Islam, Politics, and Violence on the Kenya Coast

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Note 4

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Abstract

In June 2014, the Kenyan coastal town of Mpeketoni was the target of a brutal and prolonged terrorist attack, in which dozens of civilians were murdered. In the aftermath of the attack, there were apparently widely differing analyses of its nature and purpose. After a delay, the Somali-based al Shabaab movement claimed responsibility. However, the government of Kenya insisted that it had actually been the result of 'local politics' – thought it was not clear whether that referred to politics on this part of the coast, or to the tense national politics of confrontation between the ruling Jubilee coalition and the opposition CORD. The ambiguities of this moment of violence provide a revealing window on the complex relationships between developments in Islam at the coast and in Kenya more widely, the coast's place in wider movements of political Islam, and patterns of secular grievance and political ambition which also drive violence. This paper will argue that the intersection of multiple factors makes the Kenya coast particularly volatile. The weakness of the Kenyan state has provided a favourable environment for acts of terror; equally importantly, Kenya's national politics have normalized and vulgarized violence.

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Introduction

On the evening of June 15 2014, the small town of Mpeketoni, a few miles inland from the northern Kenyan coast, was overrun by a group of armed attackers. The attackers were apparently well-organized and confident of their ability to handle the security forces. Over the course of several hours they burned vehicles, banks and shops and murdered some fifty people.[1] During the course of the attack, they shouted slogans which suggested that they were linked to the Somali al-Shabaab movement; according to some accounts they systematically selected non-Muslim men for murder. When a claim of responsibility was finally made by al-Shabaab some hours later, it announced the attack both as retaliation for the involvement of Kenyan forces in Somalia, and as revenge for the murders of Muslim preachers in Mombasa (which were widely assumed to be the work of the Kenyan security forces).[2] The announcement also described Mpeketoni as a town of 'Christian settlers' who had displaced the original Muslim inhabitants of the area – a reference to the predominance in and around the town of Kenyans from the Kikuyu ethnic group, who have taken up land in a settlement scheme there since the 1970s.

The interpretation of the attack immediately became politically contested. Internationally, it was immediately seen as another incident in a spiralling succession of attacks by radical Muslim terrorists. However, the President of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta, announced that it was the result of 'local political networks'.[3] This was taken by some to be a direct accusation against opposition leader Raila Odinga, who had been calling for mass rallies to force the government into a national dialogue.[4] It could also, however, be interpreted as an accusation that politicians on the coast (and particularly in Lamu County, in which Mpeketoni lies) had been mobilizing voters along ethnic lines by stirring up land grievances. Kenyatta's remarks also served as an implicit rebuff to Kenya's long-term allies, the United States and the United Kingdom, whose relationships with the current government in Kenya are strained: they had been quick to identify the attacks as the work of al-Shabaab.[5] In the wake of a second attack two weeks, later, a senior police officer definitively announced that this was the work not of al-Shabaab but of the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), a coastal movement which seeks secession; that statement has not been retracted, though subsequent announcements by other police officers have directly connected the attacks to al Shabaab.[6]

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[1]   'Mpeketoni   attacks   death   toll   rises   to   48',   *Daily   Nation*,   16   June   2014, http://www.nation.co.ke/news/mpeketoni-Lamu-gunfire-al-shabaab-terrorism/-/1056/2349860/-/yf5qvgz/-/

[2]   'Al   Shabaab   claims   responsibility   for   Mpeketoni   attacks',   *Standard   Digital,*   16   June   2014 http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/thecounties/article/2000124978/al-shabaab-claim-responsibility-for-mpeketoni-attack

[3]   'Uhuru   blames   massacre   on   tribalism,   hate   politics',   *Daily   Nation*,   17   June   2014, http://www.nation.co.ke/news/Uhuru-blames-massacre-on-tribalism--hate-politics/-/1056/2352306/-/wyy1laz/-/index.html

[4] 'Mpeketoni attack fits into developing scenario blaming CORD for targeting the Kikuyu', *Daily Nation*, 17 June 2014,   http://mobile.nation.co.ke/blogs/Mpeketoni-attack-opposition-kikuyu-/-/1949942/2352388/-/format/xhtml/-/1v1dn7/-/index.html

[5]   'US   condemns   al   Shabaab   terrorist   attacks   on   Mpeketoni',   16   June   2014, http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/06/227645.htm

[6] 'Hindi, Gamba attacks work of MRC – Kaindi', *The Star*, 6 July 2014, http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/article-174691/hindigamba-attacks-work-mrc-kaindi ; cf 'Westgate, Mpeketoni killings suspects held', *The Star,* 29 July 2014, http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/article-180630/westgate-mpeketoni-killings-suspects-held,

These very divergent interpretations offer a useful reminder that the categorization of violence – as 'political', 'local', or 'terrorist' – can itself be a technique of power, as can the attribution or claiming of specific acts of violence. As will be suggested below, such categorizations are anyway problematic because they imply a clarity and singularity of purpose, and a degree of organizational coherence, which do not always exist. There are discernibly different strands in the recent history of violence at the coast; differentiated sometimes by apparent ideology and rhetoric, but also by the precise nature of the violence, in terms of weapons, organization and targets. The Mpeketoni attack seems to signal the increasingly close interweaving of some of these strands. This interweaving has, ironically, been enabled and perhaps even encouraged by the chronic failings of the Kenyan state's security sector, as well as by a wider pattern of the instrumentalization of ethnic violence which has been a feature of Kenyan politics since the 1990s. It is a profoundly alarming development.

Struggles over Islam on the Kenya coast

Kenya's coast is in itself a contested imaginary. For some, 'the coast' means the towns of the shoreline and the narrow strip of land around them; it is an urban, maritime landscape, dominated by the city of Mombasa. For others, the coast includes a broader band running along the coast, much of it rural; and for others again it means what was until 2010 the Coast Province, which in places stretched far inland. Those different geographical imaginaries evoke different ideas of culture and identity. The major towns of the shoreline have a strongly Muslim feel to them, though they have very diverse populations. South of Mombasa, the local hinterland of the coast is largely populated by Muslims– the largest ethnic group being Digo, part of the larger group now known as the Mijikenda who often present themselves as the autochthonous African population of the coast. Further inland, and on the coast north of Mombasa, are other Mijikenda, mostly either Christian or following traditional systems of belief. The band of territory along Kenya's coastline is also now home to many Kenyans whose ancestors come from other parts of the country; while some are Muslim, the majority are not (Sperling, 2000). It is possible that the Coast Province actually had a slight Christian majority.[7] However 'the coast' is defined, Islam has a much longer history there than does Christianity, and retains a degree of cultural pre-eminence; but by no means all see 'the coast' as synonymous with Islam.

There are a small number of Shi'a Muslims on the coast. Some belong to small Asian communities which maintain a distinct religious life of their own, others are more recent Ithna-asheri converts, the result of proselytization funded by donors in Kuwait. But the Muslim population is very largely Sunni, and that population has always been engaged with a wider Muslim world across the Indian Ocean (Lodhi, 1994). There have been Muslims on the coast for well over a thousand years, and practice and ideas of piety share much with other parts of that Indian Ocean world. As elsewhere in Africa, there is a history of syncretism, and of forms of religion which are often called Sufi (Cruise O'Brien, 1981). On the Kenya coast, 'Sufism' has existed largely as a bundle of local practices and assumptions – the celebration of the Prophet's birthday, the performance of dhikri, a congregational salutation at the end of prayer, a belief in the efficacy of prayers to local saints. Sufi brotherhoods have had little or no organizational power, and there has been no charismatic leader exercising

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[7] 'Ambassador Bellamy visits Coast Province', 1 March 2006, http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06NAIROBI919_a.html, viewed 16 Mar. 2014.

widespread influence, with the brief and partial exception of Habib Swaleh, a sharif and scholar who had considerable impact on Lamu, on what is now the northern Kenya coast, in the late nineteenth century (Thordsen, 2009: 12). Among some higher status groups – the well-educated, or those who claim to be sharifs – there are very local networks centred on regular readings and mosque discussions, involving the Maulidi ya Burdai, a Swahili text. Such groups may explicitly consider themselves to be pursuing *tasawwuf*; but they do not have wide influence or reach.   This is in contrast to what is now Tanzania, to the south, where the Qadiriyya order both propelled the spread of Islam and provided a degree of leadership for a time in the early twentieth century (Martin, 1969).

Kenya's coast also has a history of the periodic disruptive arrival of practices from elsewhere in the Indian Ocean which challenged existing behaviours or notions of piety and social hierarchy. Habib Swaleh himself exemplified this; so too, in a different way, did the reformist scholar Al-Amin Mazrui in the 1930s (Pouwels, 1981). Engaging with wider ideas about Islam has repeatedly provided a way for people – especially men – to talk about projects of social reform, and to wind ideas about proper religious practice together with wider agendas. From the 1960s, teachers and finance from a range of sources – Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan – encouraged a growing criticism of practices of 'innovation', or *bid'a* (Haynes, 2006: 499-500; Kresse, 2009: 577-78). Men who had studied in Saudi Arabia, Sudan or elsewhere returned to the coast, and their claims to scholarship gave them status and influence as imams and teachers. Their criticism of innovatory religious practice could be tied together with denunciations of superstition and the social dominance of men who claimed an inherited ability to dispense blessings. This has been a running source of tension and an occasional trigger of local, though usually non-lethal, violence. Over time, some practices – the Maulid, the salutation to the congregation, the offering of intercessory prayers for the dead - have diminished as a result.

It would be easy to characterize this as one more example of a wider contest between foreign-funded 'Islamists' and 'African' Sufis which has been identified across the continent in recent decades (Cruise O'Brien, 1981; Rosander, 1997; Westerlund, 1997). That analysis has become influential in recent thinking about counter-terrorism, which views 'temperate, progressive' Sufis as 'moderates' who are potential allies of the United States (MacCormack, 2005: 2; Rabasa, 2007: 25-26, 77). Set against the Sufis, in this view, are those who are both Islamists – advocating a political agenda based on Islam – and Salafists, having a particular doctrinal view which denounces innovation in religious practices. Some argue that the work of international Islamic NGOs has tended to support the Islamists (Hunwick, 1997; Salih, 2002). These Islamist/Salafists are, in this view, the basis of radicalism and violence, and this categorization has informed US and allied attempts to offer financial and other support to Sufis. It has also encouraged some to argue that, because Sufi practices are still predominant, Kenya is defended from 'radicalization' by this profound and moderate Sufism which resists the influence of 'puritanical Salafists' (Vittori *et al*, 2009: 1085).

Useful as a shorthand, that analysis may sometimes be misleading in detail (Thordsen, 2009: 17). Radical exponents of violent jihad may well be Salafist in their doctrinal views: Abubakar Shariff, a notoriously radical preacher, was known as Makaburi – 'graves' – because of his violent opposition to the practice of praying at the tombs of saints. Yet to simply equate Salafism and violence, or Sufism and political moderation, is mistaken. Many of those who might be called Salafists are quick to deny involvement in violence, and to argue that the injunction to treat Islam as a comprehensive

approach to life is compatible with involvement in democratic processes. In the relatively recent past in eastern Africa, Sufism has provided a basis for violent resistance to European colonial rule; there is nothing inherently 'moderate' about Sufism (Martin, 1969). Perhaps more importantly, these categories are not absolute. On the Kenya coast, those who might variously call themselves Salafists or modernizers or Islamists are by no means a united body; not all Salafists are radical critics of the Kenyan political system. Externally-funded religious propaganda with what might be called an Islamist message has not always been 'Salafist'. From the 1980s, Iranian religious propaganda was also disseminated on the coast (Lacunza Baldo, 1993, 1997: Kresse, 2009: 585-6). Nor is there any leadership or single organization for 'Sufis'. Particular mosques may have reputations as Salafist, and sometimes that is combined with reputation for preaching which is violently radical in tone and explicitly espouses the use of violence. There are in some places loose groupings of 'tariqa mosques', where certain practices associated with Sufism are more likely; in the last few years it might be argued that some of these practices have made a modest revival, to some extent propelled by external support for such mosques provided through 'anti-radicalization' schemes. But these affiliations are not absolute or enduring. It is preachers, rather than mosques, which matter. Since mosques are largely autonomous, loosely governed by committees or sometimes simply in the hands of an individual, radical preachers can gain access to many mosques. Nor do 'tariqa mosques' always eschew political discussion in favour of quietist, devotional Islam – they too may be places for explicit discussion over the status of the Muslim community locally, and internationally.

Debates over innovation intersect in unpredictable ways with other rifts. One of these is racial. The position of coastal Islam on the periphery of the Indian Ocean world has long encouraged an extraversion in which external links are prized. Claims to Arab or Persian ancestry have been a marker of high status; African Muslims, especially those whose families have become Muslim only recently, have been correspondingly seen as lower in status (Constantin, 1993, 39-40; Macintosh, 2009). African Muslims may also be divided – between those who see themselves as coastal indigenes and those whose families have come to the coast more recently from other parts of Kenya. Amongst those who claim to be Arabs, there are other hierarchies, with Omani families linked to the former sultanate of Zanzibar seeing themselves as a particular elite, but with other groups – like the highly mobile sharifian families from the Hadhramaut - also claiming a special status. These social fault lines offer points of purchase for those who wish to pursue projects of Islamic reform or radicalism, but there is no clear and consistent pattern. While Rabasa (2009: 36) has argued that the 'general orientation of...non-Arab Muslims creates a brake on the spread of radical Islam among non-Arab upcountry Muslims', there is little evidence for this. Recent converts to Islam from 'up-country' may be enthusiastic Salafists or may attend 'tariqa mosques'; Arab Muslims from high-status families may be convinced of their own inherited power to bestow blessings, but they may also denounce the very idea of such blessing. Race, ethnicity, and attitudes to devotion all cross-cut in unpredictable ways with ideas about the place of Islam in politics. These multiple divisions lie behind the consistent absence of any clear Muslim leadership which Constantin (1993) identified as a feature of Kenyan Islam (also Ndzovu, 2012: 30-34).

A commitment to the violent promotion of Islam is not, then, a straightforward result of Salafists displacing Sufis. Yet if we take 'Islamism' to mean a close sense of the political implications of belief, and a questioning of the notion of a secular divide between religion and politics, this attitude has become widespread. The continued debates over the nature of devotional practice have ensured a continued engagement with wider debates in Islam which has itself promoted this attitude; and in

the last two decades the intensity and range of that engagement has increased very substantially, both because of regional and international circumstances and because of the dramatic new possibilities of technology - whether one views this as an 'Islamic resurgence' or as evidence that Islam simply provides an associational basis for political action (Thordsen, 2009: 14, 19, 55-56). This growing engagement with a wider – often virtual – community of Muslims has been closely associated with a sense of marginalization within Kenya, and with a willingness to see that local Kenyan circumstance as one manifestation of an international subordination of Islam.

As Kai Kresse has noted, coastal Muslims' marginal status in the Indian Ocean world is echoed and redoubled by their relationship with the rest of Kenya (Kresse, 2009). Kenya is nominally secular, but – as Donal Cruise O'Brien and others have argued – it is in practice a Christian state, its political culture infused with Christian language and imagery (Cruise O'Brien, 2003; Thordsen, 2009: 35-7)). Since independence Kenya's political and administrative elite have been overwhelmingly Christian. While recent years have seen slightly more participation at senior levels by Muslims, that has been of little significance compared with a contrary trend, a profound pentecostalization of national politics that has gathered pace since 2008 (Deacon and Lynch, 2013). Politicians speak at churches; political rallies become prayer meetings; clergymen bless candidates for office, and incumbents; election winners insist that God chose them to win. While Muslims occasionally play a minor role in some of these public events, the tone is overwhelmingly that of Pentecostal Christianity – a Christianity which is at time overtly hostile to Islam (Gifford, 2009).

That hostility to Islam sometimes finds a focus in Kenya's most intimate enemy: its own population of ethnic Somalis. Kenya was born in an existential conflict with Somalia: the Somali claim to north-eastern Kenya, largely populated by ethnic Somalis, was a threat to the very idea of a Kenya which was defined by its colonial borders. Kenya's 'Shifta' war, against insurgents who aimed at secession, lasted for several years (Whittaker, 2008). Brutal tactics left a bitter legacy, with Kenya's Somali citizens resentful at their mistreatment by the government, and mistrusted by other Kenyans. In the 1990s this relationship took on a new intensity with the arrival in Kenya of hundreds of thousands of refugees from the conflict in Somalia. Some were settled in huge camps; many others sought to make a living in other parts of Kenya, notably in the Nairobi support of Eastleigh (Murunga, 2009). The Somali population of Mombasa also grew significantly. The status and rights of these refugees were uncertain: occasional attempts to confine them to camps failed, and the state struggled – largely unsuccessfully – to distinguish between refugees and citizens. Meanwhile, some other Kenyans came to resent this new Somali population – particularly in Nairobi, where they formed a highly entrepreneurial community, competing successfully for control of urban real estate and other businesses (Abdelsamed, 2011). In continuing and close contact with family and clan in Somalia, this population has also inevitably been affected by – and involved in – the violent politics of Somalia. Some have been bitter enemies of Islamists in Somalia; others have shared the vision of radical Islam as the cure for Somalia's ills, and the idea that Somalia is a battleground between the 'crusader' forces of the west and Islam. A continued history of violent repression by the Kenyan security forces has made the relationship between Somalis and Kenya every more problematic (Human Rights Watch, 2009).

Those debates over Islam among Kenya's Somali population have in turn become entwined with a developing politics over the status of Islam in Kenya. The coast was initially the focus for this politics, but one of its features has been a prolonged debate over who has the right to speak for Muslims in

Kenya, in which one largely unmentioned but evident line of tension has been between the competing claims to leadership of men from the Kenya coast and Somali men.

A distinctively Muslim political agenda was first – and briefly – articulated in Kenya in the early 1960s, just before independence, when some called for the coast to become either a separate state, or to be united with Zanzibar under the rule of the then sultan. The language of this claim – largely pressed by Arabs - could be distinctively Islamic, though it was rooted in a legal oddity: nineteenth-century treaties meant that a ten-mile strip of land along Kenya's coast was nominally the territory of the Sultan of Zanzibar, and not part of Kenya Colony (Brennan, 2008). Attracting little support from a wider coastal population – many of whom viewed this as an attempt by Arabs to maintain their political and economic dominance - this campaign was entirely unsuccessful. The coast become part of Kenya; but echoes of this political moment still occasionally reverberate. After independence, there was almost no public Muslim politics for almost thirty years. The Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM), like similar organizations elsewhere, was closely allied to the government. (Haynes, 2006: 492). When new legislation in the 1980s seemed to conflict with Muslim precepts of family law, SUPKEM preferred to pursue a back-door politics of lobbying (Ndzovu, 2009).

Against this background, the emergence of the Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK) in 1992 seemed a dramatic new departure (Oded, 2000). The IPK was never registered, and its political strategy was inconsistent, partly because of a leadership dispute which – characteristically – followed ethnic and racial lines. But it created an entirely new phenomenon of Muslim street protest – notably on the coast, which was where its real strength lay (Kresse, 2009: 584). IPK's public pronouncements always stressed that it was a national party, and that its agenda was primarily one of political reform: despite their differences, its leaders all sought to seize the moment of Kenya's return to multi-partyism to present Muslim concerns as synonymous with a wider agenda of political and social reform (Ndzovu, 2012: 27).[8] In doing so, they articulated a connected set of grievances: that Muslims suffered discrimination in education and in state employment, that Muslims found it harder to get identity papers than did other Kenyans, that they were constantly regarded as outsiders (Haynes, 2006: 498). While IPK protests increasingly often involved violence – much of it the work of the police, or gangs organized by politicians to attack the IPK – the IPK sought to be a movement of mass protest, not a terrorist organization.

The IPK slowly collapsed in the mid-1990s, weakened both by a determined campaign of government repression and by the egotism and rivalry of its leaders (Bakari, 1995). But it had set a pattern for a new, more assertive politics of Islam (Wandera, 2008-9). It had also demonstrated that an overtly religious party could not be legally registered in Kenya – where, despite the effective Christian dominance of political life, all parties are nominally required to be secular. In the wake of the IPK's demise, civil society groups took up the role of advocacy for Muslims: notably the Council of Imams and preachers (CIPK), founded in 1997, and the Muslims for Human Rights (MUHURI), created in the same year. Both sought to work constitutionally, and argued that advocacy for Muslims was indistinguishable from a wider advocacy for human rights and equality across Kenya.[9] Both were predominantly coastal and, characteristically, other similar organizations emerged

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[8] 'Why is Balala on the warpath?', Lifestyle section, pp. 2-3, *Sunday Nation,* 28 Mar. 1993.
[9] 'The Council of Imamas and Preachers of Kenya', 7 April 2010, http://islaminafrica.wordpress.com/category/local-islamic-associations-and-organizations/cipk-the-council-of-imams-and-preachers-of-kenya-c-i-p-k/, viewed 24 July 2014.

elsewhere in Kenya, competing for the mantle of leadership (Thordsen, 2009: 44-45). In the long debate over constitutional reform in Kenya, which saw two referenda (in 2005 and 2010), a number of these organizations were closely involved, and they encouraged Muslim engagement in the process (Thordsen, 2009: 47-49). [10]

Meanwhile, others encouraged a very different approach to Muslim politics, on the coast and elsewhere in Kenya. The early 1990s had established the potential of mosques as centres of political debate and mobilisation. Particularly in the main towns of the coast, a growing population of youth with limited economic prospects and a keen sense that they were the direct victims of discrimination listened readily to preachers who explained their particular problems as evidence of systematic discrimination against Muslims. By the late 1990s, such speakers were increasingly likely to present this as an international, not simply a national, struggle; evoking events in Somalia, Palestine or in the Gulf. The discontent of many young Muslims encouraged an escalation of the radical content of sermons in many mosques: there was a demand for fiery rhetoric.

New technology accelerated this process (Haynes, 2005: 1329). First the circulation of DVDs, and then the ever-increasing connectivity of many people at the coast, provided access to a whole new genre of films, photographs and speeches, which encouraged Muslims on the coast – and in Kenya generally – to see themselves as part of a global struggle. Not all of this material glorifies violence, but some of it does. In recent years, websites run in the name of 'cyber-sheikhs' have provided an interactive element to this virtual preaching: questioners can seek opinions through these websites, some of which readily authorise violence as legitimate *jihad*. This material is generally unconcerned with the specifics of Kenya, and does not call for wider social and political reform in Kenya. It universalizes the Muslim condition as one of oppression, and locates the remedy for that oppression in a global revolution which will overturn the international system.[11] In this rhetoric, capitalism, democracy and secularism are identical evils. There is, however, no consensus on what should replace this; as in Somalia, radical Muslim voices are by no means united in terms of their goal, though they have a common rhetoric of oppositionism (Marchal, 2011: 35-36). Some promote the notion of a khalifate; others leave open the possible structure of a world liberated for Islam.

Against this background, organizations like CIPK which have pursued a peaceful engagement in Kenyan national politics have struggled. They have received support from external bodies – USAID, the Danish government (Lind and Howell, 2008; Ndzovu, 2012: 44). Arguably , this has helped to ensure them both a significant role and influence, and has helped sustain the political engagement of Muslims in Kenya's constitutional debates and process (Thordsen, 2009: 53-54). Yet such support has also left them increasingly vulnerable to the criticism that they have compromised, and they have found themselves outflanked by more radical voices which use mosques – and the internet – to argue that involvement with the democratic process is not only pointless, but actually weakens Islam.

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[10] 'It is a big YES for Muslims. Leaders unite in support for the draft constitution', *The Friday Bulletin*, 363, 16 Apr. 2010.

[11] 'What should be done: change leaders or change the system?',Shaaban Mwalimu, Hizb ut-Tahrir East Africa, 27 Dec. 2012, http://www.hizb-eastafrica.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=554:what-should-be-done-change-leaders-or-the-system&catid=31&Itemid=128, viewed on 12 Nov. 2013.

For some, then, the sense that Muslims have been marginalized, and that Kenyan Muslim experience is simply one aspect of a global pattern of injustice, has provided the justificatory narrative for violence. The developing power of this narrative helps explain the changing nature of that violence. The East African embassy bombings of 1998 were the work of men trained elsewhere, brought into the region for the purpose, and were in some ways remote from local politics in Kenya and Tanzania (Shinn, 2007: 65-66). By 2002, this had already begun to change: at the core of the Paradise Hotel bombing were members of the original group which had planned the 1998 attacks, but it also involved Kenyans (Botha, 2013: 3-5). The Ethiopian invasion that overthrew the Islamic Courts Union in Somalia marked a further change (Kfir, 2008). It made the conflict in Somali more easily presentable as simple fight for Islam, and propelled al-Shabaab – rather than al-Qaeda – into the role of the principal mobilizing force in the region. In Kenya, young men came to be recruited through preaching, in a systematic way: members of the congregation who responded strongly to radical sermons were identified, and then encouraged to join a small group for more lectures and discussions – a pattern of isolating potential recruits which al-Shabaab had already established in Somalia (Marchal, 2011: 41). After a time, such young men could be offered the opportunity – and the money – to travel to Somali to train and to fight; by some estimates, 'hundreds' took this opportunity (Amble and Meleagrou-Hitchens, 2014: 524). Radical preachers, and those who helped them, received funds from Somalia, or from sympathizers elsewhere in the world, which supported this activity.

Preaching and recruitment were not confined to the Kenya coast. Ahmed Iman Ali, one of the followers of Aboud Rogo - the most open and notorious of these preachers – moved to Nairobi to pursue a similar strategy, before himself moving to Somalia in 2009 (Anzalone, 2012; Botha, 2013: 7-9, 10-11; Amble and Meleagrou-Hitchens, 2014). There has been a continuing two-way traffic for around a decade – varying in scale over time, but constant – with some young men going to receive training or fight in Somalia even as others return to the Kenya coast, or to Eastleigh or north-eastern Kenya. Of the returnees, some are disillusioned by experience in Somalia; others still see themselves as pursuing jihad, and may be receiving some continuing payment. The Kenyan government's decision to intervene militarily in Somalia in 2011 led to a clear escalation in attacks in Kenya. Weapons – including grenades – and ammunition are relatively easy to obtain; high-grade explosives apparently less so (since some attacks have used home-made explosive material). As a result, minor terrorist incidents - committed by individuals or small groups, using grenades, small improvised explosive devices, or firearms attacks – have become steadily more common (Nzes, 2012). Until recently, however, street protest remained a more common form of political action on the coast – though this often turned into attacks on property, and into violent confrontations with the security forces.[12]

The response of the security forces to both terrorism and protest has escalated confrontation. The activities of radical preachers became flashpoints for street conflict. When the visiting Jamaican preacher Abdullah al Faisal was arrested and deported in 2010, there were violent demonstrations in Nairobi and Mombasa; similar demonstrations followed the assassination of Aboud Rogo.[13] In 2014,

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[12] 'Uneasy clam returns to Mombasa as leaders condemn deadly violence', *Daily Nation*, 5 Oct. 2013, http://www.nation.co.ke/news/Mombasa-riots-Rogo-/-1056/2020584/-/8ecdctz/-/index.html viewed 26 July 2014.
[13] 'State says al-Faisal deported; Muslims disagree', *Digital Standard,* 22 Jan. 2010, http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/business/article/2000001486/state-says-al-faisal-deported-muslims-

a 'jihadist' convention at a Mombasa mosque was publicly advertised; predictably, there was considerable violence when this was raided by the police.[14] Police tactics in managing street protests have been unsophisticated, reliant on indiscriminate use of tear gas and live ammunition. The Kenya police have a poor record in investigating, charging and securing convictions with respect to all forms of crime, and are frequently involved in lethal shootings of 'suspects'(Independent Medico-Legal Unit, 2014). The 'profound weakness' of Kenya's security services has been repeatedly identified as a factor which enables terrorism (Rosenau, 2005: 4; Shinn, 2007: 64, 67). When arrests are made, cases often drag on, partly because of failures in procedure and evidence-gathering. From 2012, there was a bitter and intermittent little war of killing and counter-killing underway at the coast, punctuated by terrorist attacks (Open Society Justice Initiative, 2013). Suspected radicals were murdered, as was one alleged financier of radical preachers; so too were police informers and undercover agents, and one prominent Muslim leader, a CIPK official. [15] Another former radical preacher was also physically attacked, apparently by youth who denounced him for having become less strident in his language; others, including at least one prominent Salafist who was a well-known supporter of the Kenyan government, went into hiding.[16] By mid-2014, this cycle of murders and counter-murders, demonstrations and harsh policing, had generated a climate of widespread suspicion and tension at the coast.

Coastal secessionism

There are other drivers of violence at the coast. At Kenya's independence in 1963, while a majority of the people at the coast had rejected the idea of secession, there had been substantial support for the *majimbo* system – that is, for the devolved regional government which existed briefly at the time(Prestholdt, 2014; Willis and Gona, 2013). That system was quickly suppressed after independence by Jomo Kenyatta's government, but popular support for some kind of devolution has remained strong at the coast, though it was largely unexpressed in the years of single-party rule up to 1991. Kenyans have since the 1990s been engaged in a long collective debate over the nature of power and inequality in the country. It has been widely argued that a centralizing, authoritarian style of government had become entrenched since independence; the return of multi-party politics in the early 1990s opened up public space for debate on this, but did not lead to immediate change. One draft constitution was put to referendum in 2005, and rejected; another, embodying a substantial measure of devolution to a new level of county governments, was approved by referendum in 2010 (Kimenyi, 2006; Kramon and Posner, 2011). Throughout these debates, popular opinion at the coast has generally favoured more devolution.

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disagree?pageNo=2 , viewed 24 July 2014; 'Chaos as Rogo is murdered', *The Star*, 28 Aug. 2012, http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/article-4502/chaos-rogo-murdered viewed 24 July 2014.
[14] 'Two killed in Mombaa Masjid Musa fighting', *The Star,* 3 Feb. 2014, http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/article-153398/two-killed-mombasa-masjid-musa-fighting, viewed 24 July 2014.
[15] ' 'Ukunda Muslim preacher shot dead', *The Star*, 7 Dec. 2013, http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/article-146494/ukunda-muslim-preacher-shot-dead, viewed 17 Mar. 2014; 'List of Muslim clerics killed in two years', *The Star,* 11 June 2014, http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/article-170658/list-muslim-clerics-killed-two-years , viewed 23 July 2014; 'Controversial businessman shot dead in Mombasa', *Digital Standard*, 12 July 2014, http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/thecounties/article/2000127940/controversial-businessman-shot-dead-in-mombasa ; viewed 12 July 2014.
[16] 'Radical youth assault preacher in Mombasa', *The Star,* 15 Mar. 2014, http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/article-158860/radical-youth-assault-preacher-mombasa, viewed 23 July 2014.

That support has been the corollary of a sometimes violent sense of resentment against people from 'up-country' – and particularly, against Kikuyu, members of Kenyatta's ethnic group, who were seen to have used Kenyatta's long presidency to acquire land, wealth and power at the expense of coast people. As one Mombasa politician put it in the 1980s 'We Coast people, we lost our own country' (quoted in Wolf, 2000: 132). Many people at the coast have routinely located their own experience, and that of their family and wider kin, in the context of a narrative of marginalization which presented coastal people as collective victims – a narrative which was, of course, very similar in much of its detail to that of Muslim marginalization. Land has been a particularly explosive issue, setting coastal people against one another – notably, Arabs against Mijikenda – but also creating increasing tension between coastal people and more recent arrivals from other parts of Kenya. Colonial land policy left much land in the coastal strip in the hands of Arab, Asian or European landowners, but also left much of it physically occupied by local people – mostly of the group now known as Mijikenda – who were technically squatters. While some settlement schemes were created, the situation has if anything become worse, as the allocation of land in those schemes was widely viewed as unfair (Kanyinga, 1998). People from up-country took up some of the land in settlement schemes – in some cases, being given preferential access to these. Some large plots came into the hands of members of a new elite from central Kenya; meanwhile, the spread of Mombasa and other towns meant made some squatted land into dense peri-urban settlements. Disputes between squatters and those who claim to own the land are frequent, occasionally violent, and provide a constant reminder of the narrative of coastal dispossession.[17]

While that narrative could drive constitutional politics, it could also encourage violence. In the 1990s, as multi-partyism was introduced, some politicians associated with KANU, the then ruling party, sought to stir up coastal resentment against 'up-country' people at the coast and to call for a form of devolved government, or *majimbo*. This was a piece of cynical opportunism – KANU had itself been closely associated with the emergence of the centralized political system, and 'devolution' in this case was simply a cover for a campaign of intimidation to drive out potential opposition voters - since by this time, Kikuyu and Luo were seen as the principal opponents of the incumbent president, Daniel arap Moi (Mazrui, 1999). The technique was not confined to the coast: indeed, it was used even more dramatically in the Rift Valley, where large numbers of Kikuyu were displaced by violent attacks: this period saw the beginning of a diffusion of violence, through which politicians deliberately pursued political advantage by organizing gangs to attack the potential supporters of their opponents (Throup and Hornsby, 1998: 371-84, 541-44). Repeatedly, these politicians acted with impunity, even when government-appointed commissions identified those believed to be responsible(Akiwumi, 1999; Ndzovu, 2012: 47-48). These attacks corroded state authority and legitimacy – indeed, they revealed 'the state' to be incoherent and fractionated. They also made the violent use of gangs a routine part of politics(Mueller, 2008). At the coast, in the run-up to the 1992 election, there were isolated acts of violence, and leaflets were distributed threatening 'up-country' people; in 1997 there was a major outbreak of violence in Mombasa's southern suburb Likoni, where a gang of young men attacked the homes and shops of up-country people (Kagwanja, 2001: 88-93). Several dozen people died, and thousands fled (Kresse, 2009: 583; Mazrui, 1997). At the coast, this manifested a distinctive style of violence: committed by organized groups of young men, with few or no firearms. The 'training' of these youths included the administering of oaths intended to ensure their loyalty and their courage; these oaths were

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[17] 'Banned group urges squatters to resist eviction from ancestral land', *Daily Nation,* 13 Dec. 2011, http://www.nation.co.ke/news/regional/-/1070/1288780/-/4gr023z/-/index.html, viewed 26 July 2014.

reportedly administered in *kaya*s, sacred forest areas associated particularly with the Mijikenda: the young men involved in the 1997 Mombasa violence came to be known as the 'Kaya Bombo raiders', because they had allegedly trained and taken oaths in the *kaya* at Bombo, just south of Mombasa (Human Rights Watch, 2002: 37).

Hostility to up-country people was apparent again in 2005-6, at the time of the debate over the draft constitution; this time, it took the form of claims that the coast should become independent. The argument for this revisited the politics of the early 1960s and the treaties of the late nineteenth century. Letters written on behalf of the 'Republican Council of Mombasa' argued that 'the coast' (a term used with intentional vagueness) had never been part of Kenya, and had a legal right to a separate status. The argument was flawed, in multiple ways: the treaties had only related to a notional 'ten-mile strip' which was never mapped or defined, and the Sultan of Zanzibar had formally renounced all rights even to that strip in 1963 (Willis and Gona, 2013). But the idea of this legal claim to a separate status proved a powerful one, and came to be widely repeated and known. By 2011 there was a Facebook page, multiple Youtube videos and various circulating paper documents bearing the name of what was now called 'the Mombasa Republican Council', or MRC. This was not a religious movement. None of the propaganda associated with it made any religious arguments or used religious language, and while those most prominently associated with it were Muslim men, it apparently had considerable non-Muslim support.

The men who claimed to be the leaders of the MRC publicly eschewed violence, and declared that they would pursue a legal campaign to assert the coast's independence. How popular the MRC was is hard to say; there was much public sympathy among those who considered themselves 'coast' people, who evidently shared the grievances expressed by the movement. On the other hand, MRC rallies were always small if noisy events, and there is no sign that there was widespread support for the idea of coastal 'independence'. Though there were repeated reports of MRC 'members' paying subscription fees and being organized into a coherent movement , it seems that there was no single organization, and the issuing of membership cards and collecting of subscriptions seems to have been uncoordinated and opportunistic.[18] This was in many ways a very home-made movement, its local existence reliant on petty local leaders who sought to leverage an existing degree of local influence – as activists, politicians, or sometimes as ritual specialists – into wider authority. Local sub-variants of the group seem to have emerged quickly, perhaps in some cases as the result of rivalries between aspiring local leaders.[19] The rapidity of this localization suggested the levels of alienation at the coast; but the process also revealed the persistent racial divide on the coast. Some documents circulated in the name of the MRC emphasised the historic claims of 'the coast' in terms of the treaty, and represented an inclusive idea of the coast; others emphasised the claims of 'indigenous' coast people, and pointedly excluded Arabs (Willis and Gona, 2013). The MRC call for a boycott of the 2013 election was not widely heeded; it seems to have reduced registration, but participation was actually higher than in previous elections (Willis and Chome, 2014). Because of the diffuse, localized nature of the MRC agitation, the boycott provided opportunity for some local overlap with the rhetoric – and supporters – of radical Muslim organizations, which were also

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[18] See for example '15 members of illegal MRC deny oath charge', *The Star,* 27 Sep. 2011, http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/article-47838/15-members-illegal-mrc-deny-oath-charge, viewed 25 July 2014.

[19] 'Warrant out for 33 gang members', *The Star*, 7 May, 2013, http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/article-119398/warrant-out-33-gang-members; 'Security stepped up ahead of polls', *The Star*, 15 Feb. 2013, http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/article-107624/security-stepped-ahead-polls, both viewed 25 July 2014.

denouncing the elections.[20] In some parts of Mombasa, graffiti which extolled the MRC and called for an election boycott appeared adjacent to graffiti which denounced elections as unIslamic.

Non-violent though the MRC claimed to be, a succession of violent attacks were blamed on its supporters in 2012 and 2013. These targeted a practice poll, election meetings, and police posts.[21] This violence was, in form, quite unlike that associated with Islamic radicalism. Like the 'kaya raiders' of 1997, these were groups of lightly-armed young men, often only with machetes and bows, who relied on numbers to overcome police. In some cases they wore red and blue cloth – traditional colours of ritual power among the Mijikenda – and were alleged to have taken oaths. While the police alleged that these attacks were evidence that MRC and al-Shabaab were working together, these attacks were not claimed by al-Shabaab and were quite different in form to the shootings and bomb attacks which al-Shabaab did claim.[22]

While the men who claimed to lead the MRC insisted that they were not involved, they were nonetheless arrested – very violently – and held in prison for a while.[23] They have not yet been convicted on any charges, though they face continuing court cases. The violence allegedly linked to the MRC peaked on the eve of the election itself, when a series of attacks were made on police officers and polling stations at the coast in which some nineteen people were killed by attackers using machetes and wearing red and blue cloths; in a few places, the poll was heavily disrupted as a result (Willis and Chome, 2014: 119). Rumours continue to swirl around this violence, which was apparently coordinated and well-organized, and in which groups of armed security officers were overwhelmed with surprising ease. The authorities blame the MRC, others have accused land-owners seeking to undermine the new constitution, or politicians seeking to affect the outcome of the election by intimidating voters (Willis and Chome, 2014: 118-19). The nominal leaders of the MRC have been largely quiet since the elections, and internet activity has also declined substantially, encouraging speculation that at least some of the activity attributed to 'the MRC' may have been the work of politicians with particular electoral aims. In the aftermath of the Mpeketoni attack, there were however claims by police that young men were again being trained and oathed in kayas; five young men were arrested in a police raid on one such 'training'.[24]

This was not the only violence at the coast in 2012/13 at around the time of the elections. On the northern coast, in the area of the Tana delta, more than 100 people were killed in a series of attacks

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[20] 'The filth of democracy is beginning to be felt in Kenya!',Shaaban Mwalimu, Hizb ut-Tahrir, 27 Dec. 2012. http://www.hizb-eastafrica.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=517:the-filth-of-democracy-is-beginning-to-be-felt-in-kenya&catid=31&Itemid=128, viewed on 13 Nov. 2013.

[21] 'IEBC boss allays fears', *The Star*, 11 June 2012, http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/article-14891/iebc-boss-allays-fears; 'Four killed at Kingi rally', *The Star,* 5 Oct. 2012, http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/article-88171/four-killed-kingi-rally ; 'MRC supects gunned down in Freretown raid', *The Star,* 11 Dec. 2012, http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/article-99153/mrc-suspects-gunned-down-freretown-raid, all viewed 26 July 2014.

[22] 'MRC has links with al-Shabaab, says Coast PC', *The Star,* 7 May 2011, http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/article-64311/mrc-has-links-al-shabab-says-coast-pc viewed 26 July 2014.

[23] 'Chief killed in MRC operation', *The Star,* 15 Oct. 2012, http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/article-91141/chief-killed-mrc-operation viewed 25 July 2014

[24] 'MRC suspects arrested in Kilifi over Saba Saba', *The Star,* 5 July 2014, http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/article-174557/mrc-suspects-arrested-kilifi-over-saba-saba, viewed 26 July 2014.

in 2012.[25] In these cases too, some of the attacks were apparently well-organized; in one case, nine armed security officers were killed by raiders who then went on to murder civilians, burn houses and kill livestock. This violence took on a tit-for-tat form, and apparently pitted two ethnic communities – both Muslim, and each with a reasonable claim to be 'indigenous' to the coast - against one another. Again, there were many contending rumours about this violence, which connected it to long-term conflicts over land use in an area which is seeing increasing pressure on water and land resources, but also to very specific local drivers in terms of electoral politics.[26] This violence was not apparently connected to religion, nor was it against 'up country' people – but it showed the inability of the security forces to prevent or effectively investigate large-scale attacks, and it showed too both the tensions which exist around land access at the coast, and the widespread suspicion that politicians are able to mobilise violence to pursue their own ends with impunity.[27] This is a potent combination of circumstances. It creates a sense of insecurity, and deprives the security forces – and the state more generally – of credibility; it encourages the emergence of local militias and allows those who mobilize violence to present their activities as legitimate.

Explaining Mpeketoni

Appearing before a committee of Kenya's National Assembly, less than a month after the attack on Mpeketoni, local political leaders differed dramatically in their explanations. The elected MP for the area – who is a Kikuyu, like most of his constituents – accused 'large landowners' of organizing the attacks; others accused 'criminals' or 'outsiders'.[28] The MP also alleged that the county governor of Lamu – who had been briefly arrested over the attacks, and who is an Arab – was hostile to his constituents; an unsubtle hint that he believed him to be involved. A few days earlier, the Deputy President had implied again that he believed Raila Odinga was responsible for the attacks on the coast; and the President Kenyatta continued to insist that the violence was the result of tribalism.[29] The persistence of these alternative narratives, in the face of al-Shabaab's claims, and in spite of reports that most of the attackers spoke Somali, is partly the result of Lamu's local politics, and of Kenyan national politics. Yet it also seems likely that, improbable as they are in some respects, there is an element of truth in this narrative: militants associated with al Shabaab have adopted a style of violence, and parts of the rhetoric, associated with other kinds of violence at the coast.

The settlement at Mpeketoni was created in the 1970s. Previously sparsely occupied and irregularly cultivated by Bajun and other local people, the land had been largely abandoned in the 1960s as a

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[25] 'How politics of tribe and rivalry over land fuelled bloody conflict in Tana River', *Daily Nation,* 16 Sep. 2012, http://www.nation.co.ke/news/politics/Politics-of-tribe-and-rivalry-over-land-fuelled-Tana-conflict-/-/1064/1509124/-/cnt4ci/-/index.html viewed 26 July 2014.

[26] 'Godhana denies holding meetings in clash villages', *Daily Nation*, 26 Oct. 2012, http://www.nation.co.ke/news/politics/Godhana-denies-holding-meetings-in-clash-villages/-/1064/1604304/-/thm0r7/-/index.html, viewed 26 July 2014

[27] 'MPs, envoy and church leadernamed in Tana chaos', *Daily Nation,* 18 Oct. 2012, http://www.nation.co.ke/news/politics/MPs-envoy-and-church-leader-named-in-Tana-chaos/-/1064/1536658/-/14h76pk/-/index.html viewed 26 July 2014.

[28] 'Lamu leaders differ over violence', *The Star*, 2 July 2014, http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/article-176261/lamu-leaders-differ-over-violence

[29] 'Ruto indirectly blames Raila Odinga's CORD on Tana River and Lamu bloodbath', *Daily Post,* 7 July 2014, http://www.kenyan-post.com/2014/07/ruto-indirectly-blames-raila-odingas.html

result of the Shifta war. After the end of that conflict, the government had claimed possession of the land and made it into a settlement scheme; the majority of plots were apparently allocated to Kikuyu. More people moved to the area over time, some buying land rather than having to allocated as part of the scheme, and the settlement grew and prospered.[30] By 2013, the mainland had become the main population centre in the county of Lamu – though the island town of Lamu, a much older settlement, was still the county headquarters.[31] This process generated multiple tensions – both over the land itself, which some local people felt was theirs, and over the sense among those who considered themselves coast people that they were being displaced by immigrants from up-country. Plans to develop a new port in Lamu County, and a pipeline and other infrastructure, increased tensions over land; there have been multiple accusations and counter-accusations of land-grabbing.[32] Pastoralists – who happen to be Muslim - have complained that 'tycoons' are fencing off their grazing land.[33] Not all the 'coast' people in Lamu are Muslim; among the relatively newly-arrived settlers are non-Muslim Mijikenda from elsewhere on the coast. Yet still, the division between coast and up-country is easily presented as a Muslim-Christian one. There are, then, multiple local drivers of conflict which can be presented as a Muslim struggle against Christian oppression – however misleading that presentation may sometimes be.

At the same time, the sense among Kikuyu that they are in danger is the direct result of experience: in the 1990s, and again in 2007/8, Kikuyu have been the victims of violence, driven by wider resentment and organized by local politicians acting with the apparent support, or at least complicity, of national politician. This sense that they are a community under siege helps to explain Uhuru Kenyatta's victory in the 2013 election, in which the turnout from Kikuyu voters was phenomenally high. It also helps to explain why many were so willing to see Raila Odinga as in some way implicated in the Mpeketoni attacks. The accusation might be seen as a political device, but Kenyatta himself seemed to believe this narrative, and the logic of his argument was revealing:

> The attack in Lamu was well planned, orchestrated and politically motivated ethnic violence against a Kenyan community, with the intention of profiling and evicting them for political reasons. This, therefore, was not an Al Shabaab terrorist attack.[34]

The argument is certainly widely accepted among Kikuyu. Ethnic animosity against Kikuyu has been common, and is easily mobilised. That sense of siege has driven ever more extraordinary theories of conspiracy, with allegations that the US and British governments were funding the violence.[35]

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[30] 'How squatters became landowners in Lamu', *Daily Nation,* 29 June 2014, http://www.nation.co.ke/news/How-squatters-became-land-owners-in-Lamu/-/1056/2366012/-/36lcde/-/index.html, viewed 26 July 2014.

[31] The four mainland wards of Lamu West constituency had 23,139 registered voters in 2013; the two island wards only 10,427.

[32] 'Elders accuse county chief of presiding over land-grabbing', *Daily Nation,* 16 Oct. 2013, http://www.nation.co.ke/counties/Elders-accuse-county-chief-of-presiding-over-land-grabbing-/-/1107872/2033896/-/3vh7wj/-/index.html; '6000 Lamu squatters want their land back', *The Star*, 6 Mar. 2014, http://roba.the-star.co.ke/news/article-157910/6000-lamu-squatters-want-their-land-back, both viewed 26 July 2014.

[33] 'Nomads plead for pasture', *The Star,* 10 Mar. 2014, http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/article-158331/nomads-plead-pasture viewed 26 July 2014.

[34] 'Uhuru blames massacre on tribalism, hate politics', *Daily Nation,* 17 June 2014, http://www.nation.co.ke/news/Uhuru-blames-massacre-on-tribalism--hate-politics/-/1056/2352306/-/wyy1laz/-/index.html

Yet to locate these explanatory narratives as the result of local or national politics begs a question – what actually happened? That al-Shabaab have claimed responsibility, and that no one else has, is surely significant – yet it may also be significant that the claim of responsibility for the first attack was not issued immediately, and that subsequent attacks have been claimed more quickly. It seems likely that the group committing these outrages were not in close contact with al Shabaab's leadership before the attack, but that they now are. Al-Shabaab is, as Marchal (2011: 18) has argued, a bureaucratic organization. But it is also occasionally prone to internal division, with rival figures seeking to establish their credentials – and authority – through their ability to carry out violent attacks.[36] The attack on Mpeketoni is perhaps in part an assertive statement by one such group; one intelligence source reportedly identifies a Kenyan Muslim (somewhat ironically, a Kikuyu by origin) as its leader.[37] It is surely also significant that these attacks represent a very different kind of violence for Islamic radicalism in Kenya: committed at night, by large organized groups with limited weaponry and no explosives. It has been argued that Islamic radicals have had difficulty recruiting in Kenya – as in Somalia – because their particular interpretations of Islam seemed unsympathetic to the local population (Rosenau, 2005: 5; Haynes, 2006: 501; Vittori et al, 2009).

But now al Shabaab makes a deliberate effort to reach a Kenyan audience with messages that have little or no doctrinal content; instead they relentlessly advance the argument that Islam is under attack. The website SomaliMeMo, closely linked to al Shabaab, now has a Swahili language section, which intertwines stories of jihad in Somalia, Syria, Palestine and Kenya.[38] While the significance of internet publications can be overstated, it is worth noting that the eulogy for Aboud Rogo published in *Gaidi Mtaani* - the internet magazine intended by al-Shabaab to reach a Kenyan audience - evoked the name of Abdulaziz Limo, a preacher from the south coast imprisoned in the 1990s for criticizing the Kenya government. It also praised the coastal secessionist movement as 'efforts to return the [Islamic] rule which was broken by the English unbelievers'.[39] That, and the events in and around Mpeketoni, suggest that al-Shabaab – or rather, some who consider themselves to be part of al-Shabaab - have become ever more interested in playing on the concerns of Kenyan Muslims, and of coastal Muslims in particular. As Rabasa (2009: 3) argued '[c]onflicts in East Africa can be opportunistically exploited by al-Qaeda and associated radical ideologues who seek to represent these conflicts as jihads'. It may be this which has allowed the Mpeketoni attackers to mobilise a relatively large group, and to secure the degree of local acceptance needed to keep operating. It has also allowed them to learn new techniques – whether by observation, or by recruiting some of those involved in earlier violence, is unclear.

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[35] 'Elders blame US/UK and Raila Odinga for Mpeketoni attack', *Daily Post,* 18 June 2014, http://www.kenyan-post.com/2014/06/elders-blame-us-uk-and-raila-odinga-for.html

[36] 'Kenyan jihadist resurfaces, sheds light on the current state of al-Shabaab', *Sabahionline*, 12 July 2013, http://sabahionline.com/en_GB/articles/hoa/articles/features/2013/07/12/feature-01

[37] 'Police unveil names behind Coast killings', *Digital Standard*, 13 July 2014, http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/thecounties/article/2000127991/police-unveil-names-behind-coast-killings viewed 26 July 2014.

[38] http://somalimemo.net/category/2/Kiswahili viewed 26 July 2014.

[39] Hassan an Nairobi, 'Aboud Rogo: Chanzo cha Mabadiliko', in *Gaidi Mtaani,* Issue 3, 2013, available at http://jihadology.net/2013/03/03/new-issue-of-the-magazine-gaidi-mtaani-issue-3/ viewed 26 July 2014.

Conclusion

The attacks on Mpeketoni, and in the area around it, apparently represent an alarming intersection of different strands of violence, and different drivers of conflict. To seek an absolutely exclusive categorisation of the violence – as solely al-Shabaab or as 'MRC', or as the work of national politicians – is probably mistaken. The language in which the attackers claimed responsibility blended coastal concerns over land with an evocation of Somali sovereignty and also an assertion of the need to defend Islam. The sense that Islam is under attack, and that local grievances can be understood as part of a universal experience of Muslims has become widely established. At the same time, the very nature of the violence is rooted in the Kenyan politics of the last two decades, in which organized violence against civilians, mobilised on ethnic lines, has become normalized and has gone unpunished. In the process it has eroded the credibility and the competence of the security forces. The complicity of national politicians in the mobilization of ethnic violence has made Kenya very vulnerable; so too has the erosion of the capabilities and credibility of the security forces. This violence is the consequences of that, and of the profound inequalities of Kenya's political system, as much as of international Islamic radicalism. Those who are involved in the violence have pulled these multiple strands together. This interweaving is not entirely new; it has long been rumoured that some of the young men who went to Somalia in the early 2000s had been among those trained at kaya Bombo. But this time the strands have come together with even more effect.

There are, of course, limits to the possibility of this strategy. Kenyan Muslims are not united, and nor is the coast. Race and ethnicity, as well as religious differences, divide these potential communities. No individual or body has ever succeeded in laying even a modestly plausible claim to speak for either, and there is no likelihood that those committing the current violence will be able to mobilise all coastal people, or all Muslims. This cannot become a popular mass movement. But as Shinn (2207: 67) has noted, 'It requires only a handful of operatives and a receptive environment to conduct successful terrorist activity'. And the attacks at Mpeketoni have already succeeded in dramatically increasing tensions: between Muslims and other Kenyans, between coast people and other Kenyans, and between Kikuyu and other Kenyans.

The dangerous confusion which this creates was emphasised again in July 2014, when hooded attackers shot and killed several people in the Mombasa suburb of Likoni. They reportedly left leaflets announcing that this was 'revenge' for Mpeketoni and that their targets were Luo, members of the same ethnic group as opposition leader Raila Odinga.[40] Al-Shabaab did not claim the attack, though SomaliMeMo carried an oddly worded story which apparently referred to the attackers as 'Mujahidin'. The senior central government official in Mombasa then publicly alleged that the attack was actually the work of Raila's own party, ODM – a statement immediately denounced by ODM, and criticized in the national press.[41] The attack itself was perhaps unsurprising: that it was

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[40]   'Deaths   in   Mombasa   shooting   rampage',   Al-Jazeera,   21   July   2014, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2014/07/deaths-shooting-rampage-kenya-mombasa-20147214444141458.html, viewed 26 July 2014.

[41]   http://somalimemo.net/articles/522/Shambulio-lingine-yafanyika-mji-wa-Mombasa-na-Mujahidina-wajitokeza-wazi-wakiwa-na-silaha-zao-na-kufanya-patroo, viewed 26 July 2014; 'ODM furious over Likoni terror link', *The Star*, 26 July 2014, http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/article-179948/odm-furious-over-likoni-terror-link viewed 26 July 2014; 'State playing politics with security matters', Editorial, *Daily Nation*, 26 July 2014,   http://www.nation.co.ke/oped/Editorial/-State-playing-politics-with-security-matters-/-/440804/2398030/-/rx80c6/-/index.html, viewed 26 July 2014.

immediately the subject of such widely differing interpretations and allegations is further evidence that multiple strands of violence interweave on Kenya's coast, that they are close to running out of control - and that the credibility of the state is deeply compromised. It is an alarming situation.

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