling party and the cooperating parties. DP seems to have adopted an old adage of "a friend of my enemy is my enemy". The D.P on the other hand is rightly or wrongly accused of representing the aspiration of the Kikuyu, the largest ethnic group in Kenya. Fear of Kikuyu domination of the political landscape has forced other ethnic groups to organise opposition against them with the aim of neutralising them. Very few ethnic groups are willing to cooperate politically with the Kikuyu since they are known to be Kikuyu-centric, when it comes to general elections. They support wholeheartedly one of their own without fearing repercussions in case of losing. It is almost certain that the cooperation between KANU and NDP is simply to frustrate D.P in Parliament and in national politics.*

*Another aspect of political cooperation and which makes it unique is that, it lacks the tenets of coalition government. In most coalition governments, the parties involved share ministerial posts in the government. They have a common policy and support one another in Parliament. Political cooperation is like marriages of convenience between the political leaders. It does not also imply that the members of Parliament belonging to a cooperating party have any obligation to support the other party. What has emerged is that there is serious lobbying between members before a stand is taken. Through the cooperation mechanism, the government has been able to defeat serious motions like votes of no confidence on the President, and secured election of KANU candidate as Speaker of National Assembly, and that NDP candidate as Deputy Speaker against DP and Ford Kenya candidates.*

*As noted earlier, the political party cooperation is not enshrined in the constitution nor is it included in party constitutions. As a result, the cooperating parties do not take ministerial posts but leaders who have been able to pull the strings behind the scene have members of their ethnic groups appointed to lucrative positions in the government and in key parastatals. This has been seen as the direct benefit of cooperation. In this regard, the ethnic groups participating in cooperation have realised tangible benefits from the political venture. The government has gone for the best in Luo community in effecting the policy. In fact, the candidates' promotion in many cases was overdue because of lack of political goodwill. Such talented peoples were victimized because of the politics of exclusion of those communities that did not sing the tune of the ruling party.*

**What has necessitated this political cooperation**

Secondly, I think, from the outset, it is important to recognise that politics is the game of the possible. Two, in politics you maximise your gains using all the available avenues. Thirdly, a good politician should be able to gauge the feelings of the masses and be in a position to exploit those feelings for his advantage. Fourthly, there are no permanent enemies in politics. How do these three factors come in to interplay in Kenyan Politics?

Kenyans, in general, have come to realize that beating President Moi in general election is an uphill task. He has rightly called himself the Professor of Kenyan Politics. It is true, Moi is the most experienced politician in Kenya, having joined active politics in 1955 (44 years ago) as a nominated member of legislative council. Since that time, he has never left parliament. At the time of independence, he was the Chairman of Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) which came to be the main opposition party in post-independent Kenya. Out of political expediency and need for unity in 1964, KADU members of Parliament crossed the floor and joined KANU (the ruling party from 1963 to present). From 1967, he was appointed Vice President by President Kenyatta and served for eleven years until Kenyatta died in August, 1987. He easily assumed the presidency in 1978. He has ruled Kenya a President for twenty-one years. This is no mean experience. What has enabled him to rule Kenya is the divide-and-rule policy. Throughout his tenure, he has seen political giants' tumble, enabling him to groom youthful politicians ready to sing his tune. It would seem that the cooperation is based on the realization that you can only succeed by joining Moi's bandwagon. By cooperating, the leader of NDP, Raila Odinga has received high profile in the corridors of power. He can travel easily without harassment by provincial administration. Though out the country through this system, he has been able to create his political niche, that is likely to bear political dividends, come the next general elections in 2002.

What possibly has puzzled friend and foe is why Raila of all Kenyan politicians could agree to cooperate. Economic niceties that go with cooperation cannot be enough political carrot to entice Raila, given the fact that the Odinga family is not poor. The family has also external connections for financial support. The cooperation with Moi would have been inconceivable bearing in mind that Raila has been put in jail and detention by the Moi regime. It should be noted that during the struggle for a multiparty political system, he was severely beaten and harassed. In Kenyan politics, it was only Raila who could organise violence to counter KANU violence. To many he was the only leader who could give Moi sleepless nights when it came to underground organisation. Raila, a Russian trained engineer, was an embodiment of a real fighter of rights of Kenyans and few Kenyans could not comprehend his decision. It was hoped that the cooperation would enable a Luo to ascend to power through Moi's support. How this will be possible is a matter of time as the year 2002 approaches for the third multiparty elections and intensification of Moi's succession debate. If the promise of Kalenjin support will be forthcoming, then Raila will be able to have an extra political constituency that could enable him realize his political dream. So far the Luo masses seem to be happy with Raila's move. High profile harambees have been held in Luo Nyanza by KANU heavy weights to raise bursary funds for Luo children. The first fruit of cooperation was election of Joab Omino as Deputy Speaker, followed

by the appointment of Peter Raburu as Provincial Commissioner. Other appointments have been effected in the Foreign Office and in key parastatals. The move has ended Luo isolation by Kenyan government which started from 1966 when Raila's father Oginga Odinga formed the Kenya Peoples Union (KPU), making him the doyen of Kenyan opposition politics. This new move by Raila is definitely going to enable him to solidify his political base in Nyanza as a leader who can deliver what the Luos need. The greatest economic benefit is the initiation of the Sondu Mimu Hydroelectric power station with ten microprojects to benefit the Luo. The project had been planned for a long time but there was no political will to implement it. The project will offer job opportunities to the youth and control the flooding of rivers Nyando and Sondu. Without political cooperation, these benefits would not have been extended to the community. Such sectarian politics has been a great hindrance to the practice of democracy and equitable allocation of national resources to all communities.

### **How has political cooperation eased ethnic tensions**

With the introduction of multiparty politics, Kenyans experienced ethnic conflicts (clashes) in the Rift Valley and the neighbouring ethnic groups namely, the Luo, Luhya, Kisii and Kikuyu. The clashes were triggered by the fear that the Kalenjin would suffer if Moi was defeated. The above-named communities apart from the Gussi, were the most vocal on the Moi must go clarion call, which characterised the 1990-92 campaign for multiparty democracy. After the two elections (1991 and 1997) these fears seem to have been misplaced. There is a realization that welders and communities can cooperate for the common good. There is also a realization that ethnic conflicts are very costly in terms of manpower and resources. The wielders of state power also seem to realise that the problems of internal conflicts in the face of economic hardships are dangerous, hence the need to respond to those issues that cause conflicts.

There seems to be an understanding among the political elite that the roots of conflicts lie with African States' failure to respond to Africans heterogeneous social realities. The failure to recognise the need to coexist has made government to spend a lot of resources to maintain sycophants, police and military forces for use to quell internal strife. In the long run, autocratic regimes were retained though they were unable to deliver basic services to the people or foster economic development. The system widened the gap between the state and African societies. The state saw some communities as enemies of the state which bred opposition with a strong indigenous base (ethnic-based). However, with acute national poverty, the government had neither the capacity to wage war nor they money to alleviate grievances that contributed to the internal clashes. Due to this, the state had to initiate cooperation to minimize expenditure and in the long run, it would be in a position to hide her inability to contain unrest. This also means that the government can rely on cooperating communities to check the pressures from dissenting groups. In this cooperating system, councils of elders are formed to advise the youth on the need to be peaceful.

The lack of opportunities for the Luo in the past intensified their opposition. There were no tangible promotions in the civil service and in parastatals. Such discrimination tended to show them that they had no stake in the Kenyan State. The denial of opportunity and impoverishment of the Luo community linked by primordial ties

undoubtedly contributed to the strength of societal resistance to the state. However, with the few gains so far attained, their militancy seems to have been tamed as they hope for more. In future, on the other hand, the leaders are not interested in revenge or even remembering the dark past or in power for its own sake but in a better life for themselves, their children, the right to be heard and a political system firmly based on the consent of the government and more responsive to their needs. I think this is a virtue to be emulated where leaders have victory over self and aspire for the wider good of the society. The main cause of conflicts is selfishness on the part of leaders, and lack of capacity and freedom to forgive their enemies. Most leaders in Africa think that by settling scores with opponents makes them heroes. It would be important to learn that there is victory for those who strive for reconciliation. In other words, political leaders in the political divide should be sensitive to any avenues that could offer reconciliation and peaceful coexistence. Conflicting aspirations and interests, if they are truly recognised and faced, can lead to acceptable compromise. Genuine love demands justice in human relationships that can only be attained by honesty, which is likely to be painful. The leaders in cooperation have to subordinate their ego for the sake of the nation. The main hindrance to cooperation is hypocrisy on the part of leaders or what has come to be popularly known in Kenyan politics as the hidden agenda. Openness would be the greatest virtue for healing the mistrust that has clouded the three decades of political practice in Africa. This notion confirms perfectly Alexander Herzen's contention that "only the strong acknowledges his fault, only the strong is humble, only the strong forgives and indeed only the strong laughs, though often his laughter is equal to tears". (Badin; 1981:141)

The lesson learnt so far is that the masses are peaceful and obedient. The leaders are responsible for peace or conflicts experienced in the society. If leaders can cooperate at the national level and translate the cooperation into tangible gains, the masses will not fight. However, the failure by leaders to cooperate makes the likelihood of inciting their ethnic followers very high.

### **Political party cooperation and opposition politics in Kenya**

There is fear among reformist politicians that political party cooperation will not augur well for political development in Kenya. These politicians believe that all stakeholders can only reform the Moi regime through concerted effort and that cooperation with him enables him to mark time on the constitutional reform process. Secondly, members of the opposition argue that cooperation waters down the whole essence of opposition politics whose objective is to keep the government on its toes. However, what has come out of the cooperation is members' awareness of the right to criticise the government an equal footing with backbenchers belonging to the ruling party. Equally important, is the realisation that the cooperating party can advise the government in secret and in confidence to thwart would be crisis in the country.

### **OBSERVATION AND CONCLUSION**

In the absence of a formal coalition government in most African states, the adoption of political party cooperation is a mechanism that is likely to ease ethnic tension in many plural societies. This is based on political party formations in Africa, where they draw a

major following from ethnic groups; thus, political party cooperation implies ethnic cooperation between the members forming the parties.

It should be noted that political party cooperation based on ethnic following might translate into the exclusion of the non-cooperative parties and, by extension non-cooperating ethnic groups. The system (if not handled carefully could create conflicts between the ethnic groups forming the political divide. The main danger of this cooperation is that non-cooperating regions are likely to be victimized despite the fact that they are entitled to development. It would be too unfair for the government to forfeit her responsibility in national development in favour of certain regions. Possibly, it would make political sense, if resources were extended to non-ruling party zones as an attempt to woo opponents.

To crown it all, political stability and easing of ethnic tension has been realized in those nations that leaders have been able to cooperate like in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

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