

# Tribal tensions dim hope for Kenya

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FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

When I was an undergraduate student at Dar es Salaam University in Tanzania in 1960, the tension between the Luo and Kikuyu tribes was palpable. Even at a time and place where people are expected to be more enlightened, one could sense the tribalism among these two Kenyan tribes as opposed to Africans from Tanzania or Uganda.

This legacy of tribal animosity has spread like cancer through post-independent Kenya, culminating in the present murderous crisis.

Kenya was supposed to be one of the more stable African countries, with a strong economy, an independent press and a strong African middle class. It was the envy of many other African states and its leaders destroyed that reputation by being power hungry.

If Kenya's President Mwai Kibaki allows another election to take place, he will surely lose because Kenyan opposition leader Raila Odinga will win by thousands of sympathy votes besides those of his own tribe.

It is unfortunate that the history of Kenya is punctuated with tribalism from pre-independence time.

Kenya's freedom struggle has firm beginnings in tribalism following the Mau Mau rebellion when the Kikuyu tribe required its members to take an oath to drive the white man from Kenya

of the present opposition leader Raila Odinga.)

Anthony Ngare, a journalist with the country's East African Standard, has argued that discrimination along tribal lines has also dominated the Kenyan workplace.

Ngare said that although many Kenyans believe in the principles of a meritocracy, up to 80 per cent of the workforce of some Kenyan companies often comes from the same tribal area.



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Agreeing with Ngare, Evelyn Mungai, the chair of the Kenyan branch of anti-corruption organization Transparency International, has admitted that the problem had become much worse in the last year. In particular, she said tribalism is rampant throughout the public sector, where it is about "who you know."

"You appoint people from your background because you want votes, and that's why the public sector has been very much in the news," she told a BBC World Service's Outlook program.

"Lately, what we have seen in the political arena is we have seen people from a particular tribe going to the president saying: 'you've got to appoint people from my area to such-and-such a position.'"

She believed that tribalism in the workplace has blossomed since Kenya became a multi-party democracy, with more people thinking in terms of their tribe. But Mungai also said she believed the younger generation was less inclined to think

As part of the overall clampdown by the colonial government, Jomo Kenyatta was arrested for alleged Mau Mau involvement.

Kenyatta, Kenya's leading nationalist leader, known as the "Burning Spear" to his followers, was later charged for managing the Mau Mau as a terrorist society.

Kenya was the favourite of the British among its three British colonies of Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, mainly because of the White Highlands, so called because during the colonial period white immigrants settled there in considerable numbers to take advantage of the good soils and growing conditions, as well as the cool climate.

By the time the colony of Kenya was established in 1920, approximately 10,000 British settlers had taken farms in the area, uprooting the original residents.

Kenya became independent on Dec. 12, 1963, and was declared a republic in 1964. There was always a great potential for ethnic division among the African population, but Kenya's first president, Kenyatta, had an ally in a Luo trade unionist, Tom Mboya, who had championed his release during the freedom struggle.

Mboya was included in Kenyatta's cabinet, holding major portfolios in a government heavily dominated by Kikuyus.

Kenyatta was grooming Mboya as a potential successor, a possibility that deeply worried many of the Kikuyu elite. When Mboya suggested in parliament that a number of Kikuyu politicians were enriching themselves at the cost of other tribal groups, the situation became explosive.

On July 5, 1969, the nation was shocked by the assassination of Mboya by a Kikuyu tribesman. Allegations linking the assassin to prominent KANU party members were dismissed, and in the ensuing political turmoil, Kenyatta banned the opposition party, the Kenya People's Union (KPU), and arrested its leader Jaramogi Oginga Odinga (father

along tribal lines, which offered hope for the future.



Reuters

## Opposition leader Raila Odinga in Nairobi Jan. 11.

However, we have to be optimistic and find a solution for tribalism. Part of the solution lies in economic development and growth.

If there is growth in the economy, it will be followed by more education and less ignorance among its residents and tribes. This would also mean that there will be fewer unemployed thugs for politicians to operate as their goons.

Another part of the solution is to have genuine democracy with independent law courts as was made evident during the recent Pakistan crisis when the judiciary clearly showed its independence.

People would have no need to rely on their tribe if they could rely on all of their ballot papers being counted, and could expect honest judgments from courts.

There is still hope for Kenya, which has a large group of intellectuals and a free press, which should lead the way for democratic reforms.

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