

Essay 3

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Philomena Njeri Mwaura

Civic Driven Change ~ Spirituality, Religion and Faith

Introduction

This article postulates that religion and faith are crucial to the process of development for they are part of a people's worldview which is central to apprehending reality and constructing positive change. In post-colonial Africa, the engagement of culture in nation building and development has been part of ideological and political movements. Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya for example used political symbolisms drawn from traditional leadership domains to craft the new nations. Underlying this borrowing was the conviction of the importance of traditional political values in nation building. Today, we are still confronted with the same question of whether religion, faith and cultural values can be an asset or a liability for development.

It has been reiterated in development discourse that there can be no transformative change in the developing world unless the people themselves take the initiative from the perspective of their own beliefs, values and wisdom. The emphasis here is on a people's ethic as a driving force of any form of growth. Religions like Christianity, Islam and African Religion have been perceived in Africa like elsewhere, as embodying social and spiritual resources that are fundamental to civic configurations and developmental purposes.

The Christian Church has, for example, been part of civil society and an active participant in defending its members and citizenry against state extremisms, advocating for human rights and raising political consciousness. It has given a voice which is capable of being an engine of growth and change. However, the Christian Church and other religions are differentiated and tend to reflect the different nature of the terrains on which the central political and social conflicts are being challenged. Some Christian churches have paradoxically

also played the role of opposing political reform by supporting oppressive regimes either overtly or by their silence. This indicates the ambiguous political role that Christianity has played in Africa in recent political posturing. On the other hand, the African world view also embodies in itself certain practices and beliefs that are inimical to transformative development. This has been referred to as the cultural restraint which limits the development of an efficient national struggle. Such constraints are the belief in witchcraft, sorcery and fear of ancestral spirits.

This essay is based on the premise that religious beliefs, and values as embodied in Christianity and indigenous African religions, determine civic arrangements within and between societies. It will explore these core values, beliefs and practices that have over time shaped people's identities in Africa and how they can be harnessed to raise social, political and economic consciousness and subsequently change that which is driven by the people.

We therefore seek answers to the following questions: Are churches conscientized enough to educate their people on how to engage the public space? Does civil society (the churches included) in its approach to public issues operate within the people's worldview? What is this worldview and what informs it? What values, beliefs and practices are embodied in it and how can they inform development and political processes in Africa? How is power conceptualized and utilized in this worldview? In order to engage in these issues and to show the processes that are significant for civic agency to enhance social justice and stability; it will be necessary to clarify terms and ideas like worldview, civic agency, civil society and how it defines itself and what constitutes social change.

I am also concerned with the issue of what capacity civil society has to promote agency among those it claims to speak for. My contention is that a strong disconnect exists between claim making by civil society and its achievements and effectiveness even when churches are involved. The question is, who provides

the space in which organizing and consciousness-raising is done and how should it be done without being patronizing and paternalistic? Illustrations in this essay will be drawn from the Kenyan context especially the churches' struggle for democratic space in the last twenty years. Since my background is shaped by discourse within religion and theology, this will be my point of departure.

Worldview, religion and faith

In evaluating the role of religion in development it is important to make a distinction between system and content of religion and spirituality. System refers to the religious institutions and official representation as well as religious groups and movements. Religion is experienced by a community of believers through rituals, symbols and practices that are usually forms of communication with the divine as well as through more contemplative practices that enhance one's awareness of the presence of God. Content, on the other hand, is the spiritual or faith dimension of religion that deals with social and individual behaviour. This enables believers to organize their daily lives and the world. It also connects people through rituals and teachings to what is considered inviolable and sacrosanct. Through faith, believers subject themselves to the control and guidance of revealed truth.

Spirituality on the other hand implies a dynamic life-giving energy that can arise both collectively and individually in connection with a personal quest for the true purpose, meaning or reality of life. It also refers to an existential experience that is described by individuals as 'personal transformation'. Spiritual experience is intuitive and not rational. Spirituality is the core of a religious framework without which it is reduced to formalisms. Spirituality is a significant driver of change, for it underscores and informs the development interventions and initiatives of faith-based organizations in education, health, agriculture, human rights and social justice. Religion has been playing a pivotal role in social transformation of African societies. Inter-religious and ecumenical initiatives have for example transformed situations of conflict into contexts of dialogue and understanding. In a world characterized by poverty, oppression and anonymity, individuals are drawn by the sense of community in religion and the comfort and hope provided by faith. If it is not to be destructive, economic and political development calls for a clearer vision of the purpose of human existence such as faith can provide.

What constitutes worldview and how is religion related to it? According to Kraft, 'worldview is the central systemization of conceptions of reality to which the members of a society assent (largely unconsciously) and from which stems their value system.'¹ Worldview lies at the heart of culture, touching, interacting with and strongly influencing every aspect of culture. Worldview is transmitted through socialization and societal members are bound to interpret the world in terms of the conceptual system of that culture. If, for example, a person conceives

of disease as emanating from the activities of personal malevolent spirits, such a person will ordinarily learn to perceive any disease in her/his experience to be so caused.

How do world views evolve? It presumably originates from agreements by members of a group over time about perceptions of reality and how they should regard and react towards reality. This implies that worldview does change due to internal and external dynamics within society and hence it would be superfluous to insist in terms of development activities on holding on to traditions and especially those that perpetuate exclusion in terms of race, class or gender. But is there a core of culture that is relatively invariable and on which identities of communities are based? We shall turn to this later; first we will examine the functions of a worldview.

A people's worldview is its basic model of reality and it serves several functions including; explaining how and why things are the way they are and why they continue or change. It embodies for people, whether explicitly or implicitly, the basic assumptions concerning the ultimate things on which they base their lives. It also serves as an evaluation tool judging and validating experience. The 'basic institutions, values and goals of a society are ethnocentrically evaluated as best and therefore sanctioned by the worldview of a culture as a sub-culture.'² Therefore all important and valued behaviour, whether of a dominant group or of other groups, whether deemed economic, political, social, scientific, etc. is judged in terms of a culture's worldview assumptions, beliefs, values, meanings and sanctions. A worldview also provides psychological reinforcement for a group in times of life's crises. This reinforcement usually takes the form of ritual or ceremony in which many people participate.

A worldview provides security and support for the behaviour of the group in a world that appears to be insurmountable. Worldview also serves an integrating function; it systematizes and orders people's perceptions of reality in an overall design. It also filters out most glimpses of reality that do not conform to the beliefs concerning the way that reality should be.

It is worth noting that a group's worldview does not completely determine the perception of all its members at all times. People occasionally shift their perceptions of reality thus deviating from the conditioned perspective. They change in one or more conceptual modes and reinterpret their perceptions. This results in groups altering their conceptual structuring. These transformations occur slowly or may be induced by rapid social changes. Where changes are destructive, worldviews have inherently in them the capacity to adapt. By adjusting their worldview, people devise means for resolving conflict and reducing cultural dissonance. Worldviews have a resilient quality by means of which people reconcile apparently irreconcilable differences between old understandings and new ones. Society finds it easier to reconcile values than to reorganize itself. This point is important for any efforts to generate transformative change and for the role of citizens in this process. Human beings are not captives of culture

though they are its product. They have free will and reason which are crucial to their interpretation of reality. Where does religion come in a worldview?

Religion underpins a society's worldview. It is said to hold the key in formulating a society's worldview, regulating the way individuals perceive society and their specific roles in it. It specifies particular norms and values which themselves control private and public life. These norms are enjoined on people as requirements of a higher social order. Religion is one of the powerful, deeply felt and influential forces in human society, especially in Africa. As an outstanding component of the social structure, it shapes people's relationships, responses and reactions which influence the individuals, family and community and beyond. Nevertheless, other factors such as people's experiences, jobs, economic status and markets also influence people's world-views.

Religion provides powerful emotional symbols of group identity which bring people together even in the midst of great opposition. Religion has the potential to liberate, empower and restore people's dignity. It supplies a special kind of moral anchorage which society yearns for. It provides meaning to life offering people hope, faith, and courage to overcome life's obstacles. Embedded in the core of religion is the capacity to mobilize society and individuals for positive action. I know defining religion is problematic for it incorporates a wide range of perspectives; but as Ellis and Ter Haar (2007) demonstrate, the most appropriate approach is to proceed from local epistemologies. This implies how people themselves view their world and explain their reality.

In Kenya and elsewhere in Africa, religious institutions and leaders have been instrumental in championing democratic change, human rights and even advancing a type of Christian Democracy based on the core of the Gospel.³ Ogbu Kalu in an insightful article on 'Faith and Politics in Africa' observes that 'Religion is intricately woven into the fabric of politics and provides the compelling touchstone of legitimacy or love of the ruler by the ruled; the motive for exercising power; reason to be obeyed; the determinant of the moral standards and style of power and the engine that moves governance.'⁴

Ellis and Ter Haar also argue that most Africans 'understand and interpret the world through the prism of religion. Religion(...)is a mode of apprehending reality.'⁵ The linkage between culture, worldview, and ecology has protected the centrality of religion in non-western contexts including Africa. Religion has always been influenced by these forces and in turn influenced them. As Kalu observes, the worldview in African communities is charismatic as gods operate in the sky, land, sea and ancestral world. They destroy the boundaries between the sacred and the profane; sacralize reality⁶ and give religious value to every day activities.⁷

African epistemologies have two basic concepts whose understanding is crucial to effective interventions in development and politics; this is the notion of the interconnectedness of reality material and non material. Both

are viewed as two sides of the same coin. Hence even to talk of religion/faith and development or politics would be absurd. Bujo (1998) aptly observes that the African still lives in a web of relationships that are in continual interaction. He says: '(...) according to African people's beliefs, not only human beings influence each other, but all forces possess a causal and ontological interdependence (...) all things can be traced to the highest being, who created everything.'⁸ The Cartesian worldview propounded by the modernization enterprise has therefore conflicted with the African worldview.

The other concept is what has been identified as the 'spirit idiom'. This is the belief that the world is the arena where spirits operate influencing the life of communities and individuals. Promotion of well-being for individuals and communities is predicated on maintaining an ontological balance between all the realms of being. These beliefs exist elsewhere but the crucial point is that the spirit *language* is used to image happenings in the secular world like economic decline and its attendant consequences like poverty and poor governance or loss of legitimacy. This language persists in Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches' rhetoric which displays a continuation rather than rupture with this world view. I argue that it is important to incorporate this epistemology in developing any theory social or political of grappling with developmental issues; in the quest for explanatory or interventionist models.

It has been observed that in Africa, the political realm is sacralized or enchanted and politics is a religious matter precisely because it is a moral performance. It is about the undergirding values that determine how governance is executed or power is wielded in the task of governing. Authority is a legitimized or delegated power. Every ruler is situated in a subsidiary entity. So the questions of power are always: who wields power, for whom and to what end? Implicit in these views is the moral dimension of power which still asserts itself in diverse ways. There is however always the question of the source of authority and obligation.

Conceptualizing Civil Society

The concept of civil society and its role in promoting civic agency and empowerment as significant aspects of democratization in Africa has generated much interest. It has been viewed as having the potential to transform African politics to greater democracy. Others are hesitant to give it such accolades due to its fragmented nature and being used to serve particular interests inside and outside the state. For the purposes of this essay, we shall view civil society as entailing 'organized and social life that is voluntary, self perpetuating and, though bound by a legal order, is beyond state control.'⁹ Civil society is a range of contradicting possibilities replete with conflict between classes, ethnicities, race, gender and other interests.

Such an analysis calls for taking into consideration questions such as: What is the meaning of democracy

4 from the point of view of various classes and groups? What specific interests are organizing behind the general demand for democracy? Overall in Africa, civil society has the role of political organizing, educating and mobilizing the masses. It is assumed that the more the members of society organize themselves into groups to advance their particular interests, the less likely the state can function in an autonomous and unaccountable manner. This, as Nyang'oro (2000) points out, makes civil society act as a bulwark against unbridled state power.¹⁰ Civil society is therefore an overarching concept that subsumes within it a variety of social formations including social movements, NGOs, faith-based organization and/or religious institutions, trade unions, professional associations, student organizations, and other civic organizations.

What are civic, civic agency, civic power, civic community, and civic culture? For me these concepts underscore the ideas and space in which citizens (human beings, members of a community), participate in public affairs not as passive recipients of state or organizational goals and programmes but as active collaborators. The interactions are marked by norms of civic engagement like trust, reciprocity, collective action, and the acknowledgement that people in their cultural contexts have the resources and power to change their circumstances. I find Harry Boyte's definition of 'civic agency' very comprehensive and it aptly captures my own perception of the concept. He defines it as the ability of ordinary people to change the conditions of their lives through creating tools to develop this ability. Fundamental to this understanding is the notion that people have an idea of what constitutes the good life and their culture and spirituality gives them a sense of self worth and dignity. The knowledge of who they are gives them the confidence to get organized, to take on leadership roles, to think up new initiatives and to challenge oppressive power structures.

Central to actualizing this is the idea of civic will. This is the link between public opinion and political will. It is argued that where public opinion cries out for significant change, political will lacks from the political class to address or effect any changes. Civic will provides a constituency for change that cannot be brushed aside by political forces. The initiative for creating civic will can come from elected leaders, civil society or ordinary citizens. Civic will can create and sustain necessary change and be a counter to political gridlock and bureaucratic inertia.¹¹ In an attempt to answer the guiding question central to this initiative 'What past and present drivers co-determine civic configurations within and between societies across the world?' I would say liberation struggles for economic, social and political justice all over the world that end up impacting on other regions due to globalization. The transnationalism embodied especially in Pentecostal or Charismatic Christianity in Africa is one such driver whose theology has reshaped the religious scene and is thereby also shaping responses to the impact of economic globalization. Before we explore how the churches have been drivers of change in Kenya, let us

examine some of the values within religion in Africa that are fundamental to identity formation and development.

Religion and Social Change

Social change as a concept is difficult to define as there is no consensus on the standard, extent and degree of change. It is generally agreed that society is always changing. This argument is based on social dynamism which means that society changes constantly even without external factors. For the purpose of our essay, change basically refers to any alteration in the social arrangements of a group or society. Of particular interests to sociologists and development experts is change that results into basic structural arrangements, for example a new basis for social stratification or a change in a group's mode of decision making. Complexities of factors are drivers of change for example, development of modern technology, population growth, cultural innovation, environmental changes, and human action, individual and collective.

Religion which is a factor that influences individual and collective action through social-religious movements and actions of charismatic-prophetic personalities is also a driver of change. How does religion influence change? Well, both positively and negatively. Religion can contribute to maintaining the status quo by invoking the sacred due to believers' respect for tradition and continuity thus inhibiting social change. On the other hand, certain aspects of religion challenge the status quo and encourage change. In particular circumstances, religion can be a profoundly revolutionary force, holding out a vision of how things might or ought to be. Historically, religion has been one of the most important motivations for change because of its particular effectiveness in uniting people's beliefs with actions, their ideas with social lives. McGuire¹² has identified three change-promoting aspects of religion namely: religious ideas, religious leadership, and religious groups.

Religious ideas and meanings indirectly influence society through people whose interests lie in pursuing those ideas. But also by applying these ideas to social action by forming the content of what a group of people wants to do and what their perceived interests are. The liberation struggles in Africa had important impetus for religious ideas. These ideas explained the evils of colonialism or post-colonial states and motivated people to act and change their political and social circumstances. Another aspect that contributes to social change is the capacity of religious meanings to serve as symbols for change. Religious symbols frequently present an image of future change; they create a vision of what could be and suggest to believers their role in bringing about change. Change-oriented symbolism is directed to the social sphere as depicted in ideas of 'the heavenly city', 'new Jerusalem' etc. This desire for change is usually articulated by a charismatic/prophetic, effective leader who can express desired change, motivate followers to act and direct their actions into larger movements for change. Religion has

historically been a major resource for these leaders because religious claims form a potent basis of authority. The prophet is a prototype for change for he or she challenges the status quo, confronts the powers and the established way of doing things, claiming to be taken seriously on religious authority.

The religious group, whether large or small is also a potential force for change. This potential exists because, especially in a religious community, religion is a source of power. Religion is not just an experience of power but it also empowers its adherents. The followers of a charismatic person may feel empowered in their relationship to him or her and with one another. This gives them the courage to apply the proposed new order to their own social world. This kind of power can provide great dynamism. Religious sentiment also has the capacity to unite disparate segments of society thus bridging barriers of ethnicity, race, class, gender, family, nationality etc. In Africa, for example, religion has in many instances provided a joint platform to agitate for reforms. Religious groups are sometimes the only groups that can cut across diverse barriers and unite people for common action.

Religious groups have as part of civil society provided the space and training for political action. The fact that religion in indigenous societies is not differentiated from other elements of society thus permeating all group norms and events; has contributed to its role as a catalyst for change. The more linkages that exist between religion and other institutional spheres, the more likely that religious movements for change are expressions of dissatisfaction with other spheres as well. Even in highly differentiated societies, linkages often exist between institutional spheres. Especially in the Africa of the 1990s, religious groups were the most effective vehicles for change because they were better situated to mobilize change-oriented action. In some situations, religious organizations and leaders became virtually the only available voices of change, due to the cooption or repression of other avenues, such as political parties, the press, labour organizations, universities, students' movements etc.

African Cultural and Religious Resources, for Development/Change

Some of the resources that may be helpful in the construction of civic-driven change and are derived from the African world view revolve around the concepts of humanness (*ubuntu*, *utu*) and interconnectedness (*Urumwe* in *Gikuyu*) which are basic to African and biblical worldviews. *Ubuntu* is a term with its root in *utu* and found in Bantu languages of East and Central Africa. The concept encompasses being human, humane, relational, respect for the dignity of human beings and other creatures and awareness or being cognizant of the connectedness of humanity, the earth and other life forces. This concept is a cultural and ethical worldview and expresses the ontology of a people and their identity. It is expressed in the saying 'I am because you are and because you are, I

am'. This concept is not basically anthropocentric for it includes, as earlier stated, a relationship between human beings and the rest of creation. Its inclusionary power resonates and is affirmed by the biblical view that God created humanity in relationship. This implies that:

'Being human is relational and cooperative (...) the concrete person is a web of interactions, a network of operative relationships. A person is fashioned by historical, cultural, genetic, biological, social and economic infrastructure.

These relationships are not mechanical ones; they do not allow for a competitive individualization which would damage the dignity of the human being. The dignity of human beings emanates from the network of relationships, from being in community. [It] (...) cannot be reduced to a unique competitive and free personal ego'.¹³

In this sense, every person's humanity is ideally articulated through his or her relationship with other human beings, the earth and other creatures of the earth. It expresses respect, empathy and compassion for others. It is a fundamental ontological and epistemological category in the African thought. Being a human being (*muntu*) is the marker of knowledge and truth in concrete areas for example, of politics, religion and law.¹⁴ It also articulates a worldview of humanity as an integral part of the eco-systems that lead to a communal responsibility to sustain life. Human value is based on social, cultural and spiritual criteria. Natural resources are shared on the principle of equity among and between generations. *Ubuntu* has also other attributes which include solidarity and the collective consciousness of the peoples of Africa, the essence of being, communalism and the care and nurture of the earth.

There is an astonishing congruence between these values and those of other religions, such as Islam and Christianity. This is a pointer to the importance of having religious-cultural values as a foundation for any meaningful change in society and which draws on people's resources and will. What have these values got to do with civic-driven change? Since the values such as respect for human beings, human rights, reciprocity, love, compassion, forgiveness, hospitality, and community are common concerns in all religions; when they are internalized these values or principles can empower people by serving as guidelines for their conscience and challenge them to grow and initiate change or be protagonists in their own struggle. How have these values been displayed in the quest for democracy in Africa and particularly in Kenya? What are the obstacles to utilizing them? The answer to these questions will indirectly address the other focus of the consultation that is, 'How intra-action and intra-action with others does civic agency affect the acquisition, distribution and application of power and in whose favour?'

6 Kenya's Struggle for Democracy and the Role of Religious Organizations

Kenya's associational arena is a very vibrant one, with thousands of civil society organizations. The history of associational life is linked to organized voluntary activity in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Kenya. In traditional Kenyan communities, arrangements for the regulation of public affairs depended on horizontal social networks of kinship rights and obligations generated by the structure of the extended family. Within these networks people were guaranteed access to the means of production. People joined associations not only because they were born into them but also to promote their own interests, to enhance their own standing in society and to cope with new and unfamiliar environments. These structures based as they were on kinship relationships were quite egalitarian and promoted social democracy, though this is not to say that there were not marginalized groups within the communities.

Nevertheless, colonialism, based as it was on a subjugation mission and a ruthless exploitative logic, altered this social order. Social, religious and political movements arose in this context advocating for human rights, political self-determination and economic justice. The nature of these and other associations' transactions depended on the extent of group resources and the skills and goods held by other social forces or by the colonial state. The transactions took place primarily along a vertical axis ranging from the local level to the colonial state. The religious and ethnic organizations established strong links with local constituencies while vying with each other and other types of groups for access to avenues of communication with colonial authorities. While the forms of exchange were inherently unequal, these civic organizations occupied a clearly defined minimal middle space in social exchanges. The methods of exchange involved a degree of subordination and incorporation. In terms of politics, two types of approaches can be distinguished during the colonial era, namely secular and theocratic ones. The secular approach was exemplified by the mission churches and in post independent Kenya by the mainline churches comprising of the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant and Anglican Churches. The theocratic approach is evident among the neo-traditional groups for example the Mau Mau, Dini Ya msambwa, Mungiki and Pentecostals. This division is at the core of Kenyan political imagination. Maupeu (2002) argues that since the colonial era, 'religious groups have continued to incarnate or crystallize the identity of various social groups ...they are vectors of ideological identity'.¹⁵ The mission churches during the colonial period maintained a position of separating church and state and were even co-opted into the colonial enterprise due to their involvement in education, evangelization, healthcare, welfare and administration.

During the anti-colonial war of liberation in the 1950s, the churches were deeply involved in the colonial reac-

tion. The mission churches provided cultural explanation of the crises while downplaying the political factors. At the dawn of independence, the churches appeared to be on the side of the loyalists (the elite class who had benefited from the colonial enterprise and the benefits accruing from it and who took over leadership). The churches continued to advocate a separation between the two spheres of power. They were generally acquiescent and rarely spoke up against social and political injustice until the advent of the multiparty era in the 1990s. Before then, in 1969, under pressure from their adherents, they objected to the Gikuyu oath-taking ceremonies that were crafted to elicit Gikuyu support of the Kenyatta presidency following the assassination of a prominent politician. The churches apparently could not disentangle themselves from their relationship with the powers that be despite overtly displaying indifference.

The neo-traditional movements and the African instituted churches viewed political action and rights as not distinct from other aspects of life and as a pre-condition for self-determination. They were basically grassroots movements which rejected colonial hegemony and tried to reconstruct alternative institutions or a return to traditionalism. Due to political factors and dynamics, both internal and external, the nationalistic movements accumulated sufficient political resources and momentum to effect the attainment of political independence.

During Kenya's 'second liberation' in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the churches played an important role. Some religious formations like the evangelicals and African instituted churches remained closely allied to the dictatorship, but the majority of the mainline churches (the former mission churches), spoke out openly against the Moi regime. It was president Moi's hegemonic construction of the state in order to ensure absolute control that propelled the churches to the political scene. To put it briefly, the president reactivated the one party system which his predecessor (Kenyatta) had instituted and consolidated. He did so by absorbing all components of society including sectors of the civil society that proved a threat to his power. Only the churches escaped this manipulation for he wanted them to play an active role in supporting him. Previously, the churches served the purpose of a Christian ideology which was supposed to surpass ethnic and other local identities. Administration support was extended to the churches. This however ended with the injustice that was exercised in the 1988 nominations for the general elections.¹⁶ This was the climax of Moi's authoritarianism, rejected by individual clerics especially from the Anglican and Presbyterian Churches. Joined by lawyers and other Democracy and Governance NGOs that were formed in reaction, and by the churches as institutions, there was a revived claim for multipartyism and constitutional reform.

The churches were seen here as the alternative to opposition parties and they played the role of mobilizing their constituents through education lobbying and advocacy. However, when multiparty democracy was allowed

in 1991 and elections were held in 1992, politicians soon took matters into their own hands and detached themselves from the religious and judicial associations. Between 1993 and 2002, the mainline churches were again in the vanguard of agitation for constitutional reform and enacted a mediating role between the government and citizens. The ousting of Moi and his KANU regime was seen as a victory for civil society and it underlined the power of civic agency. This victory nevertheless left civil society fragmented, especially when part of it was co-opted into the new government. This government also instituted changes and policies directed towards more state intervention in social welfare (free primary education, healthcare, rehabilitation of street children), thus encroaching into the space previously dominated by the churches and rendering them less visible. The political class still regarded the churches as agents of legitimizing their normative programmes towards the nation. Kenya portrays herself as a Christian nation in which about 85 per cent of the population and its leaders are careful to display their Christian dispositions.

This has led to a perception in the minds of the public that President Kibaki's regime from 2002-2007 received the church's favour and support. Hence the churches were less vocal or even silent in the face of abuse of power and failure to develop a national constitution that was acceptable to some in the government and their followers. This culminated in an acrimonious relationship within the government and between it and the opposition that eventually led to the defeat of the draft constitution in a referendum in November 2005 and the disputed national elections of December 2007. This was followed by violence; some of it premeditated some of it spontaneous and still another part, criminal and state instigated. A government of national unity was subsequently created in February 2008 which saw the return of the same faces in both government and opposition sides that stood for repression and disregard for democratic principles. It is not surprising that people ask whether the change promised was just getting more of the same or if it was just a gimmick to get into power and allow the same class to perpetuate itself.

Some civil society members today lament that there was no need to conduct civic education to empower the people prior to the 2007 general elections for in the end people still fell into the trap of politicians. What agency can we say the people in these circumstances exercised? What approach in organizing can ensure that conscientization is transformative?

Unfortunately religion and poverty did play a role in people's responses. For example, voters admitted to having been aware of their right to vote and to do so wisely but poverty led them to vote for the person who bribed them. The argument was that one has a moral obligation to vote for the person 'you eat from', even when one knows that he or she is corrupt. The churches were also perceived to be partisan and to have failed to provide moral leadership during the referendum, elections and the aftermath. They are faced with a credibility crisis despite

their efforts to make amends through ameliorating the humanitarian crises and offering apologies.

All these developments have led to questioning the integrity of civil society whether it is secular or faith based. The power civic agency is supposed to generate is circumscribed by forces within and outside their environment. One can talk of disempowerment of citizens even when they are intellectually aware of their role in change. Structures of domination continue to serve the interests of the political elite and their counterparts elsewhere. This leads me to seek a response to the crucial question: 'What processes are significant for civic agency to structurally enhance social justice and stability, specifically allied to reduction of poverty, inequality and exclusion?' Using Kenya as an example one can argue that the constitutional reform movement in which the church and other sectors of civil society were involved – and the history of social movements – made people realize the existence of injustice, exclusion, and how these are linked to poverty and marginalization. For once in Kenya's history, the people became aware of what ails them and protested but unfortunately their access to power and resources was and is still linked to political patronage.

One of the collaborative faith-based initiatives is what has been referred to as the Ufungamano initiative. It stands out as a collaborative effort by religious leaders of Islam, Christianity and Hindu faiths in commitment to social justice and to accept the right of every Kenyan to take part in the constitutional review process. The Ufungamano initiative comprised more than 52 religious and secular organizations. Finding a common platform to deal with issues affecting the whole society has become the most efficient way to ease tensions between different faiths in Kenya. The initiative was formed when the President mandated the parliament to undertake the review process thus ignoring civil society.

The initiative turned out to be a parallel process and emphasized people's participation. The faith-based initiative thus had a major objective to create a wider base for consultation with civil society and Kenya's citizens. The initiative eventually became a force to reckon with, and the government bowed down to pressure and allowed for a people-driven process in constitutional review. The Parliament in July 2000 passed the Constitution of Kenya Amendment Bill which subsequently provided for the appointment of 15 commissioners charged with the task of reviewing the constitution. Members of this Commission included representatives from various constituencies including faith-based organizations and civil society. This initiative underscores the point that religions are important sources of vision, values as well as primary agents of social change. The spiritual principles and values they inculcate not only form the basis of unifying the worldview, but also serve to motivate individuals and social institutions to act on these principles and use them as standards against which to weigh practical actions.

The vision for a better world is the philosophy that mobilizes people to create better things through collabo-

rative efforts and networks with like-minded social actors. Through organizing and non-violent action to resolve conflicts in society, people rediscover their social power which gives them a sense of their own dignity and moral worth. People always have power which is there waiting to be tapped. In all major world religions and ideologies, power is seen as neither a positive nor a negative concept. From ancient Judaism to contemporary Christianity, from 19th Century Marxism to modern feminism, power is conceived as a facet of human existence. Power while neutral in itself can be dispersed or shared among large numbers of people in the course of their human relationships, or concentrated in the hands of a few people or powerful institutions.

Civic-driven change is propelled by social power and civic agency which is the capacity to organize or control directly or indirectly the behaviour of others through purposeful human action. This power rests on the capacity to mobilize various sources of social power to achieve particular ends. These sources include an authentic cause, human resources, but in particular people to support the wielder of power; skills and knowledge, material resources, ability to manipulate the beliefs of others based on a common faith, nationalism, patriotism or religious belief, charisma of the wielder of power, methods of ensuring obedience to the wielder of power and managing descent. People need to realize that they are contributing and also benefiting from a cause. This way, their civic agency is exercised.

Notes

¹ Charles H. Kraft (1979:53).

² Ibid.: 54.

³ Herve Maupeu (2005).

⁴ Ogbu U. Kalu (2003: 1).

⁵ Stephen Ellis and Gerrie Ter Haar (2007: 387).

⁶ Paul Gifford (1997).

⁷ Kalu (op. cit.: 2).

⁸ Benezet Bujo (1998: 16).

⁹ S.W. Nansong'o (2005: 65-9).

¹⁰ J.E. Nyang'oro (2000: 98).

¹¹ See David, D. Chrislip and Carl E. Larson (1994).

¹² McGuire (1992:221).

¹³ <http://www.crvp.org> (accessed 20 April 2008).

¹⁴ Mogobe B. Ramose (2001). <http://them.polylog.org/3/frm-en.htm,2>

¹⁵ Maupeu (2002:34).

¹⁶ This was the infamous 'queue voting system' which was designed as a process for nominating candidates to vie for parliamentary seats. The exercise was riddled with irregularities that saw genuine and popularly elected candidates losing to unknown newcomers.

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