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Introduction

The African Independent Pentecostal Church has had perhaps the most publicised wrangles among the African instituted churches in Kenya. The controversies spanning for more than three decades has manifested themselves in court battles, physical confrontations and the political interventions and measures especially during President Moi's era. But the controversies are not without some historical basis as indeed, the church has its founding in the political contestations over a myriad of socio-cultural and political issues in the 1920s and which were grounded and shaped by the colonial political climate as Kikuyu in Central Kenya sought to secure space in the socio-cultural and political reality of the day. The common thread that defines and informs the period of its founding and existence especially in the three post-colonial decades is politics, although it has been practiced in different manifestations in the colonial and post-colonial epochs. The political parallelism of the circumstance of its foundations and its post-colonial existence forms the basis of this article.

The 1920s and 1930s saw increased controversies over the interpretation of the different strains of religious thought in Central Kenya. This was marked by the missionaries' and indigenous religious streams with the latter being an off-shoot of former over interpretation of certain socio-cultural practices which the two religious streams found to be unbearable to their orientations. Ideally, at the centre of the storm was the issue of culture which had become a discursive feature of orientation-colonial body and Kikuyu especially as the missionaries embarked on the acculturation of the Kikuyu and Africans in general. Hence, the socio-cultural contestations of the time could be summarised as "politics of culture" which was particularly heightened by the female circumcision controversy (*Kiriro*) among other things in the central region of Kenya. We thus argue that the

colonial missions' encounter with the Kikuyu laid the political groundwork upon which the Kikuyu independence in religion and education among other social issues was sought.

In the second part of the analysis, we explore the more internal encounters amongst the Kikuyu independents. In this post-colonial encounter, struggle for religious supremacy informed the better part of life of the independent pentecostal church for 30 years culminating in a final schism within the church. During this period, the AIPC was characterised by a "culture of politics" that saw one faction of the church outdo the other over church supremacy. Political partisans in the church used the courts, the political establishment and in the extreme, brawn to secure an upper hand in the church leadership. This was especially in the 1980s and the 1990s, a period in which the national political climate facilitated and indeed fuelled the factional infighting in a bid to secure political benefits in central Kenya.

This article is based on several sources of data: interviews with leaders and members conducted in Othaya (Nyeri), Githunguri (Kiambu) and Nairobi where the different manifestations of the independents church—Africa Independent Pentecostal Church of Kenya (AIPCK) and Africa Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa (AIPCA)—are. I also relied on the newspaper content analysis on the Church especially in the 1980 and 1990s through to the present times. A historiography on the church in the formative years was also consulted.

The politics over culture and the origins of the independent church

African instituted churches or independent churches as they are better known sprung up in the 1920s under very acrimonious relations with their nemesis the Christian mission churches. The formation of church was marked by political protests that saw the churches organise against a myriad of cultural, social-economic and political grievances that Africans had against the colonial administrators and missions at the time. The socio-cultural issues saw religious independence among the Kikuyu of central Kenya and they formed the basis of political mobilisation in the last three decades of colonial rule. Much of the attention was based on the practice of female circumcision with extension to the issue of education that Kikuyu were to be exposed to.

The AIPC was formed as a socio-cultural tool to fight the colonial religion-under very political circumstances and has lived with the church even to the post colonial period. Simon Kimani, the national chairman of the Africa Independent Church of Kenya (AIPCK), the breakaway faction of the African Independent Church of Africa attributes the founding of the independent church among the Kikuyu in one word, *watho* (laws). He says “*The missionaries’ desires to impose all their watho into the Kikuyu made the Kikuyu paranoid on every thing they introduced. Nowhere did they discuss these regulations with the local people. They were imposing watho into our people*”¹ Kimani’s comments depict the missionaries as dictators who were unwilling to negotiate their proposals with the local people. This formed the basis for the Kikuyu to protest and break away from the mission churches. Female circumcision was the key issue in the series of protests against the missionaries. Those who led in these protest came to be known as *Iregi* (refusers)², a term that the AIPCK leadership prefer to label themselves even as late 2003 as they engaged their bitter rivals the AIPCA in a leadership contest as they registered their faction of the church³.

In 1929, mission churches, especially the Church of Scotland mission led followers in denouncing female circumcision by appending their finger print sign in what popularly become to be called the *Kirore* (finger print), a pledge that the mission church used to sort out conformist adherents. The female circumcision indicated the Kikuyu lack of confidence in the British colonial rule as those who led in denouncing the signing of the *Kirore* left to found the independent church. Indeed, there had been threat by the mission churches to strike out the *Iregi* from the communion list⁴.

Female circumcision provided the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), the Kikuyu political party of the time, with political fodder with which to confront the colonialist. Peterson (2004: 103) says that in Nairobi, KCA mobilised and organised people against the colonial government arguing that missionaries were planning to steal Kikuyu land and women. Further, the Kikuyu independents in the 1930s used songs as a cultural tool to resist the ban on female circumcision. The

¹ Interview with Kimani Mbitiru.

² Peterson, 2003.

³ Interview with John Mugecha.

⁴ Peterson, 2004.

most popular among these was *Muthirigu* that was sung for the uncircumcised girl. The songs depicted the new convert girls who had foregone circumcision as irresponsible, morally loose and lacking in discipline.⁵

The refusal to sign the *kiroro* had repercussions on other social aspects of church life like marriage, baptism and on the new independent adherents. Since the independents did not have their own trained clergy to preside over in church ceremonies such as baptism and wedding ceremonies, the independents, using their political connections among their political elites, devised ways of catching up by looking for some one to train their own clergy to facilitate these issues. This was through Bishop Alexander of the Orthodox Church who was brought in from South Africa through KCA contacts to enable him train the local independent clergy along their desired visions⁶. Members of the Independent Church raised money to arrange for the coming of the bishop to provide religious instruction for the indigenous Kikuyu church.

If the independent churches evolved to solve the spiritual and religious problems of the Kikuyu, the desire to learn how to confront the missions and their colonial administrator counterparts, the need for independent schools free from control of the missions and the government arose to satisfy the Kikuyu educational and political needs. Hence, education was a key factor that shaped the founding of the independent church as indeed it has been in the fight over the church's identity in the post-colonial era. The independent schools sprung up as a result of Kikuyu fear that the missionaries and the government were not prepared to train them in skills that matched them⁷. They could not be allowed to study English language for fear that they would protest against the colonial authorities. The Kikuyu Independent School Association (KISA) among the independent church followers and the Kikuyu Karing'a Education Association (KKEA) among the Kikuyu orthodox followers were established to allow the Kikuyu formulate an education that suited them, away from the manoeuvres of the mission and the colonial administrators.

The use of education as a tool to argue over prevailing politics was demonstrated by the Beecher report that expressed the colonial

⁵ Peterson, 2000: 197.

⁶ Peterson, 2004: 145.

⁷ Kershaw, 1997.

desire to give the Kikuyu minimum education experience and place their education under supervision of the missionaries. The Beecher educational project helped show the Kikuyu disdain for colonial vision of the future of the Kikuyu and hence hastened the controversial engagement with the colonialists. The independent church and what their followers held dear was mainly borne out of the controversy over the cultural interpretation of practices and education that the colonialists wanted imparted to the Kikuyu. These two issues have shaped the better part of the independent church controversy.

Culture of politics and schism in the Church

The African Independent Pentecostal Church (AIPCA) has had a penchant for politics ever since it was formed in 1929. However, the political play has been most manifest in the 1980s and 1990 spilling over into the 21st century when it finally split in 2003. The church has been infiltrated both by national as well as local politics which have become part and parcel of its existence. Its leadership acknowledges the political value of politics in church in the search for justice. According to AIPCK Archbishop John Mugecha, politics and religion are inseparable and will remain so as all are in pursuit of *kibooto* (justice or fairness). Mugecha argues that they have been pursuing *kibooto* for their religious faction for the last 30 years and the church has been seen to be engaging in politics which according to him is a wrong notion. However, he argues that it is the other faction that has been in politics as they have benefited from patronage of the previous political administration of Daniel arap Moi. In this argument of the bishop lies the nature of politics the church has played over the better part of its post colonial existence and the buck-passing that has characterised its leadership for the same period. On face value there is barely any difference between the two factions of the church that can be seen to distinguish them other than that of politics and leadership.

Internal wrangling within the church

The history of the independent church intervention in politics dates back to the 1930s. It has caused the church to remain linked with current events. Its leadership has been actively involved in party politics either as party officials or activists, especially in the 1980s–90s, with politicians also actively participating in church wrangling. A discernable stream in the wrangles can be seen at different times and has involved different players. First, there is the stream of politicians

seeking positions of authority in the church especially from the 1980s and the second stream is that of the clerics differing over the spiritual leadership. In the course of time, these two streams realigned to garner influence through manipulation of the situation to gain the upper hand in the running of the church.

Elder-politicians and the question of the church hierarchy

The first stream was composed of politicians. An inventory of the chairmanship of the church's central committee reads like a roll of political leaders and members of KCA to KANU. In the early years, leaders of Kikuyu independent school Associations (KISA) who were also closely linked with the politics of the Kikuyu Central Associations were Johanna Kunyiha, Peter Gatabaki Mundati and Willy Jimmy Wambugu, important members of the central committee.⁸

Later in the 1980s to the recent times, church leaders were closely linked to the politicians and the ruling party KANU officials especially in Kiambu district. These politicians include Taddeo Mwaura, former Member of Parliament for Kandara, Waira Kamau, former MP for Juja and Kiambu district KANU secretary and Arthur Wainyoike Thungu, former bodyguard of former President Kenyatta. Indeed, the church spiritual leaders were also very close to the political establishment with some actually joining the political fray at local level. They have been at the heart of internal wrangling within the church in search of leadership after failure to gain influential political seats membership to the national assembly. Their active involvement in the church affairs was after failure of Waira Kamau and Taddeo Mwaura to be re-elected, and the removal from political limelight for Thungu Wainyoike who was elected into the church leadership in Kiambu after the death of former president Kenyatta.

This group of politicians in the church contended in the 1980s that there should be clear separation of administrative and spiritual roles of the church, both of which should be vested in two different structures. One would be headed by elders in the church and the other by an archbishop. Today, the church leadership in the AIPCK faction is agreed on running the church this way.⁹ According to them, spiritual nourishment of the church members should be left to the archbishop and his subordinates in the dioceses while administrative and

⁸ See the history of AIPCK 1922–2004.

⁹ Interview with Kimani Mbitiru and John Mugecha.

development aspects of the church be left to the church elders. This would create two parallel streams managing the church and thus “*reducing conflicts between the secular and the sacred in church matters.*”¹⁰

The politicians’ infiltration into the church hierarchy started in the early 1980s with the politicians led by Taddeo Mwaura seeking to change the constitution of the church to allow “elders” to lead in the administration of the church instead of the archbishop, who was also the spiritual leader. This was a direct attack on Bishop Kahehia who combined the two roles—that of the chair of the church central board, the top decision-making organ in the church—and being the archbishop. This has been the nerve centre of the conflict that sustained the two factions upto 2003. According to national chairman of AIPCK elder Kimani, the origins of the church problems for the last decade is “*a desire by the clerics to dominate in all the areas in the church from management of the church affairs and the spiritual nourishment and the legislation of their faction is an answer to this three decade old stalemate.*”¹¹ The politicians-cum-elders have tried to assume the leadership of the church by relegating the archbishop to spiritual matters.

Although the war to differentiate the leadership roles of church administration and its spiritual matters started in the 1980s by Taddeo Mwaura, it was enjoyed by elder Kimani who has not been in the political picture of the church wrangles. Today the vision of the parallel structures of the church is epitomized by the AIPCK chaired by Kimani and the spiritual leader is Archbishop Mugecha. However, this vision of the so-called reformers of the church is contradictory as Mugecha, the overall spiritual head of the AIPCK faction has been listed as the assistant secretary-general of the central board, which is an administrative position. This anomaly in the conceptualisation of the church structure hints that the sustained war of factions was defined by leadership queries more than any thing else. The opposite vision of the church structure that is a contrast of the AIPCK was first led by Archbishop Kahehia and later by Gaitho and has retained the name AIPCA. The central board is chaired by a chairman who also doubles as the archbishop. The archbishop is also the registered trustee of the church property that includes land, buildings and securities. Underlying the division of the two factions is a belief by the Mugecha faction that the AIPCA structures vests the office of the archbishop with enormous power.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Interview with Kimani Mbitiru.

Those who have supported the supremacy of the elders-cum-politicians in the management of the church affairs have always sought the Githunguri venue as the headquarters. This location has a symbolic and historical significance as the original place where the Kenya Teachers College established by Mbiyu Koinange was built. It burnt down during the emergency period. There has been a sustained campaign among one faction for a construction of a technical college at Githunguri in memory of Kenyatta who they believe was a founder member of the church due to his association with the freedom struggle in the country.¹²

Dispute over religious beliefs and practices

The second stream of the controversy manifested itself in the spiritual leadership of the church which has revolved around the personality war between bishop John Mugecha on one hand and Archbishop Kahehia and later Gaitho on the other. The wrangling over spiritual leadership first presented itself as an issue over Mugecha. He had in the mid-1980s just returned from studies in Japan,¹³ and was ordained as a bishop in Mukaro, Nyeri despite the wish of the elderly Kahehia. The ordination of Mugecha heightened the conflict with Kahehia with the younger church members supporting Mugecha faction.¹⁴ During this time in the 1980s, Mugecha had a strong following especially among the youthful followers in the church. He used the generational agenda to gain a following against the aging Kahehia. At this time, clear cracks had begun to emerge. The elderly followers of Kahehia headed a section of the church that preferred to be known by the term *kibumo* (original) independent church.¹⁵ During this time also, the faction invoked the popularity of the period when the church was founded in the 1930s to rally followers in favour of the church elderly

¹² Interview with Kimani Mbitiru.

¹³ There is some controversy over what Mugecha went to study. According to some church elders in Nyeri, the church contributed money to have Mugecha study theology to help the church have trained ministers. However, according to him, he pursued management studies. According to the archbishop, serving the African church does not require theological training but understanding the people spiritual requirements and environments. That, he explains is the reasons why the independent church does not take its pastors to theological schools as happens with other church.

¹⁴ Interview with Hudson Kimunyi.

¹⁵ *Sunday Standard*, 31/7/1988.

members who valued the followers of the church in the late colonial period.

After the initial spate of generational contests, the aging of bishop Mugecha and the failure to break the elders' hold onto the church leadership, the contest assumed the shape of interpretation of the church religious practices and forms of worship. Partisan interests have been transformed along with reform plans of the church particularly on phasing out some practices and the adoption of modern dynamic values in the church, such as emotional expression of faith common with many Pentecostal and evangelical churches.

The Mugecha faction has easily been able to motivate and mobilise a religious constituency dominated by the youth particularly those of the rural areas in rejecting practices held in high esteem by elders and conservative church members. Some of the prevalent practices include snuff-taking, beer-drinking and polygamy. These issues have therefore formed part of the wider inter-factional politics especially as one faction targets the other's leadership. This is captured adequately by Bishop Mugecha's claims on Archbishop Gaitho's impropriety in being a polygamous head of the church. He asserts, "*The church cannot accept to be led by some one who contravenes Christian practices and norms. Christian values prohibit polygamy which is what Gaitho practices. It is a known fact that he is polygamous. This has been part of our war with him.*"¹⁶ This indicates that the transformation of internal divisions have been dependent on local religious realities. The stance of Mugecha's group has been to question the legitimacy of being led by elders like Kahehia. Nevertheless, when the latter died, the also aging Mugecha shifted his attacks to religious practices in the church, targeting Archbishop Gaitho on his polygamous marital status. Many pro-Mugecha followers have expressed frustration over such practices questioning the Christian basis for them. They have accused the AIPCA leadership of perpetuating practices seen to be repugnant to modern Christian practice thus threatening the place of the church in a competitive and transformed religious environment. This religious dimension resembles the church in the 1930s during the independent split from the mission churches. Those who contravened the mission-propagated religious practices were excommunicated from the church and denied access to vital religious rituals such as baptism.

¹⁶ Interview with John Mugecha.

However, this seems to be the new mode of politics in the church leadership prior to the split as most the practices are also done by some people in the Mugecha faction. Apart from this, there is barely any difference in the factions. This is demonstrated in the continued use of some of the religious symbols and practices in the new registered faction, the AIPCK. These include use of the cross symbol that has been identified with the independent church in the country; similar clothes and cap as well as candles in their masses. The continued use of these symbols and practices of worship is currently being challenged in court in a case filled by the Gaitho faction. This demonstrates that the problems that have plagued the church are far from over.¹⁷

The other bone of contention has been the question of conversion to the real meaning of Pentecostalism. The true meaning of Pentecostalism as practiced in the church is still under debate. The major issue has been how to disregard some of the practices of the *kihumo*, original followers of the church who have clung to church policy-making issues for guidance. A youth leader captured this in rather stark terms in the question statement, “*A major problem in this contest is the letter ‘P’ in our church abbreviation (AIPCA) that begs the question, how Pentecostal are we?*”¹⁸ The basis for this question has been the extent to which the church has been transformed into the spiritual realms of other dominating Pentecostal and evangelical churches that emphasis religious practices like speaking in tongues, millennial preaching and faith healing. In this argument, Mugecha is perceived as a reformer of the church and is regarded as one who is out to transform the spiritual fulfilment of his faction members. This is as opposed to the other faction which has rejected the new forms of worship. This was seen as early as during the leadership of the late Kahehia in the 1980s who openly opposed Pentecostal and evangelistic forms of worship, saying, “*It was against the church constitution to speak in tongues, heal the sick or cast demons.*”¹⁹

This contestation over the vision of the church spiritual orientation between Mugecha and Kahehia/Gaitho could be interpreted in light of the educational background of the two spiritual leaderships of the leaders. Mugecha, the better trained of the two, has

¹⁷ Interview with Eliud Maina Wamae.

¹⁸ Interview with Muturi Macharia.

¹⁹ *Daily Nation*, 30/4/85.

a better grasp of prevailing spiritual reality and thus is able to ground himself better in theological aspects that define current Pentecostal perception. This is in contrast with the other past leaders (Kahehia and later, Gaitho) who were only nominally exposed to formal education. They were unable to orient their followers to the current wave of conversion to Pentecostalism. However, this has only been possible in relation to the practice in the rural areas where the most basic of Pentecostal practice has been questioned in the independent church. In urban areas like Nairobi where the AIPCA is the most dominant of two factions, people have been able to easily convert to Pentecostalism perhaps due to the influence of other Pentecostal movements present. The AIPCA are now coming to terms with the reality of Pentecostalism and its impact on the young and are thus reverting to evangelistic outreach in rural areas to bond together the church branches in the rural areas.²⁰ There is therefore not much difference between religious practices of the AIPCA in Nairobi and other Pentecostal and mainstream churches. They hold outdoor crusades and overnight prayer meetings called *kesha* just like numerous other Pentecostal churches in Nairobi, where they have retained influence after the official split.²¹

Church disputes and State intervention

The church interaction with the state in political patronage started in earnest shortly after independence as the stakes over the church leadership became apparent after the government of President Kenyatta agreed that churches that had been proscribed during the state of emergency be allowed to operate. As early as the first decade of independence, leadership woes had started with some leaders eager to control the administration of the church. According to the AIPCK leadership,²² this was why the name of the church changed from AIPCK to AIPCA at independence. However, the AIPCA assert that the change of name was a strategic decision to project the church as a continent-wide church that reflected the vision of a church that fought for the freedom of Africa. The politics surrounding the name has also sustained three decades of conflict within the church and has seen different factions seek the influence of the state in winning this fight.

²⁰ Interview with Grace Gathoni and David Thiga.

²¹ Interview with Hudson Kimunyi, David Thiga, and Grace Gathoni.

²² Interview with Kimani Mbitiru and John Mugecha.

Part of the war that is being fought today in court is over the use of the initials AIPC (African Independent Pentecostal Church) after the registration of the AIPCK faction in 2003.

On the eve of republic day in 1964, a delegation of the AIPC went to Gatundu to petition President Kenyatta at his Gatundu home over the Church registration and possible reverting to the former independent sponsored schools that had been taken over by the mainstream churches (Anglican, Presbyterian and Catholics) after the declaration of a state of emergence in 1952.²³ This delegation caused the president to agree to the revival and operation of the church. However, the resultant factional leaderships earned the church the rather unsavoury reputation of the most internally-divided and controversy-prone church in the country.

One of the features of the Kenyatta reign is a detachment from the emerging wrangles in the independent church. During this entire period he was regarded as a freedom fighter and many social groups connected with the independence war ensured that they did not antagonise the president.²⁴ Instead, they lived with their simmering differences until the Moi presidency where different factions of the church sought to endear themselves with his state for own interests. During his reign the church witnessed an increase in leadership conflicts marked by physical fights, manipulation, litigation and political mobilisations that tilted towards the national political establishment and the provincial administration for intervention and seeking of favour. This was marked by the different factions trying to seek favour with the national political leadership with Kahemia, Gaitho as well as Mugecha working close with the KANU government. In the 1990s, Gaitho spearheaded national pro-KANU political projects like the constitutional review led by parliament and Mugecha sought political office in his Tetu constituency in Nyeri on a KANU ticket.²⁵

²³ Interview with Kimani Mbitiru, See also *History of AIPCK 1922-2004* (2004).

²⁴ Kariuki, 2003.

²⁵ Archbishop Gaitho headed the mainly evangelical churches group that supported the parliamentary initiative headed by the National Democratic Party of Raila Odinga and KANU of President Moi. They were opposed to the Ufungamano constitution review initiative of the mainstream churches—the Catholic Church, Anglican Church of Kenya, Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church. Mugecha on his part has been a KANU activist in Nyeri and a parliamentary aspirant in Tetu (See Muchemi Wachira, Tetu constituency profile, *Daily Nation*, 8/4/2002).

The leadership crisis in the early period of the Moi presidency coincided with politics that revelled in manipulation of social and religious organisations for political mileage. This was when president Moi attempted to entrench his political rule as he dismantled the Kikuyu social-political hegemony that he inherited from Kenyatta. He used Kikuyu social organisations associated with the freedom struggles in the 1950s such as Mau Mau associations and within this context, the independent church assigned them a political role to play.²⁶ This role was played by these organisations especially during the 1990s when the Moi once again tried to win over the Kikuyu voters in a highly competitive political scene that came with the re-introduction of multipartyism in 1991.

Moi's reign also saw a great deal of political manipulation of religious constituencies in favour of the president's political projects. On the other hand, some churches were opposed to the state's manoeuvres. Some of the churches that had succumbed to state manipulations include the African Inland Church, the African Independent Pentecostal Church (AIPCA) and other local evangelical churches for example, the Redeemed Gospel Church. Indeed, the leadership of these churches had become a part of the president's political life featuring in major national undertakings that the president and the ruling party had interests in. The established churches formed a core group of opposition to the president's political undertaking, usually collaborating with opposition parties. In the lead was the umbrella body of protestant churches the NCK, the Anglican Church of Kenya (formerly the Church of the Province of Kenya), the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) and the Catholic Church.²⁷ The Catholic Church was in constant conflict with the state, often criticising the government on various political decisions undertaken, which were seen to perpetuate KANU's hold onto power.

For the AIPC, close political contact with the state came into proper light in the late 1980s at the height of unofficial political opposition to KANU, spearheaded by protestant churches. This was particularly evident in the 1988 elections, during which NCK affiliates, specific churches like the Anglicans and individual members of the church like Rev Dr. Timothy Njoya (PCEA) led a move to condemn the *Mlolongo* (queuing) elections that they judged grossly rigged. Just as the pressure against KANU and Moi picked up in 1987,

²⁶ Kariuki, 2003.

²⁷ For analysis of the church-state conflicts in Kenya, see Throup, 1995.

the AIPCA deregistered as an affiliate member of the NCCK. This was clearly political manipulation as the government tried to woo Kikuyu community groups as their leaders were at the forefront of pushing for political and constitutional reforms in the country.²⁸

The independent church considered opposition to the government as being antagonistic. In the words of the national chairman of the AIPCA, the NCCK “*attempted to lead the AIPCA members astray and put them on a collision course with the government.*”²⁹ During the late 1980s, the church was at the forefront of the KANU electoral campaigns with Archbishop Kahehia supporting the *mlolongo* system, which was vehemently opposed by mainstream churches, especially those in the NCCK.³⁰ He also facilitated recruitment and registration of KANU party members and acted like a party activist.³¹ After an extended period of support for the government and the exit of president Moi, the AIPCA has thrown its weight behind the government of the new president, whom they had constantly undermined during the reign of Moi. The AIPCA now supports the Kibaki administration on controversial issues such as the constitutional review process. The AIPCA support for the current government smacks of opportunism on the part of the church despite the feeble argument that “*they always support the government in power.*”³²

Following the poor relations between the church and NCCK, the church pulled out of NCCK’s membership³³ in the 1988 elections. This marked the beginning of parallel work of the two religious organisations which went on for the remainder of President Moi’s reign. At this time, the chairman of the church central board was politician Taddeo Mwaura, who was greatly opposed to the archbishop. This indicates that both factions were still working to satisfy the political establishment in the continuing search for supremacy in leading the church.

²⁸ Leaders from Central Kenya more specifically Kenneth Matiba and Charles Rubia among others were in the lead in the 1990s calling for opening up of more political and democratic freedoms such as political pluralism.

²⁹ *The Standard*, 4/1/1988, See also *The Sunday Standard*, 31/7/1988.

³⁰ Throup, 1995.

³¹ *Daily Nation*, 2/9/1986.

³² Interview with pastor Wanjiriri, Eliud Maina Wamae.

³³ *Sunday Standard*, 31/7/1988.

The quest for political patronage by the leadership of AIPCA continued for the better part of the 1990s and to the end of the Moi's reign in 2003. This was manifested in the sustained opposition of the constitutional and political reforms spearheaded by the established churches where their leaders like Bishop Henry Okullu, Bishop Gitari (ACK), Rev. Timothy Njoya (PCEA) and Rev. Mutava Musyimi (NCCK) were in the forefront. However, during the clamour for constitutional reforms, the AIPCA led the evangelical churches against the Ufungamano Initiative of the mainstream churches, organising a parallel constitutional reform initiative. According to Kimani Mbitiru, the continued identification of the AIPCA with KANU further heightened conflict as Gaitho's prominence and outspokenness on the national scene caused him hostility from the other faction. In official circles they were thought to be supporting Mwai Kibaki's Democratic Party.³⁴

At issue was whether the DP was sympathetic to the Mugecha faction. Could this explain why the Kibaki government registered the faction as an independent religious entity soon after Kibaki became the president? There is no evidence to show that the registration of the church as two different entities was influenced by political reasons. The claims by Kimani further indicate that the factions, together with the AIPCK are now trying to lay claim to the political establishment of the day. Most members of the two factions think the registration was done to end the tension that had long persisted and thus bring peace to the members of the church. This explanation is supported by the fact that President Kibaki's own constituency, Othaya, hosts many independent church followers, coming a close second in percentage terms to the Catholics.³⁵ These perceptions could also explain why KANU used to support the son of the late archbishop Kahehia (Maina) to contest against Kibaki in Othaya. This was intended to exploit the majority size of the independents church members as voters in the constituency.

Other areas that show state interference with the independent church is the church-sponsored schools. In 2001, the Moi government orchestrated a debate for the return of schools sponsored by the independent church prior to the declaration of a state of emergency, which were later taken over by the mission churches like Catholics, Anglican and the Presbyterians after the independent church was

³⁴ Interview with Kimani Mbitiru.

³⁵ Interview with Hudson Kimunyi.

proscribed in 1952, to be returned to the AIPCA. This government ploy was particularly opposed by the Catholic Church and the Presbyterian churches which considered the campaign a government attempt to create fighting within the church, thus keeping them from concentrating on the governance and 2002 pre-election issues.

This debate over the schools also generated a new controversy between the two factions as both wanted to take over the schools. The AIPCA took a more diplomatic approach by approaching the Ministry of Education. They have also designed an educational policy, *AIPCA educational policy 2004*, to be launched by the Minister for Education, in an effort to show their interest and plan to manage the schools.³⁶ On the other hand, the AIPCK have a political strategy for taking over the schools. Kimani, the chairman of the church says they have been at the forefront of campaigns to take over the schools from mainstream churches, a campaign that started three years after independence in 1965. At this time, he was accompanied by other church leaders on a visit to former president Kenyatta, to discuss the schools and churches that were taken from them during the state of emergency. The schools' debate also points out that the internal conflicts are far from over.

Is the splitting of the churches a panacea to the problems that has bedevilled the church for more than three decades? Activities after the registration of the AIPCK seem to indicate that the controversy is far from over. The question of the take-over of their former schools and the management of the schools the AIPCA already controlled is causing trouble within the two groups. Additionally, some branches of the churches are still raising controversy and are being fought over as they are torn between the two churches, each claiming their ownership. These include Gachatha church in Tetu and Gatura church in Mathira where both groups have almost equal membership. Neither of the groups is willing to part with church property such as buildings and other items. On the other hand, the post-split wars over the use of the name Africa Independent Pentecost Church (AIPC), religious symbols like the cross and clothes as well as the church history indicate more struggles ahead of the Kikuyu independent church before they become completely free from each other. The current scenario is subject to court interpretation and if the past litigation between the two factions is anything to go by, there will certainly be some appeals, particularly over the names of the factions.

³⁶ Interview with Pastor Wanjiriri and Eliud Maina Wamae. See also *AIPCA education policy*.

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