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Political Mobilization and Conflict on Kenya's Coast:

Land, Indigeneity and Elections

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in African Studies

by

Danielle Marie Harris

2014

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Political Mobilization and Conflict on Kenya's Coast:

Land, Indigeneity and Elections

by

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Master of Arts in African Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Edmond J. Keller, Chair

Throughout the early 1990s, Kenya experienced several episodes of so-called ethnic violence amidst its return to multiparty elections in 1992. Prior to August 1997, the violence was largely limited to the Rift Valley, Nyanza and Western Provinces. Yet on August 13, 1997, armed raiders attacked the Likoni Police Station and Post, just south of Mombasa, commencing a period of episodic violence on Kenya's Coast lasting more than a year. To investigate the causes and characterization of pre-election violence on Kenya's Coast, this essay undertakes an extensive literature review, focusing on the construction of ethnic identity, the indigeneity discourse and political mobilization and violence, as well as a review of reports from Kenya's

government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the *East African Standard* newspaper. Ultimately, this essay determines that manipulation by political elites, land dispossession and economic marginalization played major roles in pre-election violence on Kenya's Coast. Furthermore, the violence was characterized by an underlying discourse of indigeneity, with ethnic entrepreneurs tying ethnicity to entitlement and positioning the Mijikenda as indigenous to the Coast and upcountry migrants as foreigners. Such exclusionary politics set the stage for violence on Kenya's Coast in 1997 and remain relevant contemporarily, with the potential to resurface violently.

The thesis of Danielle Marie Harris is approved.

Al Roberts

Edith S. Mukudi Omwami

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I. Introduction

The label “ethnic” is applied almost indiscriminately, particularly by students of comparative politics, to political mobilization and conflict in sub-Saharan Africa, essentializing identities that are anything but fixed. This is problematic for several reasons. To begin, it obscures the underlying causes of political mobilization and conflict by playing down otherwise legitimate grievances and attributing them to static, one-dimensional identities and antagonisms. Similarly, it ignores the specific context in which ethnic identities are activated and by what mechanism. Furthermore, “ethnic” is a value-laden and extremely ambiguous term; without further qualification, it conveys very little useful information about political mobilization or conflict (Chandra, 2006).

Rationale

Throughout the early 1990s, Kenya’s one-party electoral system experienced several episodes of so-called ethnic violence ahead of the return to multiparty politics in the General Election of 1992. Prior to August 1997, the violence was largely limited to the Rift Valley, Nyanza and Western Provinces. Yet on August 13, 1997, armed raiders attacked the Likoni Police Station and Post, just south of Mombasa, commencing a period of episodic violence on Kenya’s Coast that would last into December of the following year (HRW, 2002). Although the conflict was framed in terms of ethnicity, primarily between the Mijikenda and upcountry migrants, it is widely agreed in the general population that it was engineered by Kenya African National Union (KANU) politicians to disrupt the opposition on the Coast in the General Election of 1997 (Akiwumi Commission, 2002; HRW, 2002; KHRC, 1997). Acknowledging the role that KANU played in organizing the pre-election violence on a macro-level, this essay seeks to examine its causes and impacts on a local level.

To this end, this essay focuses on pre-election violence on Kenya's Coast in 1997 as a case study to tease out its underlying and precipitating causes (Keller, 2014). This investigation is timely because many of the salient issues on Kenya's Coast in 1997, including disparities in land ownership, economic and political marginalization, remain relevant contemporarily. For example, in May 2007, the Ministry of Lands' National Land Policy stated, "the land question within the Coast region is potentially explosive owing to its particular historical and legal origins" (p. 38).¹ And although the Coast was largely spared of the 2007 post-election violence, Axel Harneit-Sievers attributed this primarily to competitive dynamics at the national level, prompting little voter participation on the Coast and obscuring what he calls the "classical antagonism 'Coast v. Hinterland'" (Mghanga, 2010, p. X). Furthermore, enduring political and economic marginalization of Kenya's Coast gave rise to the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), a separatist group advocating coastal secession, in 2008 (Goldsmith, 2011). As such, understanding what factors led to widespread violence on the Coast in 1997 has important and timely implications for avoiding and responding to violence in the future. In line with this thinking, former Member of Parliament and political activist Mwandawiro Mghanga published a book on land, elections and conflict on Kenya's Coast in 2010 entitled *Usipoziba Ufa Utajenga Ukuta*, a Swahili proverb meaning, "If you do not repair a little crack in the wall, you will in time have to rebuild the whole wall" (p. 2).

Research Questions

Broadly speaking, this paper attempts to answer two questions: 1) What were the causes of violence in Kenya's Coast region between 1997 and 1998? And, 2) How was the violence characterized? Undoubtedly, the specificity of these questions is informed by an extensive

¹ Originally cited in Mghanga, 2010, p. 17.

literature review and historical background, which focuses on the development of politicized identity on Kenya's Coast, economic marginalization, land alienation, a discourse of indigeneity and ethnic or social conflict. This essay argues that despite KANU manipulation, participants in the Coast violence were motivated not necessarily by ethnicity per se but by the association of ethnicity with land dispossession and economic marginalization. Consequently, the discourse underlying the violence took on an exclusionary character based on entitlement through indigeneity to the Coast region, its land and economic opportunities.

Data and Methods

To explore the aforementioned research questions, this paper employs a qualitative research methodology based on Process Tracing. Process Tracing (Bennett, 2010) is an investigative tool that engages in an in-depth analysis and systematic investigation of evidence, allowing for the evaluation of competing explanations for a particular event. This methodology focuses heavily on sequencing, helping to determine causal direction and possible confounding variables. Critiques of Process Tracing include the detail-oriented nature of the approach, potential of "infinite regress" and degrees of freedom, owing to the typically small number of cases in qualitative studies. However, Andrew Bennett (2010) encourages qualitative researchers to discriminate amongst their materials, not necessarily devoting equal time and attention to each. The quality rather than the quantity of information, and the role it plays in evaluating alternative hypotheses, is most valuable.

This essay relies on an extensive review of primary and secondary sources to evaluate competing explanations of political mobilization and violence on Kenya's Coast. Primary sources consulted include comprehensive reports, from the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), from the colonial period to the present. Reports from the Colony and

Protectorate of Kenya referring to Kenya's Coast in particular were consulted, including *The Kenya Coastal Strip Report to the Commissioner* by Sir James Robertson and *A Plan to Intensify the Development of African Agriculture in Kenya*, otherwise known as the Swynnerton Plan. Several colonial era laws were revisited as well, including the 1908 Land Titles Ordinance and the Hut and Poll Tax Ordinance of 1910. Contemporary government reports consulted include the Akiwumi Commission's Report, named after the Chairman of the Commission Justice A.M. Akiwumi, which investigated causes as well as security forces' response to episodes of ethnic violence between 1991 and 1998. President Daniel arap Moi appointed the Commission on July 1, 1998 and although its report was culminated in late 1999, it was only released to the public in October 2002 (HRW, 2002). Other reports focusing on violence on Kenya's Coast in 1997 consulted include the Kenya Human Rights Commission's *Kayas of Deprivation, Kayas of Blood: Violence, Ethnicity and the State in Coastal Kenya* as well as Human Rights Watch's (2002) *Playing with Fire: Weapons Proliferation, Political Violence and Human Rights in Kenya*.

To understand the media characterization of violence on Kenya's Coast in 1997 and 1998, the range of *East African Standard* review was limited to January 1997 to December 1998.² In 1998, the *East African Standard* reported on the Akiwumi Commission in a recurring section entitled "Tribal Clashes Inquiry" accompanied by the day of inquiry. The "Tribal Clashes Inquiry" focused on Kenya's Coast from late August to mid-November 1998 (Standard Correspondent, August 27, 1998, p. 5; Standard Correspondent, November 17, 1998, p. 2).

Secondary sources, namely books, scholarly articles and bibliographies, were also consulted. Secondary sources were used to supplement the historical background, and to inform

² The Akiwumi Commission records acts of violence associated with the Likoni raiders through June 1998 (p. 27). However, HRW (2002) maintains that associated violence continued until December 1998 (p. 24).

the literature review. Specific literature on the topics of ethnicity, ethnic conflict, indigeneity and autochthony were consulted.

This essay is organized into five chapters. The first chapter, or introduction, includes a brief overview of the research topic and related questions as well as a summary of the data and methodology utilized. The second chapter is a literature review covering the main sources consulted. Particular attention is focused on relevant theoretical concepts on social identity, such as primordialism, social constructivism, instrumentalism, cultural pluralism and relative deprivation, and their implications for understanding ethnic political mobilization and conflict. The concept of ethnicity, and ethnic or identity-based violence is discussed at-length. Various authors' perspectives on identity-based political mobilization and violence are presented and evaluated in this chapter. The third chapter, or historical background, provides context for the development of politicized identity on Kenya's Coast. The historical background is divided into sub-sections to address major themes, such as: the evolution of the Coast's legal status, land distribution, the political and economic climate as well as how all of these factors interact to influence identity among the major ethnic groups residing on the Coast. The fourth chapter discusses findings; here, the essay attempts to determine the relevance of competing explanations for pre-election violence in Kenya's Coast Province. In particular, explanations regarding the role of land dispossession, economic marginalization, political manipulation, ethnicity and indigeneity in political mobilization and violence on Kenya's Coast are explored. The thesis concludes by revisiting the primary research questions and findings.

II. Literature Review

An investigation of political mobilization and violence on Kenya's Coast requires an extensive literature review consistent with extant theories for its causes and characterization.

Given pre-election violence in Likoni in 1997 was often described in explicitly ethnic frames of reference, ethnicity – its definition, construction, conceptualization and mobilizing capacity for violent ends – are explored at-length. Moving forward with an understanding that ethnicity is socially constructed and only one of many identities an individual may call upon given circumstance and personal preference, the essay discusses the relevance cultural pluralism on Kenya’s Coast. The discourse of indigeneity and its applicability are also examined as ethnic entrepreneurs and political brokers opted to disregard cultural pluralism on the Coast in favor of narrowly tying ethnicity to land through *majimbo* political rhetoric, framing the Mijikenda as indigenous and upcountry migrants as foreigners. Theories of political mobilization and violence, based on Relative Deprivation (Gurr, 1971) and citizenship claims, inform an understanding of how such actors manipulate both identity and circumstance for violent ends and ultimately, electoral outcomes.

The Construction of Ethnic Identity in Theory and Practice

According to Kanchan Chandra (2006), scholars lack concise, consistent definitions of what ethnicity means. Furthermore, they often fail to employ their own operationalized definitions in their application and analysis of the concept in relation to political events. As a result, numerous instances of political mobilization and conflict have been falsely attributed to ethnicity in academic literature. To resolve this issue, Chandra formulates a simple definition of ethnicity by identifying several common constructs of ethnicity, and relating them to one basic premise: “eligibility for membership is determined by attributes associated with, or believed to be associated with descent” (p. 398). In general, she contends that descent-based attributes are more “sticky” and visible than others and as such, are more difficult to change in the short-term and constrain individuals’ repertoire of available identities. Of course, there are several

exceptions to Chandra's rule; wealth is a relatively "sticky" feature unrelated to descent while gender is highly visible and equally unrelated to descent. While an underlying basis of descent may seem reasonable for an understanding of ethnicity, Chandra problematizes the term by alluding to the limited viability of claims of common ancestry, region of origin and/or culture. For example, the Giriama- an ethnic group in coastal Kenya- display conflicting origin stories. For some, the origin of the Giriama is in the "kaya," an inland area previously home to all Giriama institutions and society. For others, the "kaya" is only an intermediate stage in origin because ancestry is traced to Singwaya in southern Somalia. And still others, in some extreme cases, origin is located on Mombasa Island or in nearly all coastal lands currently in use.³ Per Chandra's definition, this ambiguity would render the Giriama's status as a cohesive ethnic group suspicious, despite its accepted status within the region. However, her complication of the term "ethnic" and criticism of its blanket application is well received, and should be considered in evaluating complex violent episodes with numerous, overlapping identities at play.

James Fearon and David Laitin (2000) treat ethnicity as an identity category, subject to only two rules regarding membership eligibility and content, or the characteristics associated with members. While the latter is a marked departure from Chandra, who purposefully purges her definition of any attributes not directly related to descent, James Fearon and David Laitin are more concerned with the ways in which identity is socially constructed rather than a definition of what it means per se. Specifically, they investigate the plausibility and implications of structural, discursive and individual construction of ethnic identity. Structural factors, such as economic modernization, are dismissed as overly broad causes incapable of producing ethnic identity on

³ There is significant discordance in academia regarding the origin of Mijikenda groups. Rather than ascertain which is most empirically supported, McIntosh (2009) describes numerous versions, acknowledging that it is likely each serves a different purpose.

their own. Discursive systems, on the other hand, are more difficult to define. They can be most easily understood as overarching, philosophical systems that influence individual and group behavior on an unconscious level. The authors refer to discursive systems as pre-determined “cultural scripts,” and critique this perspective for its lack of human agency. Individual ethnic identity construction is discussed in relation to two conduits: elite manipulation and the masses. Elites construct ethnic identity by using inflammatory rhetoric and highlighting, or inventing, the ethnic dimensions of political events. The masses’ role lies in the reinforcement of group boundaries by virtue of their participation in events that have been designated as communal by elites, and as such take on an “us versus them” orientation. However, Fearon and Laitin readily acknowledge that while mass participation has this effect, it is not necessarily the motivation of individual participation. In fact, amidst the chaos afforded by episodes violence and under the banner of ethnic identity, individuals pursue diverse agendas, such as personal revenge or enrichment. For example, the Kenya Human Rights Commission’s (1997) report on pre-election violence on the Coast identified criminal opportunism as one of the causes and sustaining factors the conflict.

For Daniel Posner (2005), the construction of ethnic identity is tied to institutions, particularly in the way that they determine possible ethnic identity choices, as well as regulate political competition and the arena in which it takes place. According to his research in Zambia, politically salient ethnic identities in most parts of Africa can be traced directly to colonial administrative policies and regulations. For example, the four major linguistic blocs in Zambia that enjoy considerable political influence are the result of purposeful language consolidation through missionary activity and directed migrant worker flows with railway lines. The legacy of so-called tribal identification resides in the power bestowed upon rural Native Authorities by the

colonial state. Furthermore, political institutions shape the game of politics; they define the rules of the game and the arena of competition. For instance, in a one-party state the executive is not directly elected and so the political arena shrinks to the constituency level while in a multi-party state, the arena is national. The arena of political competition has important implications for political strategy and the mobilization of ethnic identities, because identities will have greater or lesser saliency in different circumstances.

Although Posner developed his model in Zambia, he does apply it to Kenya, but with fleeting mention of “Coastal peoples” as synonymous with the Mijikenda, assuming a false level of uniformity in their aggregate regional or religious agendas. His analysis is overwhelmingly biased towards the politics of central Kenya and featuring the Kikuyu, Kalenjin, Luhya and Luo ethnic groups as the main players (p. 261). Ironically, the orientation of his analysis and broad generalizations about “Coastal peoples” demonstrates the peripheral positioning of the Coast in Kenyan politics generally. Additionally, Posner recognizes that anticipation and/or execution of political violence and extensive coalition-making limit the viability of his model’s application, all of which are hallmarks of the Kenyan political scene.

On Kenya’s Coast, ethnic identity construction can be mostly usefully understood on structural and individual levels. As stated above, structural processes do not create ethnicity on their own, but they can serve to incentivize or dis-incentivize the uptake of certain identities. For instance, throughout the colonial period, identity categories such as Arab, Swahili and “native” fluctuated in their meaning and associated benefits. Although Swahili was a category held in relatively high regard, after its classification changed to “native” in 1910 and its associated benefits decreased, like the ability to avoid the Hut and Poll Tax Ordinance, it was discarded by the Swahili in favor of more distant ties to Arab ancestry (Willis 1993, p. 188). As stated by

Mazrui and Shariff (1994), the “Africanity of the Swahili...became a liability” (26). In Malindi, the development of the tourism industry has impacted ethnic groups differentially, often to the benefit of wealthy and well-connected members of upcountry ethnic groups. In particular, coastal residents complain that upcountry Kenyans own a disproportionate share of beachfront property due to political favors and expedited, preferential land titling. This real and/or perceived differential treatment serves to sharpen inequalities and thus boundaries between upcountry and Coast groups.

Given the aforementioned inconsistency in defining and applying the concept of ethnicity in political analysis, Crawford Young (1976) sidesteps this issue by adopting a framework of “cultural pluralism.” As the name suggests, cultural pluralism recognizes that individuals acknowledge and employ numerous socially constructed identities based on real or assumed commonalities of blood, language, religion and region, among others. To tease out the exact nature of these identities may not be especially useful as any or all of them may be used at once, depending on circumstance and vantage point. For example, a Digo man may choose to identify himself as Digo, Mijikenda, Coasterian⁴, Muslim or use particular diction depending on his audience and the characteristics he wants to communicate. Political analysis benefits from cultural pluralism because it considers the dynamic interplay of numerous identities at variable levels of cohesion and ideologization, and as such avoids simplistic, monocausal explanations for complex episodes of political mobilization and conflict.

Cultural pluralism, as articulated by Young (1976) privileges elite construction of ethnic identity, primarily through two actors: cultural entrepreneurs and political brokers, who may or may not be overlapping. Cultural entrepreneurs are responsible for adding cultural resources to

⁴ A term used to denote coastal residents (Goldsmith, 2011).

their respective groups, such as symbols and literature in a standardized language. By providing resources like written or oral histories, cultural entrepreneurs are actively involved in strengthening group cohesion and in turn, ideologization. The Swahili are considered a visible and highly ideologized ethnic group on the East African coast, which is due at least in part to their literary legacy. The Swahili language is particularly apt for poetic expression and boasts a cadre of internationally acclaimed poets, including Shaaban Robert and Abdilatif Abdalla. Political brokers often capitalize on the resources provided by cultural entrepreneurs, but simplify and manipulate them in the interest of mobilization for political ends. The political broker's role is most prominent in provoking conflict, a discussion which will be returned to as part of the concept of Instrumentalism.

Conceptualizations of Ethnicity

Ethnicity is typically understood according to three distinct conceptual/ theoretical perspectives: as a primordial trait; a trait of instrumental utility; or as a product of social construction.

Primordialism

Primordialism offers a strict descent-based view of ethnicity, based on ascribed traits that may or may not be biological, but are fixed nonetheless. According to Pierre van den Berghe (1981), a prominent primordialist, ethnicity is both a base of sociality and an extension of kinship. As such, ethnicity is the lowest common denominator in all human relationships due to its biological grounding, and can be used to explain ethnocentrism and racism as reasonable manifestations of a natural tendency to favor kin. While primordialists are often criticized for their inability to explain the apparent permeability of ethnic group boundaries, van den Berghe likens it to genetic adaptation under certain environmental conditions (p. 35). Since ethnicity is

viewed as a diluted extension of kinship, group boundaries may shrink or expand according to degrees of relatedness in response to external factors. Pierre van den Berghe asserts, “Ethnicity can be *manipulated* but *not manufactured*” (1981, p. 27).⁵ It should be noted that this conceptualization has over the past several decades been variously criticized and rejected for its assumption of the fixity of social identities.

In line with the primordialist analysis, the Mijikenda can be understood as an amalgamation of disparate, distantly related clans in response to local power dynamics that disenfranchised indigenous groups. However, this analysis fails to explain the spontaneous emergence of the term Mijikenda in the 1940s, when it was used to refer to the Mijikenda Union of indigenous laborers (Willis, 1993, p. 192). Furthermore, primordialism cannot account for the fact that individuals assume numerous, overlapping identities and that those they hold most dear are not necessarily imbued with blood or biology.

Instrumentalism

Instrumentalism provides an alternative perspective on the construction and namely, the purpose of ethnicity and its role in explaining behavior. According to instrumentalism, ethnicity is a political tool that only becomes relevant in order to achieve a political goal. Ethnicity is responsive to circumstance, and therefore malleable in the event that a change would derive greater political, economic or social benefits. In sum, instrumentalists view ethnicity purely in its politicized form: as a nationalist agenda.

As a result of this political orientation, the role of elites and their relationship to the state are of significant import for instrumentalists. According to Paul Brass (1991), elite competition leads to ethnic conflict in response to political and economic circumstances, not primordial

sentiments. Brass identifies three situations in which elite conflict can take place: within groups, between groups and between the groups and the state. Intra-group elite competition revolves around the control of cultural resources and group boundaries, while inter-group competition revolves around the control of national resources, like rights and privileges. Elite competition between groups and the state refers to the latter's attempt to extend their scope of power and administration.

All competition takes place in relation to the state, which Brass (1991) views as a relatively autonomous entity. He contends that the state favors different groups at different points in time, but is not an outright tool of domination for any of them. The extent to which the state favors any group disproportionately is in the interest of accomplishing essential government tasks, such as local administration or control. However, in the case of Kenya, the autonomy of the state may be called into question. Not unlike many other states in Africa, the Kenyan state is built on a system of patronage so that gaining control of state apparatuses and resources is of the utmost importance for ensuring adequate allocation of public goods.

Social Constructivism

According to Social Constructivism, ethnic identity is fluid and situational. It is responsive to political, economic and social circumstances, but as a matter of personal preference based on an individual's identity repertoire. Sandra Joireman (2004) describes ethnic identity as the sum of ascribed traits, or those given at birth (e.g. complexion) and social inputs, stemming from the surrounding political or economic climate (p. 55). Joane Nagel (1986) asserts that ethnic identity is contextually ascribed, situationally-activated and its boundaries are flexible, across both time and space. It is preferable to view identity as socially constructed rather than the result of a biological determinant.

For Nagel, ethnicity is politically constructed via the structure and political access and content of political policies. Structurally, access can be ethnicized through regionalization and participation. Policy-wise, ethnic political mobilization can be encouraged by national language and land policies, as well as any measures that take special care to recognize certain ethnic groups or provide affirmative action.

Indigeneity

In sub-Saharan Africa, identity – whether it is ethnic, religious or regional – informs a sense of belonging, which has significant political, economic and social implications. In the contemporary nation-state, belonging is expressed through an identity based on citizenship in both symbolic and tangible terms. However, neither identity nor belonging, nor the citizenship that flows from them, are static; they are relative phenomena, subject to constant revision negotiation according to the relevant context. For much of sub-Saharan Africa, this context is characterized by young nation-states with a loose sense of national identity, as well as chronic poverty and corruption. Within this environment, revisions and negotiations of identity, belonging and thus citizenship often take on exclusionary forms. In sum, the politics of belonging and the politics of exclusion work in tandem to define citizenship in the modern nation-state, the latter of which are captured by the deployment of the interrelated discourses of indigeneity and autochthony.

Indigeneity and autochthony are intimately related and often used interchangeably, but differ in their historical application and scope. Indigeneity is a broad concept, usually associated with ethnicity and requiring a “tribal Other” (Geschiere, 2009). Indigeneity is conventionally defined in relation to indigenous peoples movements, which suggests that to be indigenous is to be historically and culturally distinct as well as marginalized (Igoe, 2006). Autochthony, which

means, “to be born of the soil,” is a spatially-specific claim (Dunn, 2009; Jackson, 2009). In sub-Saharan Africa, autochthony is frequently traced to the nascent village and as such, takes on an intensely local character. However, this local character is misleading; Geschiere (2009), amongst others, contends that this “return to the local” disguises an exclusionary, global orientation (p. 1). According to this perspective, autochthony is employed purposefully to limit the number of competitors in accessing global resources (Dunn, 2009).

Although indigeneity and autochthony experience significant conceptual overlap, this paper will adopt the use of indigeneity due to its relevance for the Coast’s somewhat ambiguous historical and spatial definition as well as narrative of marginalization. In this context, indigeneity will refer to claims of entitlement based on origin in a given area. However, this origin need not be definitive, but only precede counterclaims. And lastly, the distinction between indigeneity and autochthony serves as an analytical tool for increased applicability, but the literature on both discourses will inform the following review.

Autochthony and Indigeneity Discourses

Despite the local character of the autochthony discourse described by Geschiere (2009), it was introduced to sub-Saharan Africa in the early 20th century by French colonialists in the West Africa as a means to track and manage local populations. Similar to the British system of indirect rule through real and/or invented chiefs, the French used autochthons as an administrative tool to extract taxes and labor. For the French, autochthony did not necessarily imply a superior or preferred status, but did confer a seemingly “natural” right to live and rule in a given area.

The most fundamental characteristic of autochthony, and to a lesser degree indigeneity, is that it means, “to be born of the soil” (Dunn, 2009; Jackson, 2006). This direct link to the land has several implications. For one, claims of autochthony and indigeneity are located in spatially-

specific terms, such as a village or region. And more importantly, these spatially-specific claims often imply entitlement to rights and/or political representation and become highly contentious as a result of the economic and emotional dividends that land provides (Lynch, 2011; Geschiere, 2009). According to Jackson (2006), these discourses can operate on several spatialized levels, including: the local, provincial, national and mega-ethnicity. Claims of autochthony on any of these levels may be substantiated by ethnicity, region of origin, citizenship criteria or language group (e.g. Bantu or Nilotic). In Kenya's coastal region, indigeneity functions at a number of levels, including mega-ethnicity in which Mijikenda groups claim indigeneity due to their "Africanness" (as opposed to "Arabness"), despite a migration history that locates them on the Coast much later than the Arabs and Swahili (Spear, 1978).

The aforementioned temporal inconsistency is a hallmark of both autochthony and indigeneity. For a variety of reasons, including migration, the overlapping of ethnic and language groups as well as intermarriage, autochthony is nearly impossible to trace (Geschiere, 2009; Lynch, 2011). Thus proving autochthony and/or indigeneity are not only "claims to have arrived *first*, but also *second*" (Jackson, 2006, p. 113). Furthermore, it could be argued that autochthonous claims only need to disprove relevant counterclaims to be accepted as legitimate. By virtue of this, autochthony and indigeneity are frequently reconfigured according to circumstance and as a result, the definition of who belongs becomes increasingly narrow. This flexibility to redefine belonging highlights the most poignant characteristics of both discourses—that they are unstable, even "nervous" and yet masquerade as "self-evident" truths by those who employ them (Jackson, 2006; Geschiere, 2009). As Geschiere (2009) states, autochthony suggests that it is the "most authentic form of belonging" as a result of its link with the land (p.

2). And so, threats to this apparent authenticity are often met with violence, which is the ultimate provider of certainty for claims of autochthony and indigeneity according to Dunn (2009).

Contributing Factors and Processes

The rise of exclusionary discourses, based on autochthony or indigeneity, can be attributed to numerous factors and processes. However, it is most readily identified as an effect of political and economic liberalization. In sub-Saharan Africa, political liberalization is more or less synonymous with moving towards a democratic form of government that prioritizes citizen input and government accountability. Redefining the populace of a nation-state as citizens, with obligations, rights and privileges, requires considerable negotiation. Often, this negotiation takes on an exclusionary character in environments characterized by resource scarcity. By defining citizens narrowly, so-called democratic governments can strategically concentrate power and privilege. Dunn (2009) asserts that in Rwanda, Ivory Coast and the Democratic Republic of Congo, “a democratic majority has used the democratic process to disenfranchise the minority” (p. 117). Pierre Englebert (2009) links the rise of exclusionary politics to political liberalization as well but more specifically, to the spread of elections across sub-Saharan Africa. Englebert (2009) suggests that incumbent leaders use exclusionary rhetoric, in the form of questioning their opponents and/or voting bloc’s citizenship, in an attempt to resist democratization (p. 206). KANU politicians engaged in similar questioning throughout the 1990s, suggesting that votes should only be cast in “home areas” or areas to which individuals would be considered indigenous (Akiwumi Commission, 2002; HRW, 2002).

Economic liberalization and decentralization are also cited as contributors. For Dunn (2009), economic liberalization functions as a piece of globalization and as such, encourages migration for labor opportunities. This movement further exacerbates existing competition for

access to land among other resources, and features prominently as a cause for conflict in areas attempting to assert claims of indigeneity. Geschiere (2009) argues that decentralization has encouraged “bypassing the state” and shifted the focus from the central to the local government, where the most accessible resources are now located. As such, the need to situate oneself locally takes on greater significance.

Dunn (2009) and Gabrielle Lynch (2011) also refer to the important role that political and ethnic entrepreneurs play in igniting and sustaining exclusionary politics based on autochthony and indigeneity. Dunn argues that autochthony is particularly appealing to political entrepreneurs because of its widespread mobilizing power and ability to “flatten out other forms of difference, obscuring forms of political hierarchy” (p. 121). Furthermore, the instability, or conversely flexibility, of the concept allows political entrepreneurs to sidestep inconvenient historical details and cast their claims most favorably. Relating to her research in East Africa, Lynch maintains that claims of belonging in western Kenya “remain ‘a strategy rather than fact’ (Lonsdale, 2008, p. 311).⁶ Ethnic entrepreneurs take advantage of moves toward democratization to publicly ask questions of who belongs where and what rights are associated with that belonging, particularly in terms of access to resources like land and political representation.

Indigeneity on Kenya’s Coast

In Kenya, the politics of belonging play out both regionally and nationally. Prior to independence in 1963, fierce debates ensued regarding the composition of the postcolonial Kenyan state. Coastal residents were divided between two camps: *mwambao* versus *majimbo*. *Mwambao* refers to the movement for full autonomy of the Coast rather than incorporation into a greater Kenya and was primarily supported by Arabs, the Swahili and European settlers.

⁶ Originally cited in Lynch, 2011, p. 407.

Majimbo refers to regionalism as a means to protect minority rights and was supported by the Mijikenda and other minority groups elsewhere in Kenya. *Majimbo* supporters perceived the *mwambao* movement as a means to entrench the power dynamics on the Coast, which privileged the Arabs and Swahili and marginalized the Mijikenda. In order to rally Mijikenda and minority groups firmly against *mwambao*, *majimbo* supporters emphasized the illegitimacy of Arab and Swahili claims to the Coast. For the *majimbo* movement, this illegitimacy was centered on Swahili mixed ancestry, which “belied authentic autochthony...demonstrating their shallow roots and nullifying their “indigenous” status on the Coast (Brennan, 2008, p. 856). In contrast, David Anderson (2005) describes how the *majimbo* movement asserted its legitimacy based on indigeneity, which was substantiated by historical precedent set through colonial documents, ethnographies and chiefly genealogies. *Majimbo* also operated according to colonial-era boundaries and as such, was heavily grounded in colonialism. Anderson’s conclusions resonate with Lynch (2011), who relates the nature of the contemporary autochthony discourse to contradictory colonial practices, particularly in their desire to fix populations in defined areas for easier access and control and yet simultaneously encourage migration for economic advancement.

In anticipation of Kenya’s return to multiparty elections in 1992, there were renewed calls for *majimbo*, first in the Rift Valley and then in the Coast Province. Whereas the *mwambao* and *majimbo* debates seem to have effectively stalled elsewhere in Kenya save for their rhetorical value, the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) reignited them on the Coast in 2008. However, the separatist group based in Mombasa has managed to secure support that cuts across ethnic and religious lines as well as former *mwambao* and *majimbo* divisions (Goldsmith, 2011). Yet one bone of contention is that the MRC bases their claims for secession on colonial-era

treaties, particularly the 1895 agreement recognizing the Sultan of Zanzibar's sovereignty on Kenya's Coast, which previous *majimbo* supporters deemed irrelevant due to the failure to consult Africans residing in the region (Willis and Gona, 2012; Anderson, 2005). According to Goldsmith (2011), the MRC enjoy such widespread appeal due to their focus on coastal land alienation and economic marginalization, and that "the indigenous coastal population see themselves becoming poorer while outsiders are prospering in their homeland" (p. 17). In this context, the "indigenous population" refers to Arabs, the Swahili and Mijikenda relative to "upcountry" migrants, namely the Kikuyu, Luo and Luhya. This characterization of the indigenous and non-indigenous populations on the Coast differs greatly from what was described at independence, and yet accurately reflects the nature of the indigeneity discourse: constant redefinition according to contemporary circumstances. In this context, the historical inconsistency of what constitutes indigeneity on the Coast is irrelevant as Geschiere (2009) noted, "debunking authenticity does not preclude people's powerful craving for the authentic," particularly when it is accompanied by political, economic and social resources (p. 29).

Political Mobilization and Violence

Numerous authors point to the significance of national political configurations on political mobilization and violence in Kenya, particularly emphasizing the importance of whether it is a one- or multi-party state. For most, the return to multiparty politics in 1992 prompted a resurgence of ethnic politics, mobilization and violence. Posner (2005) would account for this relationship based on an understanding that multiparty elections expand the arena of political competition and allow citizens to vote according to more localized thinking, which is likely to be informed by ethnicity. Furthermore, localized politics are more vulnerable to ethnic entrepreneurs and cultural brokers' exploitation of local circumstances, inventing and/or

asserting narrowly defined ethnic claims and indigenous citizenship rights. Unfortunately, several politicians have used multiparty elections' poor reputation for reviving ethnic politics to their benefit, to undermine their opposition and the democratic system as a whole. For example, Geschiere (2009) notes that Cameroonian president Paul Biya went as far as to support regional political movements in an effort to counteract multiparty politics.

Political mobilization and violence in Kenya, and particularly in Coast Province, are informed by a number of overlapping, interactive forces such as the structure of national political competition as described above. In addition, certain other factors should be considered, including the politicization of identity, regional marginalization and contested citizenship rights. In this study, macro-level theories of relative deprivation and contested citizenship rights are adapted to the context of Kenya's Coast in an effort to illuminate the etiology of political mobilization and conflict in this region. The following review attempts to lay the foundation for addressing these key questions: can identity-based political mobilization and conflict on Kenya's Coast be understood according to a perception of marginalization, competing claims to citizenship rights, or a combination of both? Earlier discussions of cultural pluralism and conceptualizations of identity as well as the discourse of indigeneity will be heavily integrated into these theories' descriptions to demonstrate their relevance to political mobilization and conflict on the Coast.

Relative Deprivation

In Ted Gurr's seminal work *Why Men Rebel* (1971), he proposed the theory of Relative Deprivation (RD) to explain episodes of collective political violence. Gurr defines political violence as "the use or threat of violence by any party or institution to attain ends within or outside the political order," which may include revolutions, guerilla wars, coups d'état, rebellions and riots (p. 4). In practice, political violence defies the state's monopoly of force and

interrupts normal political processes. Furthermore, it often serves to adjust and/or reinforce the boundaries between opposing groups and/or institutions.

Prior to delving into his theory, Gurr describes the sequence of events that lead to political violence as follows: “the development of discontent, the politicization of that discontent and finally its actualization in violent action against political objects and actors” (p. 12-13). The theory of Relative Deprivation enters the sequence as part of the development of discontent, and is defined as, “the perceived discrepancy between men’s value expectations and their value capabilities” (p. 13). Value expectations refers to the goods and conditions men think they *should* have while value capabilities refers to what they think they are *able* to have. These values may be related to welfare (e.g. physical wellbeing), power (e.g. agency, control) or the interpersonal (e.g. social support); furthermore, the relative importance of these values varies amongst members of a collectivity as well as between collectivities. According to Gurr, “the potential for collective violence varies strongly with the intensity and scope of RD among the members of a collectivity” (p. 24). In other words, the potential of collective violence depends on how intense the collectivity perceives their RD to be and to what extent this intensity is prevalent among the collectivity’s members (p. 29).

According to Gurr, there are several types of Relative Deprivation that can appear simultaneously within a single society, and may cause or predispose such a society to political violence. Whatever their characterization, all types of RD are based on the same fundamental assumption: “that because Relative Deprivation is a psychically uncomfortable condition, men tend over the long run to adjust their value expectations to their value expectations” (p. 46). Decremental RD is based on the perception that value capabilities have decreased, and as result the status of a given group or entire society has decreased as well. Aspirational RD is based on

an increase in value expectations, without an increase in the means to achieve new value expectations. Aspirational RD is often thought to occur as the result of exposure to something that is perceived as better than one's current lot, and usually refers to a better lifestyle. Lastly, Progressive RD takes place during an economic downturn that was immediately preceded by an extended period of economic development. Gurr views Progressive RD as a form of Aspirational RD and often the impetus to revolution (p. 46-56).

Prior to the application of Gurr's theory of Relative Deprivation to Kenya's Coast, it is important to reiterate the role of perception; RD is based on the *perception* amongst a collectivity rather than any real index of deprivation. Consequently, Goldsmith's (2011) finding that "the indigenous coastal population see themselves becoming poorer while outsiders are prospering in their homeland" is especially poignant (p. 17). Several reports and statistics attest to coastal marginalization. The Kenya Human Rights Commission's report following 1997 pre-election violence in Coast Province found several indicators of discrimination toward coastal residents in ownership of businesses and land, employment and the provision of social services; upcountry Kenyans and ethnic minorities (e.g. Indians) dominated business and land ventures, and were favored in employment. Anecdotal evidence that can be heard on the radio during call-in sessions, such as "Outsiders have grabbed our land and we want to tell them that this is our ancestral land; if they don't surrender this land they will suffer the consequences" (MCK, 2012, p. 18). Although in many cases claims of marginalization can be substantiated, what is more important is the widespread perception of marginalization throughout the Coast. This perception leads to threats, as evidenced by the previous quotation, and targeted violence, as occurred prior to 1997's multi-party elections. In this episode of violence, upcountry Kenyans were directly targeted, of which the Luo suffered the greatest loss in life and property (KHRC, 1997).

Upcountry Kenyans represented the source of frustration for marginalized coastal residents and as such, served as the targets of their resulting aggression. However, it should be noted that coastal residents did not skip a step in Gurr's sequence of political violence. Based on political, economic and social developments a sense of RD grew amongst coastal residents in contrast with upcountry migrants. However, this sense of RD did not lead to violence straightaway, it was first politicized by ethnic entrepreneurs who in this case, were part of or hired by the ruling KANU party of then-president Daniel arap Moi (KHRC, 1997).

Citizenship and the Perception of Citizenship Rights

Edmond J. Keller (2014) proposes a framework for studying social conflict that is based on three relatively simple, interactive factors: context, institutions or structures, and agents. Context refers to the environment and/or culture in which politics unfold, or what Keller refers to as "the weight of history" (p. 41). At the macro-level, institutions or structures have a dynamic relationship with politics, with each influencing and modifying the other. Agents may refer to individuals or groups, elites or civil society. In the case of individuals and elites, it is often ethnic entrepreneurs that exercise considerable agency in instigating and sustaining conflict, and often in their own self-interest. In contrast, civil society, which is defined as "groups that emerge spontaneously in protest against a particular regime or its policies," aims for collective improvement (p. 44). Within this framework, Keller recognizes the importance of both underlying as well as precipitating causes, or triggers.

While the framework developed by Keller can be applied to a multiplicity of political circumstances, he employs it to explain social conflict in relationship to competition over citizenship and its concomitant rights. According to Keller, the majority of social conflict in contemporary sub-Saharan African can be attributed to competition stemming from citizenship

claims, although it may play out in a number of ways. For instance, conflicts over citizenship may be derived from identity-based conflicts relating to electoral competition and land rights, as well as the real and/or perceived discriminatory allocation of public goods by the central government to local communities.

In the context of Kenya's Coast, all of the aforementioned identity-based conflicts are present, and related to a greater struggle for citizenship and its concomitant rights within contemporary Kenya. "The weight of history" in Coast province is captured by its distinct historical trajectory from the hinterland, which included extensive contact with the Middle East through trade and settlement as well as "protectorate" rather than "colony" status. It is within this context that the relevant local institutions and structures developed, such as early patron-client relationships between Arabs/ Swahili and the Mijikenda. Agents on the Coast are diverse, and include members of nearly all major ethnic groups due to migration from the hinterland for economic opportunities. However, certain agents are privileged above others, depending on the institution or structure. For example, upcountry Kenyans disproportionately staff coastal administration and security positions. Similarly, political parties based in Coast, and particularly those of an Islamic persuasion (e.g. Islamic Party of Kenya, IPK) are routinely denied registration as legitimate political parties and a forum for voicing their concerns (Mazrui and Shariff, 1994).

A particularly poignant example of contested citizenship in Kenya's Coast Province is the contemporary slogan of the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), "Pwani si Kenya" or the "Coast is not [part of] Kenya." In this case, the MRC definitively rejects Kenyan citizenship and calls for secession instead. These calls for secession are based on a recent history of political, economic and social marginalization by postcolonial Kenyan governments which implies that

from independence, citizenship and its associated rights were extended to the Coast tenuously at best. However, within the context of broad coastal marginalization, it is the issue of land that exacerbates all others. As a result of colonial-era land tenure arrangements that were codified upon independence, the Coast houses an inordinate numbers of “squatters” who are mainly comprised of the Mijikenda and ex-slave descendants who are unable to secure titles to land they are settled on and render productive. In an effort to reassert land rights, the indigeneity discourse gained traction prior to independence, particularly during the heyday of *majimbo*. And yet the indigeneity discourse is once again gaining momentum on the Coast, but in slightly more inclusive terms so that Arabs and the Swahili are also considered indigenous to the region, and upcountry Kenyans become the most relevant “Other.”

In conclusion, both Gurr’s theory of Relative Deprivation and Keller’s framework for understanding conflict born of contested citizenship provide valuable insights for political mobilization and conflict on Kenya’s Coast. The assertion of claims of indigeneity on the Coast, or entitlements based on birthrights in the region mirrors with a slight twist claims of autochthony elsewhere. While the discourse is most often used to redefine and exclude the rights of the “Other” on increasingly narrow terms, it appears to work in the opposite direction as well. As a result of marginalization on a regional level, Arabs, Swahili and Mijikenda appear to referring to themselves as a collective indigenous entity, at least in within the context increased political leverage versus those from upcountry.

III. Historical Background

On August 13, 1997, an armed group of men attacked a police station and post in Likoni, just south of Mombasa, before terrorizing the surrounding area throughout the night. This attack commenced a period of episodic violence on Kenya’s Coast lasting more than a year, resulting in

more than seventy deaths and the displacement of roughly 100,000 residents, namely those from upcountry Kenya.⁷ Between August 15 and June 30, the Akiwumi Commission (2002) recorded twenty-five separate attacks while Human Rights Watch (2002) recorded Likoni-associated attacks through December 1998 (p. 27-30; p. 24). The causes of these attacks are complex and specific to the social, political and economic context of Kenya's Coast. As such, this context will be explored at-length in this section, with particular attention paid to identity and how it is influenced by political and economic factors on the Coast.

Kenya's Coast, and especially the regional capital of Mombasa, has been attracting travelers, traders and immigrants from around the world as early as the first century (Mazrui and Shariff, 1994). As a result, identity in this region has been constantly in flux. Only since the early 20th century, ironically coinciding with the abolition of the international slave trade, the advent of British colonialism and the later exclusionary practices of successive postcolonial Kenyan governments, did identity become a matter of strict legal interpretation for determining status, rights and privileges on the Coast. Specifically, this section will trace the development of cultural pluralism on Kenya's Coast, as well as identify factors that have led to the politicization and perception of what appears to be the increased rigidity of certain identities. As a historical review, this thesis illuminates the ways in which the fluidity of identity that previously characterized Kenya's Coast has been effectively stifled at the encouragement of ethnic entrepreneurs and cultural brokers, and the political implications of this fixity.

Major Ethnic Groups on the Coast

⁷ Upcountry refers to Kenya's hinterland, particularly central and Western Kenya. Upcountry Kenyans includes several major ethnic groups, including: the Kikuyu, Luo, Luhya and Kamba.

The Mombasa Republican Council's⁸ call "Pwani si Kenya" or rather, "the Coast is not [part] of Kenya" resonates with many indigenous Coasterians.⁹ There are several reasons for this. To begin, although the Coast was incorporated into an independent Kenya in 1963, it enjoyed a relatively distinct historical trajectory from the hinterland. As early as the first century, per the Greek Periplus' account, Arab traders were settling on the East African coast and intermarrying with local populations. Waves of immigrant traders, principally from Oman and Yemen, contributed to a sizeable Arab population in the region and large numbers of offspring of mixed ancestry (Mazrui and Shariff, 1994). The Swahili, as those of Arabo-African ancestry came to be known, trace their origin through the Twelve Tribes in the city of Singwya, in present-day southern Somalia. The Twelve Tribes are considered the original twelve Swahili families, only rendered distinct from the Swahili population at-large due to their Arabicized names and wealth (Willis, 1993).

The local population, previously known as "Nyika," referred to all those living in the local hinterland, including the present-day Mijikenda and ex-slaves. According to Willis (1993) the primary distinguishing factor between the "Nyika" and Swahili were the location of their networks; the former were concentrated on the rural outskirts of town, while the latter were based in urban centers (p. 19). It should be mentioned that the name "Nyika," which translates to "people of the bush" is no longer in use due to its derogatory meaning; however, the term Mijikenda did not replace it, as it only refers to a subset of the previous "Nyika." For the most part, the present-day Mijikenda are more or less considered the indigenous population of the region and are comprised of several smaller ethnic groups. The Digo, Giriama and Duruma are

⁸ The Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) is a separatist group based in Mombasa advocating for the independence of Kenya's coastal region.

⁹ "Coasterian" refers to Kenya's greater coastal population (Goldsmith 2011).

the largest and thus most visible of the Mijikenda, but the grouping is thought to include nine distinct ethnic groups.¹⁰

The origin of the Mijikenda is disputed; for some, it is in Singwaya, for others it is in the “kaya” and still others, it is in Mombasa Island and/or all coastal lands. This assortment of origin stories is drawn upon by the Mijikenda to explain pieces of their collective history as well as satisfy present-day demands, many of which are tied to establishing traditional political authority on the Coast. By locating Mijikenda origin in Singwaya, the Mijikenda emphasize their historical nearness to the Swahili and their earlier patron-client relationship and familial networks. Alleged patterns of migration from Singwaya are also used to establish a hierarchy amongst the Mijikenda, with the earliest to arrive on the Coast at the top. The “kaya” may stand alone as a location of origin, or as an intermediary step following migration from Singwaya. According to Spear (1978), the “kaya” is the traditional home of Mijikenda society, with each ethnic group identifying with one in particular (e.g. “kaya Fungo” for the Giriama). Each “kaya” housed several clans and sub-clans, and was divided into age-sets, with the elders serving as the primary political and spiritual leaders. The last of the origin stories, which trace Mijikenda origin to Mombasa Island and the greater Coast region, are likely politically motivated in order to lay claim to coastal lands. Willis (1993) notes that changes to Mijikenda origin stories usually follow the following premise: “history is seen to legitimate present claims and is therefore continually remade in new situations” (p. 33). As a result, Mijikenda origin has become “a story not of enduring alliance, but of dispossession and hostility” with respect to the Swahili and contemporary political and economic dynamics (Willis, 1993, p. 37).

¹⁰ The literature inconsistent about who is and who is not included in the Mijikenda grouping; Spear (1978): Kauma, Giriama, Chonyi, Jibana, Kambe, Ribe, Rabai, Duruma and Digo; Willis (1993): Taita, Segeju, Pokomo and even Kamba are included at times.

Upcountry migration to Kenya's Coast preceded and continued throughout colonialism, particularly among Kamba farmers settled in Shimba Hills (KHRC, 1997). Following independence, upcountry migration to Kwale and Likoni contributed to a population increase between 3 and 4% between the 1960s and 1970s. Migrants were drawn to settlement schemes, the tourism industry in Diani Beach and industry in Mombasa city (Branch, 2011, p. 223). Upcountry migration to the coastal strip came primarily from Central, Nyanza and Western provinces. Migrants settled in Mombasa and the surrounding district, along the route from Mombasa to Malindi and in settlement schemes. In 1962, upcountry Kenyans, including the Kikuyu, Kamba, Meru, Embu, Luhya and Luo, accounted for 10% of the Coast Province's population. In 1979, the upcountry share of the population grew to 17% (Parkin, 1991, p. 232). KHRC (1997) noted that upcountry migrants on the Coast often became long-term migrants and/or permanent settlers due to the distance between their home areas and places of employment (p. 11). Based on 2009 census data, 25% of the Coast population was not born in their county of current residence and in 2013, 25% of the Coast population located their origin upcountry (Wolf et al., 2013). Daniel Branch (2011) stated, "The issues of indigeneity and migration were more obvious in debates about those who had moved to Coast from other parts of Kenya during the post-colonial period. The immediate political implications of that recent history of migration became clear once voter registration was completed in June 1997," foreshadowing pre-election violence just months later (Branch, 2011, p. 224-225).

Fluidity of Identity

By most historical accounts, the identity categories of Arab, Swahili and Mijikenda were exceptionally fluid prior to the Coast's acquisition of British Protectorate status. According to Mazrui and Shariff (1994), Arabs occupied the highest rung on the pre-colonial social ladder but

their superiority was primarily cultural and thus, possible to acquire. The adoption of Islam and associated cultural practices allowed the Swahili to rise to the position of Arab, and the Mijikenda to the position of Swahili. That is not to say that race was not a factor in Arab superiority, but it was not the dominant one.

For McIntosh (2009), the historical permeability of ethnic identity on the Coast can be traced to interdependence. Arabs and the Swahili served as patrons to the Mijikenda, and in doing so provided essential resources during episodes of famine and hardship. The Mijikenda provided similar benefits, in defense and linkages to trade in the hinterland, for example. The Mijikenda could approach Swahili status through numerous avenues, including patronage, intermarriage and conversion to Islam. Furthermore, intermarriage would provide the offspring of a Mijikenda-Swahili union with the privileges of Swahili identity. For the Swahili to rise to the status of Arab, they pursued aristocratic activities, like literacy in Arabic and “advanced Islamic magic” (McIntosh, 2009).

Prior to the advent of British Protectorate status, the presence of European colonialism introduced and reinforced the concept of racial differentiation. Per the “Eurocentric paradigm of identity” as termed by Mazrui and Shariff (1994), the Germans and British categorized Coastal residents first by their blood (Arab versus African), then by expected phenotypical features and cultural habits. In this way, the African and Arab contributions to Swahili identity were separated and used to explain behavioral traits, such as an Arab’s normal level of energy compromised by African sloth within a Swahili individual. This racialization of identity served as an underlying justification and the antecedent process to later British colonial policy to manipulate and fix Coastal identities.

Although the influence of British colonial policy on identity is most apparent in laws pertaining to land, the abolition of slavery also affected identity by unanticipated mechanisms. According to McIntosh (2009), the abolition of slavery by the British was nothing more than a ploy to control African labor and create a labor force that would work for wages supplied by Europeans. To the surprise of the British, the abolition of slavery gave ex-slaves and the Mijikenda at-large greater power to negotiate their status as causal labors for their former masters and patrons. As a result, the abolition of slavery actually led to an increase in the permeability of Swahili identity because there were more clients to obtain patrons and thus access to Swahili networks and material acquisition.

Slavery

According to McIntosh (2009), the Giriama of Malindi regularly refer to a historical memory of slavery at the hands of the Swahili and Arabs. However, many scholars are skeptical about the extent to which the Mijikenda were involved in slavery on the Coast. McIntosh notes that most slaves on the Coast were drawn from outside the region and that the practice as whole was not pervasive but confined to the coastal elite, which did not characterize the majority of Swahili. Although the British abolished slavery in their territories in 1907, Mazrui and Shariff (1994) argue that from this point forward the presence of slaves increased on coastal plantations, primarily due to a collapse in demand for them elsewhere.

In closing, McIntosh (2009) considers “slavery” inadequate to explain the diversity of relationships between the Mijikenda and Swahili and Arabs on the Coast. From her perspective, the blanket application of “slavery” fails to acknowledge relationships that would be better described as patron-client, in which clients have the ability to negotiate their status through commercial activities and conversion to Islam. However, similar to the utility of divergent origin

stories, a historical narrative of slavery serves a political purpose in discrediting Swahili and Arab authority and describing a wider phenomenon of marginalization (Willis, 1993, p. 194-195).

Legal Status

The legal status of the Kenyan Coast and accompanying applicable laws have played a significant role in the development of the region, particularly in shaping contemporary political, economic and social dynamics. In referring to the legal status of the Coast, several factors are to be considered: legal versus common understandings of what constitutes “the Coast,” degrees of authority and administration, relevant ideological orientations and political movements.

Prior to the Anglo-German Agreement of 1886, the Coast was not formally defined. Brennan (2008) suggests that pre-colonial Swahili city-states adopted a form of sovereignty that was “layered and shared...bound not by state power but through family ties, ideologies, and trade” (p. 845-835). As such, the Coast was understood as a network of trading centers that were locally managed by aristocratic Arab families with ties to sultans in the Middle East. According to McIntosh (2009), the sultan of Oman installed the Mazrui as governors on the Coast in the 18th century who were later replaced by the Busaidi.

Ironically, it was the Portuguese invasion in 1498 and subsequent occupation of the Swahili Coast over the next two centuries that led to the consolidation of Omani rule. During this period, the Portuguese inflicted significant damage to the Coast; they destroyed trade networks, entire towns, including setting fire to Mombasa, and introduced a distinct sense of religious and racial superiority. Mazrui and Shariff (1994) refer to their ideology as “religious-cum-racist” in that all Muslims were grouped together as “Moors” irrespective of ethnic identity. For the

Portuguese, skin complexion was a relevant factor but subordinate to religion, which was viewed as the foundation of culture (p. 23, 28).

Due to the intolerable effects of Portuguese colonialism, both material and psychological, the Coast “collectively” appealed to Oman for help. In exchange for their assistance, the Sultans of Oman were to be recognized as the rulers of the Coast. Shortly thereafter, in 1832 Seyyid Said, Sultan of Muscat and Oman, moved his Court to Zanzibar. Following Said’s death, his son Seyyid Majid became the Sultan of Zanzibar and proclaimed the island’s independence in 1862, which was acknowledged by Great Britain, France and Germany. Great Britain and Germany further reinforced the sovereignty of the Sultan through the Anglo-German Agreement of 1886, which outlined British and German interests in East Africa. In this treaty, the Coast was formally defined as “a continuous line of coast from the Minegani River at the head of Tungi Bay to Kipini...an internal depth of ten nautical miles from the coast, measured direct into the interior from the highwater mark” as well as the islands of Zanzibar, Pemba, Lamu and Mafia (Robertson Commission, 1961). Despite the level of detail included in this definition of what came to be known as the “Coastal Strip,” Willis (1993) notes its impracticality because by his estimations, a measurement inland from the highwater mark would yield considerably more territory (p. 118).

In 1887, the Sultan of Zanzibar leased the “Coastal Strip” to the eventual Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC). Although the Sultan retained nominal sovereignty, the IBEAC carried out all administrative tasks in the region, including purchasing land, collecting taxes and passing laws. In 1895, the British Government took over the assets and rights of the IBEAC, which was no longer operationally viable. The subsequent agreement between Great Britain and Zanzibar in 1895 echoed that of 1887; the Sultan of Zanzibar would reserve sovereignty over the

region, but the British government would be responsible for all facets of administration. Furthermore, all parties were assured that administration of the Coast would take place in accordance with Islam and in reality, was left mainly to Arab and Swahili governors.

Although the rest of present-day Kenya became a colony of Great Britain in 1920, the Coastal Strip remained a protectorate until its incorporation at independence in December 1963. Coastal incorporation was a highly divisive issue that split residents into two camps: *mwambao* versus *majimbo*. *Mwambao*, which translates to “coast,” advocated for the autonomy of the Coastal Strip based on historical and cultural distinctiveness from central Kenya. *Mwambao* supporters cited the 1895 agreement between Great Britain and the Sultan of Zanzibar as proof of their historical dissimilarity. According to the Robertson Commission (1961), Arabs and “Islamicized Swahilis” supported *mwambao*, leading to suspicions that the autonomy movement was really just a ploy to protect Arab and Swahili privilege. *Majimbo*, or federalism, advocated for the inclusion of a Coast Province under a federal system to protect the rights of minority communities. The Mijikenda Union was a staunch supporter of *majimbo* as was vocal Coast politician Ronald Ngala, prominent Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) member. David Anderson (2005) describes *majimbo-ism* as a policy of fear, of economic and political domination, of minority communities at the hands of the majority. For proponents of a centralized governmental structure, namely the Kenya African National Union (KANU), *majimbo-ism* was nothing more than tribalism. Yet Robert Maxon (2011) maintains that KADU’s *majimbo* sought to prevent unbalanced development and protect democratic values, particularly by limiting the powers of the executive branch (p. 274). As expected, in late 1961 the Robertson Commission recommended the incorporation of the Coastal Strip into a greater independent Kenya based on a number of factors enunciated in the summary report, such as the

demands of the “African majority” and potential economic viability. However, similar to the by-line of the 1895 agreement, Commissioner Robertson articulated a number of protections for Muslim residents.¹¹

Although KANU agreed to an independence constitution based on *majimbo*, it was short-lived; ultimately, KANU created a highly centralized state and the KADU opposition crumbled within months of independence (Keller, 2014; Maxon, 2011). According to Maxon (2011), KADU was unable to withstand multiple defections to KANU and decreasing public support and a disinterested British government that preferred KANU’s commitment to protecting the status quo (p. 267). However, *majimbo* did not disappear; according to Keller (2014), “*majimbo* continued to be a part of everyday conversation” (p. 110). *Majimbo* remains part of Kenya’s political rhetoric, and is especially prominent among its early supporters, including the Kalenjin and the Mijikenda (Maxon, 2011, p. 186).

“Land Question”

The distinct historical trajectory of the Coast, largely shaped by its legal status and accompanying applicable laws, has several significant implications in terms of land. To begin, the “land question” in the Coast developed in accordance with layered and at times conflicting systems of land tenure. For example, under Islamic law, Muslims are entitled to personal land ownership. However, for the Mijikenda, land is held communally and managed through kinship networks. Communal land may serve a variety of purposes at once and as such, a number of individuals may claim some form of land rights at any given moment. According to Kanyinga (2000), “the lack of *de jure* rights of individual ownership was an insurance against landlessness and a guarantee of equitable rights of access” (p. 31). Despite their oppositional definitions,

¹¹ Protections included: right to Islamic worship and kadhi courts, the appointment of Muslim administrators, Arabic instruction for Muslim schoolchildren, registration and respect for freehold land (Robertson Commission, 1961).

Muslim and Mijikenda systems of land tenure often worked in tandem in support of larger patronage networks. Willis (1993) contends that pre-colonial land payments, to Mijikenda and Swahili or Arab elders were in the service of “authority and obligation, not in access to land as such” (p. 120).

Shortly after the Coast gained Protectorate status, the British colonial government passed a number of measures to define and formalize land tenure. In 1908, the Land Titles Ordinance provided subjects of the Sultan an opportunity to register their land as freehold, given they could supply proof of ownership. This proof usually consisted of multiple witness testimonies, but was ultimately left to a few landowners and officials in Mombasa to decide. For the most part, the Mijikenda and ex-slaves were unable to utilize this mechanism to gain rights to the land they occupied or cultivated. On the other hand, large-scale Arab and Swahili landowners exploited it to gain rights to land they had acquired, perhaps by illicit means, or conceivably to land they had just claimed to own. For the British colonial government, the 1908 Land Titles Ordinance served a very important purpose- to differentiate between freehold and “waste” land, the latter of which would become Crown land and available for allocation to British settlers.

According to Willis (1993), the 1908 Land Titles Ordinance separated Coastal residents into landowners and the landless, and relegated each group to its respective rightful place, in the Coastal Strip or in the Native Reserves in the hinterland. McIntosh (2009) observed the enduring nature of this spatial arrangement in Malindi, noting that the Swahili are characterized by their residence in town while the Mijikenda occupy the outer edges of town and rural hinterland areas, where there poverty is somewhat hidden from view of wealthy tourists frequenting the beach destination.

The Hut and Poll Tax Ordinance of 1910, which created distinct categories of “native” and “non-native,” further differentiated between Coastal residents. As expected, Arabs were considered “non-native” while the Mijikenda, ex-slaves *and* the Swahili were considered “native.” Due to the tax exemption granted by “non-native” status, the Swahili immediately sought to reassert their Arab ancestry. By the 1920s, the Swahili undertook conscious efforts to “redefine Swahili identity through use of the Twelve Tribes as an exclusive category, from which poor Nyika, ex-slave, and other recent immigrants would be excluded,” despite their previous inclusion (Willis, 1993, p. 189). For Mazrui and Shariff (1994), this Ordinance likely initiated what they term a Swahili “denial of Africanity,” particularly because the British colonial government incentivized it.

The 1908 Land Titles Ordinance and the 1910 Hut and Poll Tax Ordinance were formative in that they distinguished between landowners and the landless, and designated each seemingly recognizable group (Arabs, Swahili, Mijikenda, ex-slaves) to one or the other. These Ordinances also laid the foundation, primarily in terms of increasingly individualized land tenure, for future plans to increase agriculture production on the Coast. In 1955, the Assistant Director of Agriculture, R.J.M. Swynnerton authored *A Plan to Intensify the Development of African Agriculture in Kenya*. The “Swynnerton Plan,” as it became commonly known, was based on extensive land privatization that would provide “security of tenure through an indefeasible title” and a source of credit for future investments. The authors acknowledge that this move, if extended to “natives” would create landowning and landless classes. In this plan, the Coast province was targeted for large-scale plantation agriculture, particularly of crops like sisal, coconuts and cashew nuts, among others. To this day, acres of sisal plantations extend alongside major highways through Kwale and Kilifi districts (Mghanga, 2010).

Following independence in December 1963, the postcolonial government of Jomo Kenyatta (1964-1978) uncritically affirmed existing land tenure arrangements on the Coast. Essentially, the 1908 Land Titles Ordinance became law in independent Kenya, “transform[ing] the Mijikenda into squatters or tenants of Arab and Swahili landowners” (Kanyinga, 2000, p. 51). However, in failing to redress historical land injustices, postcolonial Kenyan governments, of Kenyatta and Daniel arap Moi (1978-2002) exacerbated them as well as created new ones. Borrowing from the Crown Lands Ordinance of 1915, which was to become the basis for Kenya’s postcolonial land laws, the government controls all non-freehold land and the power to allocate it is vested in the President (Ndungu, 2006, p. 2). This absolute control of land became an indispensable resource for creating and maintaining KANU patronage networks as well as alienating the poor, particularly during the freezing of foreign aid in the 1980s (Ndungu, 2006, p. 4).

Ato KwAmena Onoma (2010) describes the evolution of property rights in postcolonial Kenya in two phases; Phase I spans 1963 to 1990 while Phase II spans 1990 to 2000. Despite corruption, Onoma describes Phase I as laying the foundation for property rights and strengthening institutions to enforce property rights. Yet Phase II, commencing under pressure to transition to multiparty elections, was a significant departure from institution-building and strengthening through the decentralization of power to allocate land. Widespread corruption, characterized by irregular allocation of lands and selective enforcement of property rights, became the norm in Phase II.¹²

The Ndungu Commission, which investigated illegal and/or irregular allocation of public land in Kenya, found that approximately 200,000 illegal land titles were issued between 1962

¹² Originally cited in Keller, 2014, p. 113-114.

and 2002 though nearly all (98%) were issued between 1986 and 2002. This is partly explained by the freezing of foreign aid in the 1980s, which made land an essential tool for gaining and maintaining political patronage networks (Ndungu, 2006, p. 4, 5). The Ndungu Commission also found that illegal allocations of land tended to cluster around the multiparty general elections of 1992, 1997 and 2002, highlighting the utility of land as a political resource (Southall, 2005, p. 147).

Cultural Brokers, Elections and the Transformation of Basis for Ethnic Claims

Under pressure from civil society and the international community, Kenya held its first multiparty election since independence in December 1992. Prior to the general election, KANU politicians in the Kalenjin community renewed calls for *majimbo* as a means to undermine multiparty democracy and protect the KANU leadership headed by President Moi. Consequently, Kalenjins recruited by KANU commenced a violent campaign of displacement of non-indigenous groups (e.g. Kikuyu) from the Rift Valley (KHRC, 1997, p. 6-7). Ahead of the next general election in December 1997, KANU politicians on the Coast recreated this strategy drawing upon local grievances related to land dispossession and economic marginalization. KANU politicians on the Coast served as cultural brokers and/or political entrepreneurs, simplifying and manipulating cultural identities and resources, to foment conflict between indigenous communities (e.g. the Mijikenda) and foreigners expected to vote for KANU opposition (e.g. upcountry migrants). KANU manipulation on the Coast relied on mobilizing residents around land dispossession and economic marginalization, using ethnicity and indigeneity as a shortcut. KANU Coast politicians MP Boy Juma Boy acted as cultural broker and political entrepreneur in campaign meetings only days before the Likoni attack on August 13, 1997; a witness overheard him linking local problems of poverty and unemployment to

upcountry residents, and calling for *majimbo* (HRW, 2002, p. 26). As early as 1991, another witness in Kwale District recalled a meeting in which a local councilor and KANU member warned that if upcountry residents voted for the opposition, they would be attacked with “arrows in their backs” (HRW, 2002, p. 26).

In conclusion, this limited historical review traces both the development of cultural pluralism on Kenya’s Coast as well as its later politicization. The politicization occurred primarily through the adoption of British colonial laws, and particularly those that governed status (e.g. native or non-native) and land tenure. As described above, land is an especially volatile issue in Kenya and “potentially explosive” on the Coast; the increased fixity of identity, which defines the Mijikenda and poor Swahili as landless in contrast with Arab and upcountry as landowners, has a peculiar effect on political mobilization and violence in the region. Arabs, the Swahili and the Mijikenda are increasingly viewing themselves as an indigenous collective entity that has been marginalized by successive postcolonial governments. In instances of violence, such as the 1997 pre-election episode of violence in Coast Province, this indigenous collective entity lashed out against upcountry Kenyans as the relevant “Other.” However, many upcountry Kenyans living in Coast Province exist at a similar level of wealth as fellow Mijikenda and poor Swahili and are also starting to identify as marginalized coastal residents. It remains to be seen if the exclusionary practices of Kenya’s central government will be enough of an impetus to unite coastal residents by virtue of living in a marginalized region, and if separatist groups like the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) will be able to capitalize on this expanding support base.

IV. Findings

The findings presented in this chapter are derived from several reports on violence in Kenya's Coast Province, specifically those authored by the Akiwumi Commission, Kenya's Human Rights Commission (KHRC) and Human Rights Watch (HRW). Information gleaned from these reports is supplemented, and at times contradicted, by media coverage of the Coast violence as reported in the *East African Standard* between January 1997 and December 1998.

Revisiting the initial research questions, the aforementioned reports and media coverage were consulted namely to determine: 1) What were the causes of violence in Kenya's Coast region between 1997 and 1998? and, 2) How was the violence characterized? Using Keller's (2014) framework for studying social conflict, the first question was refined to examine both underlying as well as precipitating causes. Using the qualitative process tracing approach and Keller's framework also incorporates the importance of contextual and institutional and/or structural factors as well as the role of agents in explaining social conflict. Similarly, the literature on ethnic conflict provides a lens with which to view the role of agents, as cultural entrepreneurs and/or political brokers (Young, 1976). Lastly, Gurr's (1971) theory of Relative Deprivation provides a foundation for analyzing the context of violence on Kenya's Coast, which is characterized by economic and political marginalization.

Process Tracing (Bennett, 2010), the qualitative research methodology employed in this paper, calls for an analysis that evaluates the evidence according to its contribution to competing hypotheses. As such, this analysis will evaluate findings identified in the literature related to several competing explanations of the relationship between incidents of violence relating generally to political contestation and more specifically to ethnic identity, including: land dispossession, economic marginalization, political manipulation, ethnicity and the indigeneity discourse. This essay advances the argument that the primary cause of violence on Kenya's

Coast was inequity in land ownership, though often manifesting in economic marginalization, and that the violence was characterized by a discourse of indigeneity, positioning the Mijikenda as indigenous and upcountry Kenyans as foreigners. In the following sections, the explanatory significance of each of the competing explanations is discussed and supported with evidence.

Land Dispossession

As discussed in the historical background, land dispossession among coastal residents, and the Mijikenda in particular, originated shortly after the Coast gained Protectorate status and the British attempted to define and formalize land tenure arrangements. The postcolonial governments of Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel arap Moi not only failed to address historical land injustices on Kenya's Coast but exacerbated them by using land as a tool for creating and maintaining patronage networks (Kanyinga, 2000; Ndungu, 2006; Southall, 2005). Though Kenyatta set the precedent for allocating land for political patronage, it became Moi's primary means of securing and maintaining support amidst the freezing of foreign aid in the 1980s (Ndungu, 2006, p. 4). Furthermore, it should be noted that the Ndungu Commission found that the majority of illegal land allocations clustered around the general elections of 1992, 1997 and 2002, highlighting lands political utility (Ndungu, 2006, p. 4; Southall, 2005, p. 147).

In the Akiwumi Commission Report (2002), a disparity in land ownership on the Coast is acknowledged yet explicitly rejected as cause for violence. The Report asserts, "...demonstrating that land was not the real cause of tribal clashes at the Coast, the ordinary upcountry people who were the victims of the tribal clashes, were not the allottees of valuable beach plots" (p. 3). While it is true that ordinary upcountry as well as coastal residents suffered in the wake of the Likoni violence, the logic falls short of dismissing land as an important contributing factor to violence. Furthermore, the authors note that coastal residents sold their land to upcountry people,

insinuating that there is no legitimate basis to complaints regarding disparities in land ownership. However, scholars of Coast history would disagree with the active nature implied in “selling” land; impoverished coastal often had few alternatives to selling their land. KHRC (1997) reported that interviews with previous landowners revealed, “their decision to sell their pieces of land was based less on economic calculation than on sheer economic desperation” (p.15). With respect to context, Human Rights Watch (2002) also recognized that, “beach-front properties and other valuable land, including Mijikenda ancestral land, were in the lands of wealthy foreigners and politically connected Kenyans, some of whom allegedly obtain the deeds irregularly in a practice known as land-grabbing” (p. 25).

In the *East African Standard's* coverage of the Coast, land dispossession is a regular feature. In February 1997, the *Standard* reported that Kwale residents were appealing the grabbing of forestland alleged to contain a Kaya shrine to a private developer (February 8, p. 3). Similarly, in March 1997, seven cars were burned in Kwale in response to the allotment of land housing an anxiety mosque to a private developer wishing to construct a golf course (Standard Correspondent, March 1, p. 1-2). And yet again, in April 1997, the *Standard* reported that land in Mombasa allocated to an influential cabinet minister had been sold to a private developer, including land on which a primary school serving 800 students was built (Standard Correspondent, April 11, 1997, p. 7). Only days before the Likoni attack in August 1997, residents in Kilifi threatened violence regarding the grabbing of beachfront property; the residents' spokesperson, Hemed Mohammed Karema, insinuated that the Kilifi administration might have failed to address their concerns due to the involvement of a well-connected individual (Standard Correspondent, August 9, 1997, p. 5).

In an article by the Standard Team entitled, “Likoni Chaos Explained,” land was considered a primary contributing factor to the Likoni violence; the authors wrote, “coastal indigenous people armed themselves to protest the alleged inequitable distribution of land allegedly in favour of ‘upcountry people’” (Standard Team, April 22, 1998, p. 1-2). In another article, “Stop this Violence, say Coast MPs”, authors Phillip Mwakio (and Agencies) reported that Shirikisho Area MP Suleiman Shakombo said, “...land was the crucial issue in Likoni saying many of the locals who are settled there are squatters” (April 21, p. 1-2). And finally, on July 22, in an article entitled “Witchdoctor Linked to Tribal Clashes,” Deputy Commissioner of Police Japheth Mwanja said that a witchdoctor “told the Digos that killing of upcountry people was the only way to recover their (Coast people) ancestral land from the grabbers” (Kaona, 1998, p. 1,3). In nearly every article consulted in this study that discussed the causes of the Likoni violence and its aftermath, land dispossession was mentioned as a contributing factor, and at the very least alongside economic marginalization.

Economic Marginalization

Economic marginalization as a contributing factor to the Likoni violence is often expressed in terms of youth unemployment and discrimination in hiring, particularly in the tourism industry. The Akiwumi Commission (2002) conceded that coastal people were estimated to own fewer than 20% of the Coast’s commercial and business sector, and that profits from tourism rarely supported development in the Province at-large. With respect to unemployment, the Akiwumi Commission blamed the Muslim majority’s illiteracy as well as preferential hiring practices based on ethnicity among upcountry business owners. Furthermore, the Akiwumi Report (2002) highlights the perception of coastal people as “lazy and undisciplined” as a contributing factor in employment discrimination (p. 2). KHRC (1997) also found these attitudes

to be pervasive among business owners (p.15-16). Economic marginalization is also reflected in, and reproduced by, disparities in the quality of educational systems on the Coast compared with other areas in Kenya. In 1997, the Coast Province only registered two schools in Kenya's top one hundred. (Kamotho, March 1, 1997, p. 3).

On January 17, 1998 the alleged Likoni Raiders held a press conference to make their demands clear; among them, the Raiders requested, "That the Government address the serious unemployment problem among Coast youths who do not enjoy the local resources and business in the region the same way as those from upcountry" (Standard Correspondent, Jan 18, 1998, p. 5). Similarly, a survivor of the Likoni violence on August 13, 1997 recounted that before his attacked, he was asked, "why the workers came all the way from upcountry to take up all the opportunities at the coast" (Patrick Beja, Feb 10, 1998, p. 17). In an article from April 22, 1998 entitled, "Likoni Violence Explained," Minister Marsden Madoka, from the Office of the President, said, "coastal people also wanted to protest against the domination of job opportunities and businesses by up country people at the expensive of indigenous coastal people" (Standard Team, p. 2).

The examples above demonstrate the sense of economic marginalization perceived among coastal residents, and how it is often framed relative to upcountry migrants thus supporting Gurr's (1971) theory of Relative Deprivation (RD). Aspirational RD, which results from exposure to something perceived as better (e.g. a lifestyle), characterizes Kenya's Coast. According to Gurr (1971), the sequence of events that lead to political violence is as follows: "the development of discontent, the politicization of that discontent and finally its actualization in violence action against political objects and actors" (p. 12-13). Applied to Kenya's Coast, the development of discontent flourished among the Mijikenda prior to Kenya's independence

through late 1997 and beyond owing to land dispossession, codified by the Kenya Colony and Protectorate in the early 1900s and used as a political tool by postcolonial governments ever since. Local politicians, those in favor of KANU as well as in opposition, facilitated the politicization of that discontent. However, KANU politicians capitalized on the politicized discontent in order to disrupt opposition support in Coast areas heavily populated by upcountry Kenyans (HRW, 2002).

Political Manipulation

Young (1976; Fearon and Laitin, 2000) describes political brokers as actors that contribute to the construction of the idea of grievances based on ethnic identity by simplifying and manipulating cultural references to provoke conflict. On the Coast, political brokers served KANU interests by “exploit[ing] the existing and latent animosity which the coastal people might have, against the upcountry inhabitants which had hitherto, not led to any violence, so that the former can intimidate or drive away the latter from voting for the opposition parties” (Akiwumi Commission, 2002, p. 3). HRW (2002) concluded, “pro-majimbo KANU politicians helped make the upcountry people residing among them, rather than their own leaders and the government, the focus of local anger” (p. 25). For example, only three days before the Likoni attack, an Akiwumi Commission witness recalled KANU MP Boy Juma Boy holding a campaign meeting in which he blamed upcountry Kenyans for coastal unemployment and poverty, and called for *majimbo* (p. 26). The report concluded that other KANU politicians, like Rashid Sajjad, supported Coast violence financially (Akiwumi Commission, 2002).

Majimbo featured prominently the *East African Standard*'s coverage of Coast politics and violence. In an article entitled, “What is this ‘Majimbo’ thing?” Members of Parliament (MPs) discussed their understanding of *majimbo* in Kenya. Namely, the MPs cited confusion

between the meaning of *majimbo*, federalism and devolution. MPs were concerned that *majimbo* will solidify economic marginalization in some areas, and that only Nairobi and Central would be viable entities. MP Adan Keynan (Wajir West, Safina) said, “They [Kenyans] are all thinking of ethnic-oriented *majimbo* rather than a conception of an economy-oriented policy” (p. 21). However, on the Coast, Minister Shariff Nassir framed *majimbo* as the only political system capable of “spur[ring] development in the Coast region and protect[ing] the rights of the area residents” (Standard Correspondent, June 15, 1998, p. 4). Nassir also credited *majimbo* as a means to care for the poor, invoking the name and memory of Coast politician Ronald Ngala. Furthermore, in at least one article, the Likoni raiders were referred to as “militant *majimbo* raiders” (Standard Reporters et al., August 20, 1997, p. 2).

HRW (2002) defined *majimbo* as ethnic federalism and, “as it is known ordinarily, also means the displacement of non-indigenous communities from their region to wherever they came from” (p. 20). HRW identified the resurgence of *majimbo* political rhetoric as coinciding with the return of multiparty elections, particularly among Kalenjin and Maasai politicians in the Rift Valley (p. 20). KHRC (1997) also located renewed calls for *majimbo* with the return to multiparty elections, specifically attributing it to “KANU hawks...to intimidate advocates of political pluralism and undermine their legitimate cause” (p. 6). On the Coast, the Akiwumi Commission (2002) acknowledged contextual factors leading to “the desire for the Digo and coastal people in general, to have greater control in their region, over their own socioeconomic and political destiny” (p. 3). Furthermore, HRW (2002) reported that raiders were recruited with explicit plans to bring *majimbo* to the Coast (p. 30).

Given Kenya’s security forces’ excessively poor response to violence in the Coast region, HRW (2002) was compelled to ask: “Complicity or Incompetence?” (p. 39). To begin, HRW and

others questioned the failure to act on early warnings, including those from Roshanali Karmali Pradhan in May and August of 1997. Specifically, Pradhan sent letters to several police stations and influential provincial and district level officials complaining of suspicious activity by armed men on his farm (p. 39-40). HRW (2002) also questioned the spontaneous reshuffling of security personnel in September 1997, hesitancy to investigate areas suspected of harboring raiders and a general inability to protect coastal residents from raids through December 1998 (p. 42-47). The Akiwumi Commission (2002) stated, “We cannot help but come to the conclusion from the evidence that we had, that the senior most members of the Police Force and the Provincial Administrated added and abetted the clashes at the Coast...The politicians at the Coast were also involved in the attacks again upcountry people and should be investigated” (p. 39)

Identity and the Indigeneity Discourse

This essay understands identity, particularly ethnic identity, to be socially constructed; meaning, it is fluid, intermittent and situational (Kasfir, 1979, p. 365). Identity is also multilayered, and activated by circumstance as well as personal preference (Joireman, 2004; Nagel, 1986). The violence in Likoni and its aftermath throughout Kenya’s Coast Province inspired several layers of identity for participants, those who organized and executed violent acts, and victims alike.

For those who organized the violence, local politicians acting as political brokers, identification occurred primarily through a political lens: KANU party membership. Yet to appeal to the masses they hoped to mobilize, political brokers also identified as coastal and/or part of a particular ethnic group, such as the Digo or Giriama. Perpetrators of the violence identified as primarily Digo, Muslim, youth, coastal, unemployed and politically marginalized.

The victims were largely from upcountry, belonging to ethnic groups such as the Luo, Luhya, Kamba and Kikuyu, and identified as migrants, migrant workers and overrepresented in government positions throughout the Coast.

Underlying the identities employed in Likoni and the Coast at-large was the idea of indigeneity, so that the conflict became framed as a struggle between coastal and upcountry Kenyans, between the indigenous and the foreigner. Based on the literature and context of the evidence, indigeneity can be understood to mean claims of entitlement based on origin in a given area. In the following examples, the descriptor indigenous is often invoked to refer to coastal people in general; particular ethnic groups and/or links to land claims specifically.

Several months prior to the Likoni incident, the *East African Standard* covered an eerily foreshadowing, small-scale attack in which one woman was killed and several kiosks destroyed. According to witnesses, the assailants “wanted indigenous Coast people left to run their affairs” (Standard Reporter and Correspondent, April 8, 1997, p. 3). KHRC (1997) collected testimony of threats dating back to May 1997; interviewees recalled warnings that they would be leaving their homes and voting in their home areas (p. 19).

Within days of the August 13, 1997 Likoni attack, the *East African Standard* reported on the targeting of upcountry Kenyans by armed raiders; “survivors quoted attackers as saying they would continue until all ‘foreigners’ from upcountry leave” (Standard Team, August 18, 1997, p. 2, 4). Witnesses said that the raiders verified the ethnicity of potential victims by calling out a Digo greeting and waiting to see how it was answered (HRW, 2002, p. 36). On the night of August 13, 1997 impromptu roadblocks were constructed so that raiders could verify the ethnicity and home district of passerby via national identity cards; those deemed to be “indigenous coast people” were allowed to pass (Beja, February 10, 1998, p. 16-17).

Leaflets from “Mpambazuko wa Watu wa Pwani,” translated to mean “Uprising of the Coast People,” were also distributed in areas affected by violence warning “‘upcountry people’ to leave the Coast” (Standard Team, August 18, 1997, p. 2, 4). HRW (2002, p. 38) quoted a leaflet stating, “‘The time has come for us original inhabitants of the coast to claim what is rightly ours. We must remove these invaders from our land.’” Threatening leaflets also appeared at a Likoni church-turned-refugee camp in early September (Beja, September 3, 1997, p. 16-17). In response, roughly 100,000 upcountry Kenyans fled the Coast, putting a major strain on transportation services (Standard Team, August 18, 1997, p. 2). Others, however, asserted their belonging; one speaker from the Luo community was quoted, “We are all Coast people although some of us originate from up-country. There are those among us who were born here and have no interests in up-country” (Standard Reporters et al., August 20, 1997, p. 2, 3).

V. Conclusion

The Akiwumi Commission (2002), Human Rights Watch (2002) and Kenya’s Human Rights Commission (1997) concluded that the violence in Likoni and its aftermath throughout the Coast region was politically-motivated, engineered by KANU politicians to disrupt opposition voting in the December 1997 election.

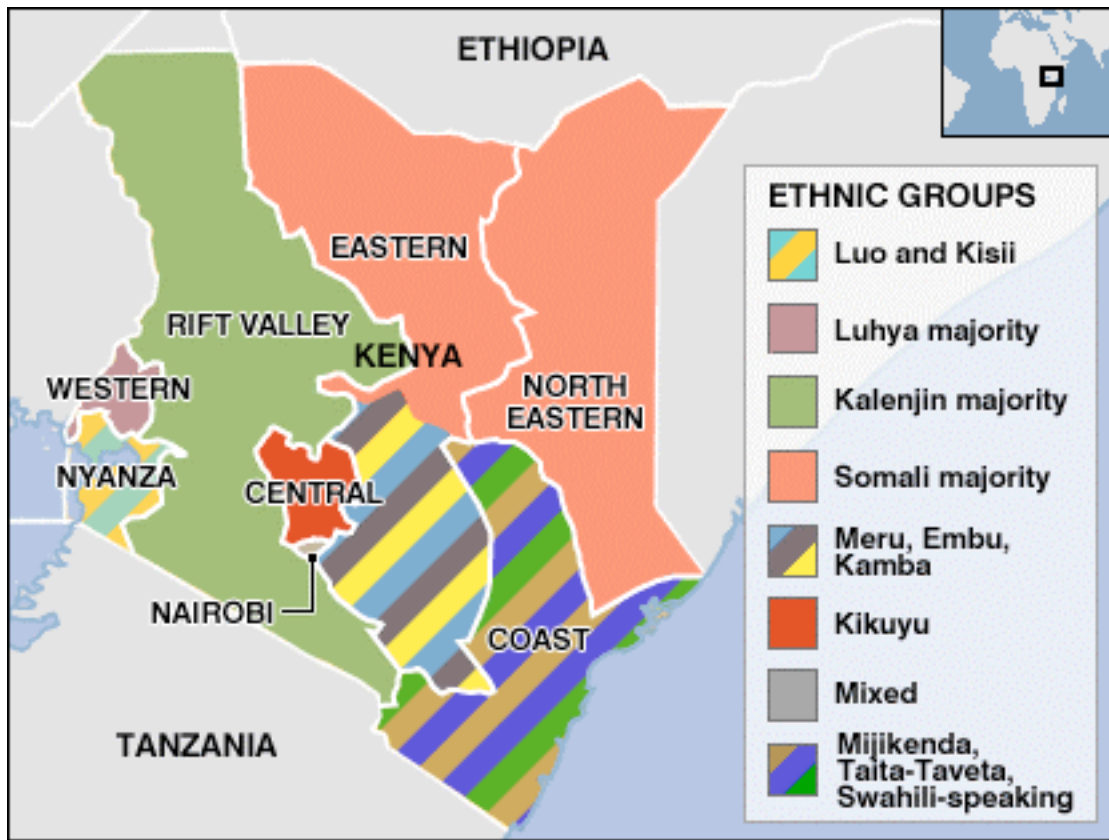
Revisiting the initial research questions, this essay attempted to determine: 1) The causes of violence in Kenya’s Coast region between 1997 and 1998? And, 2) The characterization and impact of the violence. By all accounts, each of the competing explanations described above – land dispossession, economic marginalization, the indigeneity discourse and political manipulation – played a role in facilitating pre-election violence on the Coast in 1997. Grievances regarding perceived land dispossession among coastal residents, codified in law by the British Colony and Protectorate nearly a century prior to the Likoni attack, served as a

powerful resource for ethnic entrepreneurs and political brokers. Using *majimbo* political rhetoric allowed ethnic entrepreneurs and political brokers to tie ethnicity to land and entitlement through a discourse of indigeneity, framing the Mijikenda as indigenous to the Coast and pitting them against upcountry migrants framed as foreigners to the region. KANU politicians were further able to take advantage of the expanded arena of political competition offered by multiparty politics to exploit a longstanding sense of political and economic marginalization on the Coast. This exploitation took the form of inflammatory speech in campaign meetings and the distribution of leaflets inciting violence as well as more tangible forms of facilitating violence, including oathing, training and funding the raiders.

Despite the possible triggers for the Likoni attack, rumored to be the arrest of an ex-naval officer and trainer of the raiders, the conditions for violence on Kenya's Coast existed well before August 1997 (KHRC, 1997, p. 26). Owing to a particular blend of factors, including the return to multiparty politics, disparities in land ownership and economic opportunities, KANU politicians were able to capitalize on coastal marginalization for violent ends and ultimately, an electoral success. Given the underlying causes of pre-election violence on Kenya's Coast in 1997 remain unaddressed, their potential to resurface violently remains. Absent of government intervention, coastal residents have taken to redefining scarce resources – land, employment and political representation – according to a discourse of indigeneity. In practice, indigeneity means privileging the citizenship rights of those considered indigenous to the region (e.g. Mijikenda) and subverting those considered foreigners (e.g. upcountry migrants), regardless of place of birth or residency. In times of electoral contestation, indigeneity is often accompanied by violence, what Dunn (2009) considers the surest way to solve indigeneity's inherent instability and uncertainty. Although Kenya's Coast was largely spared violence following December 2007's

General Election, the indigeneity discourse articulated in 1997 continues to inform local politics. For example, the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), a separatist group based in Mombasa advocating for Coastal secession based on colonial-era treaties, was established in 2008. Unsuccessfully, the MRC called for a boycott of the December 2012 General Election. Despite violent responses from the Kenyan government, the MRC is gaining support throughout Coast based on their claims of regional marginalization (Goldsmith, 2011). Increasingly, the MRC's support is coming from groups not necessarily understood to be "indigenous" but that have resided on the Coast long-term and can identify with regional marginalization in terms of the economy and political representation. As such, the MRC is only one example of the constant redefinition of the indigeneity discourse. The implications of the indigeneity discourse for political mobilization and violence are not only relevant to Kenya but throughout sub-Saharan Africa, and particularly in areas characterized by resource scarcity. In these areas, it can be expected that entitlement to limited resources, including land, employment and political representation, will be defined by increasingly narrow conceptualizations of indigeneity and at times, enforced by violence.

APPENDIX A: Map of Kenya's Provinces, Main Ethnic Groups



(BBC, January 8, 2008)

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