# 7 Religious tribalism, local morality and violence in Christian Kenya

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## Introduction

In this chapter, we analyze several historical and thematic points of confluence between religion and violence in Kenya, focusing primarily on the country's large Christian majority.[1] In doing so, we are guided by a number of premises. First, we accept that 'religion' – a term by which we understand forms of interaction with spiritual entities, including their binding through witchcraft – is, like politics, a 'world of power', with bearing not only on mindsets but also on action, and may often be utilized aggressively for self-serving aims such as the perpetuation of domination (Ellis and Ter Haar 2004). Second, we accept that religion's attraction and power positions is in ambivalent relations with state-level politics: on the one hand, religion can be a useful resource through which to justify political control, while on the other hand, to the extent that it grants autonomy, it can serve as a counterbalance to political power by mobilizing its often vast constituency, producing appealing myths, narratives and rhetoric that rival those of politicians.

Lastly, we recognize that the religious sphere can be considered both a repertoire of symbolic action, which inscribes meaning and structure into worldly chaos, and a concrete guide for sociopolitical behaviour among believers loyal to this cosmic depiction. This observation derives from the distinction drawn by Clifford Geertz between religion as a 'model of' and a 'model for' the world (2002). We recall that, for Geertz, religious forms are not limited to symbolizing the universe to which they belong and to which they give sense (a model of), but they also offer incentives for action within the world (a model for). To this we add that violence can manifest either directly and overtly (physical violence) or symbolically (Galtung 1990) – better said, psychologically. Focusing on the latter, we recognize – and later elaborate – that psychological violence often finds its way into religion. Moreover, such psychological religious violence is often harnessed for political ends, as evidenced by the Kenyan elite's use of religion to promote their self-serving agendas since independence, and even prior to it: this we call 'religious tribalism', following John Lonsdale's insightful analysis (1994).

We begin by discussing the political register of religious violence – religious tribalism – thus providing a brief historical survey of key moments in the intertwining of religion and violence throughout Kenya's history from colonial times to this day. We then move on to discuss the psychological register of religious violence, focusing in particular on the highly popular neo-Pentecostal movement (e.g., Parsitau 2011, 2012). Here we consider two types of psychological violence: first, the teachings themselves, with their divisive overtone and emphasis on socio-religious exclusion, and second, the common gap between the moral tone of Pentecostal teachings – religious morality – and their common abuse through hypocrisy and deception. Later in the chapter, we flip the image and turn from an institutionalized macro level to the tension between formal teachings and de facto individual practice. We employ the notion of religious *butinage* – a biological reference to the practice of pollination, which we use metaphorically to point at everyday religious mobility – in order to designate the various forms of multidirectional, interdenominational mobility common in Kenya. These acts of mobility we consider a popular mode of political action, and we hypothesize that they can mitigate the employment of religion as an instrument of political violence (religious tribalism) and psychological violence, hence securing a peaceful space of social coexistence.

One clarification should be made from the onset regarding the omission, within this text, of the place of jihadist Islam in contemporary Kenya. An event such as al-Qaeda's 1998 attack on the American embassy in Nairobi – which took the lives of over 200 people, mainly Kenyan nationals – may easily fall into the category of religiously motivated violence. More recently, Kenya's military entanglement in the protracted conflict in Somalia attracted bloody reprisal by the Somalia-based al-Qaeda offshoot of al-Shabaab on Kenyan soil (e.g., Hansen 2013), such as the massacre of 148 students at the Garissa University College in 2015. Harrowing though these attacks were, and timely though the question of Islamist terrorism is, this distinct conflict lies outside the scope of the present chapter. In this text, our focus lies with Kenya's substantial Christian majority, whose religious dominance also pervaded the political-national sphere. It is due to this attention to Christianity, as well as considerations of brevity, that we also avoid discussing Kenyan neo-traditionalist movements, and in particular the well-known and often dreaded Mungiki movement, which has been employing violence to impose its alternative form of citizenship on the Kenyan public (Anderson 2002; Kagwanja 2003; Rasmussen 2010; Maupeu 2002, 2003).

## Religious violence as political tribalism in Kenya

As much as we can extrapolate from the limited historical records, until the arrival of the British in Kenya, the area had not known religious violence as such. Kenya's pre-colonial prophets (Anderson and Johnson 1995) were numerous and diverse in orientation, and predicted a grim future, full

of disasters and incredible events, such as the coming of the 'red people'.[2] And yet they never commanded extraordinary respect and authority, at least not among Kenya's biggest ethnic group, the Kikuyu (Lonsdale 1995; Ambler 1985; Anderson and Johnson 1995; Neckebrouck 1983: 359). This began to change under British colonialism, with the sporadic eruptions of religiously motivated violence led by neotraditional movements.[3] We may consider, for example, the Akorino movements, whose birth at the beginning of the 1930s was accompanied by episodes of millenarian prophecy (Morovich 1997, 2008). However, the most significant intertwinement of religion and politics in colonial Kenya emerged during the Mau Mau civil and anticolonial war. Evocative religious rhetoric was used on both sides, and the intended pacification and 'rehabilitation' of Mau Mau combatants by the British counterinsurgency, known as the 'pipeline' programme, included active evangelization inspired by Christian revivalism and executed by British preachers (Maloba 1993; Elkins 2005; Anderson 2005; Branch 2009).[4]

The trauma of that tragic war contributed to the 'pacification' of the country since its independence in 1963 and until the death of its founding father, Jomo Kenyatta, in 1978.[5] His successor, Daniel arap Moi (1978–2002), masterfully employed the Christian churches as a way of strengthening his grip on power (Maupeu 2001; Gifford 2009). However, by the late 1980s, church leaders joined hands with civic society in rising against the arbitrariness of political violence, seeking to shake off the shackles of a dictatorial regime that flirted with totalitarian tendencies through such practices as tight control over state organs, a rise in the number of political prisoners, and political persecution and surveillance across the country. The 1988 elections, in which voters had to stand in queues behind their candidate, together with the marginalization of certain ethnic groups, scandalized many public figures. Several religious officials had the courage to rise against these actions and to count the abuses of power. In close collaboration with human rights jurists, they supported politicians persecuted for demanding free and fair multiparty elections. Following intense international pressure, President Moi – dangling the threat of ethnic clashes following the loss of single-party control – authorized the development of new political parties created under the patronage of the leading churches. During that period, the opposition used religious structures, with the help of Christian networks, to disseminate its messages. Quickly, however, the political class sought to break away from this religious tutelage, and during the 1992 election campaign, clergymen were clearly left out (Hornsby 2012; Branch 2011; Maupeu 1998).

Throughout 1992 and 1993, the main churches struggled to accommodate nearly 100,000 refugees who had escaped the massacres at the Rift Valley, as 'prophesied' by President Moi. Despite being implicated in the ethnic cleansing, Moi's political elite denied any wrongdoing (Maupeu 1997). The state and the governing elite excelled in ignoring the dramatic situation

across the Rift Valley, while the administration hindered efforts by Christian organizations. Five years later, the agenda and themes of the 1997 electoral campaign were largely dictated by human rights organizations. Beginning in 1996, advocates of the democratic movement mobilized diverse support in order to demand constitutional reforms, attracting support by multiple Protestant and Catholic religious leaders. However, these attempts were unsuccessful, and merely cosmetic constitutional modifications were introduced in 1997 – perfectly tailored to favour the re-election of President Moi (Rutten et al. 2001).

That same year, the movement for political change organized mass protests in order to demand changes in the constitution before votes were to be cast. Once again, opposition politicians joined hands with the churches. Six months before the elections, however, intensifying police persecution severely hampered the mobilization of support, when protesters were beaten inside the compound of Nairobi's Anglican cathedral. Facing many deaths and the risk of sliding into anarchy, the clergy were seized by fear and, together with some opposition leaders, negotiated with the government, resulting in the marginalization of the popular movement's leaders. As a result of this turnaround, Christian organizations ended up alienating an important part of civic society, namely human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and many of the jurists who backed them (Maupeu 2001). In the run-up to the 2002 elections, which were peaceful, the churches made little appearance. Most of them supported the opposition, but their engagement was mainly on the local level, where they organized party primaries and stood behind their candidates during religious ceremonies. Thus, with the exception of the AIC[6] and several Pentecostal movements, the Christian constituency cast their lot with political change. The victory of Mwai Kibaki and his opposition camp was, they felt, theirs too.

The new regime soon co-opted religious leaders by offering them handsomely paid sinecures in various state committees. Well treated by the government and relieved by the supposed return to democracy, many religious leaders turned a blind eye to the failings of the new government (Maupeu et al. 2005). This was made especially clear during the 2007 elections, when religious leaders widely endorsed politicians with whom they had worked before as representatives of the opposition, without taking into consideration these politicians' later turn to political tribalism, corruption and embezzlement. When the bloody events of the 2007/2008 post-election violence swept the nation, taking the lives of up to 1,500 Kenyans, some of the responsibility was laid at the doorstep of religious groups and leaders who, prior to the elections, avidly endorsed their own candidates, fuelling tensions between communities. It has further been suggested that the churches have failed to work as a unifying power and to serve as a bulwark against ethnic violence (Maupeu 2013).

Following these horrific events, the churches went into a period of reflection. The run-up to the 2013 elections, which stood in the shadow of the

International Criminal Court (ICC) inculpation of President Uhuru Kenyatta and Vice President William Ruto for inciting the post-election violence, was marked by various programmes in plea for national unity, some operating from within churches.[7] Many churches initiated prayer sessions and even fasting in a plea for peace,[8] as part of a wider, multi-sectoral public campaign. Despite such non-partisan rhetoric, questions were raised as to how strictly the promises of impartiality were actually kept, throwing into question religious leaders' commitment to help steering the country on a new course.[9] As for politicians themselves, while they may have been more careful this time, many were still using religious platforms to promote their own candidacy even as they were talking of unity. As one interviewee observed in the run-up to the elections, politicians try 'to win votes from the congregation, because all of a sudden you can see all these politicians are going from church to church, all over the country'.[10]

In this respect, it is relevant to mention a trend that, though having its roots in the fight for democratization in the 1990s (Sabar 2002; Knighton 2009), has characterized Kenyan politics post-2000, and even more so since 2007: the growing number of Kenyan clergymen, primarily of the Pentecostal stock, who have been hankering after elected political positions (Cheeseman 2008; Kavulla 2008; Gifford 2009; Droz and Maupeu 2013; Gez and Alvis 2015). In turning to politics, many religious clergy build on their support as charismatic leaders, and importantly, make use of the actual infrastructure of their church and constituency. Thus, for example, when the Nairobi-based Pentecostal bishop Margaret Wanijiru was elected member of parliament for Starehe constituency (northeastern Nairobi), her journey to the top passed through intense recruitment of her church members as voters (Kavulla 2008).[11] In a research we conducted in the run-up to Wanjiru's ultimate unsuccessful election campaign of 2013, we observed the overlap between her religious and political roles. For example, in a church service in January 2013, Wanjiru addressed her congregation by suggesting that 'if you do not know who to vote for, call the numbers on the screen and we will tell you who to vote for' (JIAM morning service, 13 January 2013). Wanjiru saw no conflict between the two roles and continued to serve as the head of her church even after being elected for parliament (Gez and Alvis 2015). Offering perspective on Wanjiru's attitude, in this respect, were the political ambitions of another well-established Pentecostal leader, Bishop Dr. Adoyo of NPC.[12] Running against Wanjiru in 2013 in a low-key campaign that got him a fraction of Wanjiru's (still insufficient) number of votes, Adoyo's stance was starkly different in that he claimed to have resigned from all religious duties before joining politics (Barasa, 21 February 2013). At the same time, however, and similarly to Wanjiru, Adoyo mobilized support from within the church, using church volunteers as campaigners (FamilyTV 12 February 2013).

As we can see from this brief historical outline of the interplay between religion and politics in Kenya from pre-colonial times to the tragedy of the

2007/2008 post-election violence and beyond, religion's mobilization and translation into overt outbursts of violence has been fairly rare. Setting aside the separate category of violence ascribed to actors who associate with Islam, we observe that, even if we take into consideration the instrumentalization of religion for political purposes (religious tribalism), it seldom developed into violent clashes. While we agree with Paul Gifford's observation whereby churches are key actors in Kenyan sectors such as education and health, as well as social and humanitarian aid, and as such, would think twice before risking their privileges vis-à-vis the state (Gifford 2009), we also recognize that religion often played a pacifying role countering political violence, such as when ethnic clashes erupted at the beginning of the 1990s. Three exceptions to this reconciliatory tone come to mind: first, the Akorino episode in the 1930s, which can be considered marginal as it involved only some hundreds of persons. Second, the ambiguous intervention of evangelical preachers during and after the Mau Mau war, when they helped to 'sanitize' imprisoned rebels in the British camps – which Caroline Elkins (2005) called 'British gulags'. And third, the implication of the churches in the 2007 elections and the terrible violence that erupted thereafter. On the whole, in the context of the volatile East African region, Kenya can be considered an impressive counter-example for relations between religion and violence.

## Religious morality and violence within Kenyan Christianity

We shall now turn to consider how religious violence in Kenya plays out at the psychological level – that is to say, beyond the realm of direct exercise of political power. Looking especially at neo-Pentecostal churches, we propose that psychological violence manifests on two levels: first, on the level of the teachings themselves, with their battleground depiction of a 'cosmic war' (Juergensmeyer 2017; Marshall 2016) between Good and Evil, and the break that they invite from traditional practices and from other religious forms; and second, on the level of moral behaviour and the bewildering gap between specific moral teachings and de facto non-adherence thereto by many leaders and lay practitioners. While the gap between teaching and practice is not unique in and of itself, we regard this as a form of psychological violence to the extent that it raises concern over hypocrisy, and the instrumentalization of religion in the service of impunity.[13] Such deviation, we propose, threatens the integrity of the teachings, while abusing a façade whose often nefarious underside violates moral codes and invites anxiety, insecurity and exploitation of various orders.

First, in line with a large body of scholarly work, we identify psychological violence in the divisive teachings of Kenyan neo-Pentecostal preachers, which vilify other religious forms and practices, in line with a clear-cut binary vision of the world that induces a spiritual warfare (Meyer 1999; Anderson 1999; Van de Kamp 2011; Marshall 2009): On the one side, we find the forces of God/Good as represented by true believers, while on

the other side, we find the power of Evil, allied with those of little faith, who may have heard the Good News, but paid no heed. Many Pentecostals believe that Christ is already among us but is hiding, waiting to identify the Just from the false Christians. This is a common millenarian technique, creating suspense and anxiety in waiting for the final war of Armageddon that will eventually grant the Just a thousand years of reign. The impending apocalypse requires believers to mistrust false prophets and to preach the Good News to all people. This incites some preachers to hasten the Second Coming by seeking evangelizations to the furthest corners of the earth, in order to give the Just one last chance to make themselves known. This Pentecostal dualism, and the 'extortion' of appeal for urgent conversions before the End Days, may be conceived as a form of millenarian violence (Droz 2001). This uncompromising theological vision risks breeding intolerance, including violent retaliation against 'infidels' who refuse to accept the Word of God.

In addition, much has been written on the intolerance and violence directed by evangelical and neo-Pentecostal churches against traditional African religious forms, as well as other religious forms including Islam and the Catholic Church, as false and even as the Devil's work (e.g., Meyer 1999). Unsurprisingly, this stigmatization of other religious forms as evil brings about friction even in environments that were once considered tolerant and inclusive. Indeed, beyond their views on other religious forms, these religious puritans are also intolerant towards Christian heterodoxies, which they often brand as 'funny'; in our research, we noted a tendency to attach this epithet to a range of religious forms – both Christian and non-Christian – deemed suspect, as a marker locating them outside the realm of legitimacy. Some maligned groups include 'sect-like churches', 'possible devil worshippers', those 'involved in witchcraft', and those overly engaged with money and the prosperity gospel (Droz 1997; Gez and Droz 2015; Deacon and Lynch 2013). To give one example, we can consider Winners' Chapel – of Nigerian origin but well represented in Kenya – as an example of this struggle for legitimacy through rhetoric of exclusion: while the church tends to employ inflammatory rhetoric against traditional practices and mainline churches, its own legitimacy is itself shaky in the eyes of mainstream Kenyan Pentecostals.

Second, within these very churches, psychological violence is rife through divergence from formal moral teachings in ways deemed hypocritical and even abusive. To be clear, here we move from the divisive nature of these teachings to the immorality of – as Kenyans say – 'preaching water and drinking wine'. To use Erving Goffman's milder language, Kenyan religious leaders and lay practitioners often betray a gap between 'front stage' and 'back stage' social performance (Goffman 1959). While religion is ideally expected to act as a haven of social trust and a moral compass, Kenya is far from unique in its barrage of rumours and scandals that undermine the Pentecostal ideal of a life uncompromisingly infused with godliness and Christian

morality. Stories of men who go to church to pass as devout Christians as a strategy for lulling their target of sexual interest into a false sense of security are examples of how front-stage behaviour can be read as religious moral 'free riding', in which individuals want to maximize gain – the socio-moral capital resulting from passing as highly religious – while trying to avoid participating in paying the costs in the form of moral, ritual, and financial religious injunctions (Anderson and Tollison 1992; Wallis 1991; Hull and Lipford 2010; Cullity 1995). Such manifestations of corrupt religious morals, and Pentecostal hypocrisy in particular, are a favourite topic of public debates, and Kenyans are accustomed to newspaper headlines accompanied by incriminating images of pastors caught pants-down in the company of a married female congregant (Gez and Droz 2015).[14] As Kenyan musician Jaguar sings in a popular song Kigeugeu ('changeable' or 'fickle'), 'I have a pastor who is my neighbour, I trusted my death and my life with him. But when I leave my house, he comes in to "pray" with my wife. . . . Who do I look up to, who should I trust, who? They all turn against me, changing, changing'.

   We can illustrate this using one quick and widely discussed example, that of Fire Gospel Ministries, which exploded on the Kenyan stage in mid-2012. The story emerged through the exposure, on Kenyan national television, of a sex worker from the Nairobi neighbourhood of Embakasi, who accused the head pastor and televangelist at a local Pentecostal denomination called Fire Gospel Ministries, of hiring her and other girls to give false testimonies of miraculous healings, live on the televangelist's programme. In the original exposé and in its series of follow-ups, the televangelist's healing session was played alongside the woman's televised confession, causing a huge stir and public outcry. The dramatic confluence of the sacred church space with the miseries and immorality of prostitution, and the fact that the young female sex worker was the one to come out on top from her confrontation with the established pastor, further explain the story's appeal. In fact, the story has generated so much popular interest that a special DVD containing NTV's original coverage has been circulating in the informal video markets and was selling out quickly. In the aftermath of the scandal, voices abounded demanding strict regulations in order to reign in such self-declared pastors.

   What made the Fire Gospel Ministries saga particularly appealing to the Kenyan public was its strong visual (televised) evidence, which substantiated the suspicions against the pastor and shifted them from the realm of rumours to the realm of full-blown scandals.[15] In most cases, accusations regarding such moral deception remain 'merely' as rumours, which are nonetheless recognized as 'a fundamentally political act with the power to alter social structures' (Fine and Ellis 2010).[16] For the most part, alleged religious transgressions can be classified as rumours, for they are said to be conducted surreptitiously and are seldom proven. In these rare occasions when religious leaders are caught red-handed, scandals attract great interest, such as in the case of a pregnancy outside of marriage, which offers concrete proof

of sexual transgression and turns the transgression from rumour to scandal.[17] Despite sometimes being branded as 'un-Christian' gossip, rumours are especially important in the world of devout Christian performance, in which a person's true colours are often open to guesswork. On the national-political level as well, Kenyan politics has for decades been whirring with rumours that 'explain' political successes and failures and erode the credibility of those in power by associating them with the powers of Evil: Satanists, Chinese witches, Freemasonry and so forth (Smith 2008; Droz 1997; Haugerud 1995; Blunt 2019). The widespread nature of such stories, and the frequent abuse of religious prestige, risk overcasting the potential of devout Christian identity to facilitate trust (Englund 2007).

Such stories of abuse of trust among religious leaders vary greatly, but they share a violent common denominator in that they manipulate authority and power to threaten trusting lay believers' integrity – be it moral, economic or sexual. When revolving around church leaders, such stories tend to involve questions of abuse of office, whether for financial gains (e.g., embezzlement of church funds) or sexual ones (e.g., seducing choir girls). On rare occasions, they receive a truly criminal and hellish face, brought to a chilling extreme in Wahome Mutahi and Wahome Karengo's scathing novella, *The Miracle Merchant* (2003), in which the villain is a successful pastor whose religious enterprise veils a sophisticated international drug cartel and a range of practices including brainwashing and violence, intimidation and even murder.[18]

## Religious *butinage* as a response to political and psychological violence in Kenya

Having discussed religious violence in Kenya as a manifestation of political tribalism and as a symbolic action, in this section we turn to consider the commonplaceness of religious *butinage* or mobility in Kenya on the everyday, individual level. Applying the prism of popular forms of political action (Bayart and Mbembe 1992), we propose that such practice has a strong, if not fully conscious, declarative and even constitutive bearing on Kenyans' sociopolitical orientations.

As we have shown elsewhere (Gez 2018), religious mobility is widespread in Kenya. For example, in the early 2000s, the Nairobi Urban Integration Research Project collected questionnaire data on over 1,500 respondents in the city of Nairobi. Out of this total, 457 respondents (nearly 30%) claimed to have changed their religious denomination at least once since birth (Wafula 2003; Bocquier et al. 2009). Our own data, focused around 87 semi-structured interviews with urban Kenyans in Nairobi and Kisumu, produced higher figures still, with nearly all of our interviewees recounting instances of religious mobility (Gez 2018; Gez et al. 2020). This tendency towards religious mobility may appear counterintuitive if we recognize the degree of commitment with which many Kenyans maintain ties with their

religious institutions, and should therefore be understood in line with the tension between formal institutional prescriptions and de facto lived religion (Mcguire 2008).

Observing the frequency of circular as well as diachronic mobility in Kenya and elsewhere,[19] we developed, together with our colleagues Edio Soares and Jeanne Rey, a new metaphorical framework for understanding religious identity as inherently dynamic (Gez et al. 2017). The metaphor we use is that of *butinage*, which refers to the action of bees as they forage nectar and by that create pollination. To speak of *butinage* is to observe socio-religious practices and to speak of a religious '*manière de faire*' (de Certeau 1980), which includes mobility from one denomination to another, as well as participation in religious events without necessarily being formal members (Birman 1996). As such, the *butinage* perspective counters the dominant Abrahamic dichotomy between believers and unbelievers, and its rejection of fluid and inclusive religious identities as deviant (Soares 2011).

We propose that, from a political perspective, the continuing appeal of religious mobility in Kenya is a manifestation of practitioners' autonomy, a claim to one's 'freedom of faith' – an often used concept in Kenya – in near defiance of churches' claim to exclusivity. To the extent that practitioners are unwilling to forgo their religious autonomy, we observe a grassroots rejection of divisive teachings. Acts of *butinage* reinforce this tendency, as many Kenyans gladly participate in multiple religious services throughout the week, accompanying relatives and acquaintances to religious events where they are not members. When returning to their *shamba* or homestead in the countryside, they often revert to their former religious practices and participate in services offered by their former religious confession, without this posing a serious concern. Such behaviour stands in contrast to the advice of religious leaders who, in adopting a scholastic vision of religious practice (Bourdieu 1997), project on their followers their own wishful thinking of a strict and unwavering institutional commitment.

We can thus interpret this polymorphous religious practice as a way of evading the religious cleavages that can lead to political violence, and of securing a peaceful religious environment. Moreover, this frequent to-and-fro may be considered a non-sectarian, popular mode of religious action – a religious morality – that counters and mitigates 'religious tribalism' that arises in Kenya, as elsewhere. We propose that passing between multiple religious forms in the course of one's lifetime – sometimes through a single week or even day – may cultivate a certain ecumenical tolerance and decrease the chances of mobilizing one's religious resources in the context of political struggles (Droz and Gez 2019). In many cases, Kenyan Christians would show their solidarity with other denominations through mutual invitations that are publicly regarded as legitimate and are commonly associated with tolerance, ecumenical sentiments, and a sense of divinely sanctioned exploration (Gez and Droz 2017). Indeed, considered in light of the two types of psychological

violence presented earlier – aggressive theology and abusive exploitation of power – we propose that *butinage* circularity of multiple practices may tone down exclusivist, triumphalist theologies by disseminating alternatives and cultivating tolerance towards other churches, while helping to assert individual agency and critical distance from religious authority.

However, it should also be taken into consideration that religious *butinage* is not without its limits.[20] Christians, and especially Pentecostals, experience many restrictions on peaceful and inclusive *butinage*, not least due to the dualism inherent in their vision of a cosmic war as described earlier. Indeed, established religious alternatives, most notably Islam,[21] are out of bounds for most Christians. Our interviewees, for example, showed little faith in intermarriages, often quoting the Old Testament verse, 'Can two walk together, except they be agreed?' (Amos 3:3, KJV). In fact, as we suggested earlier, even within Christianity, many denominations are cast as suspicious or 'funny', and as such, engagement with them is considered ill-advised and even dangerous.

In sum, the widespread practice of *butinage* – and its limits – highlights a different aspect of the place of violence and religion in Kenya: if we look at religious affiliation as linked to religious tribalism and the exercise of power, then the practice of *butinage* pierces the mirage of complete correspondence between formal narratives and affiliations and actual practices, emphasizing lay people's agency as moral arbitrators. Similarly, if we look at the psychological manifestations of religious violence, with their emphasis on forced division and occasional abuse of power, we can again see how the practice of individual everyday mobility concentrates power at the hands of individual practitioners, potentially decentralizing political power while empowering individuals vis-à-vis their religious institutions. As such, religious *butinage* can be read as a popular mode of resistance, an acting out of anti-sectarian convictions and reclaiming of peaceful individual agency.[22]

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we considered the role of violence in Kenyan religion, focusing in particular on the country's Christian majority in central Kenya. We highlighted two types of violence: physical and psychological. Despite this distinction, we emphasize that the two forms of violence are closely inter-related, and that psychological violence may translate into physical, political violence – and vice versa, when political violence turns to religion in search of symbolic justification. The example of Pentecostalism is a case in point, for the movement's potent dualistic cosmogony lends itself to political objectives including, sometimes, the rallying of the flock behind dubious political candidates and figures (Parsitau 2008, 2011).

At the same time, the fact that the Pentecostal movement combines its puritan-fundamentalist teachings with reliance on unmediated inspiration and charisma creates unique opportunities for popular political action

(Bayart 1993; Bayart and Mbembe 1992), complete with sociopolitical consequences that are far from negligible (Droz and Gez 2015; White 1993; Deacon and Lynch 2013; Osborn 2008). In the last section of the chapter, we observed the tension between the two regimes of violence, on the one hand, and de facto individual practice (*butinage*) on the other hand. The latter we approached as an expression of peaceful religious morality that helps to secure a non-violent religious environment. Dwelling on the commonplaceness of often-subtle religious mobility among Kenyans, we analyzed *butinage* in terms of acts that, if not overtly political, contain political implications and undertone in the form of rejection of political and symbolic attempts at spreading divisiveness and violence. But while recognizing that religious *butinage* can be considered a popular mode of religious action thwarting religious tribalism incited by political elites, we concurrently noted that individual mobility is socially monitored and thus has its limits, such as in the case of shifting outside the Christian world or engaging with so-called funny churches.

To summarize our argument, in this chapter we proposed that, throughout the history of central Kenya and save rare exceptions, religious institutions seldom fomented political violence. The pacifying role that the Kenyan churches played throughout most of the 20th century and up to now is worthwhile stressing, because it stands in stark contrast with events in other countries in the region, such as Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). In addition, to the extent that political elites did try to instrumentalize Kenyan religious institutions for their own aims, these attempts met with little support by the public, who distanced themselves and have been critical of attempts to incite religious tribalism. Moreover, for the most part, the Kenyan public shied from fully endorsing the psychological violence presented by the Pentecostal dualistic view of spiritual warfare, where one has to choose between the legions of Satan and the true faith. This can be shown by how most Kenyans are de facto committed to religious *butinage*, moving as they do between and betwixt various religious engagements and day-to-day practices in ways that question and challenge the imposition of borders. They promote their religious morality – a pragmatic form of ecumenism, perhaps – as a popular mode of political action implicitly contesting the political tribalism of Kenyan political elites, and by doing so, support the construction of a more tolerant and peaceful religious and political landscape.

## Notes

1  According to the most recent national census (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics & ICF Macro 2010), Christians make up 82.6% of the country's population.
2  The British colonizers, with their faces and bodies scorched by the sun, did not strike their Kikuyu counterparts as 'white'.
3  The two most common examples are the Akorino and the Dini ya Msambwa, considered as belonging to the broad category of African Independent Churches (AIC; Welbourn 1961; Wipper 1977; Peterson 2012).

 4  The 'pipeline' programme, designed by the British to 'rehabilitate' Mau Mau warriors, was flaunted by the administration as a proof of its good intentions. However, scholars such as Elkins (2005), in her work condemning British heavy-handedness, proposed that the scheme was little more than a euphemistic sham.

 5  See Hornsby (2012) for a detailed political history of politics in Kenya. Within this section, we integrated summarized parts of another text on Kenya's recent religious history (Droz and Maupeu 2013).

 6  The African Inland Church, a denomination that emerged from an Evangelical mission originated from the East Coast of the United States.

 7  For instance, Nairobi Chapel ran a pre-elections programme in which episodes from the history of the Israelites were evoked to shed light on Kenya's inter-tribal rivalries (visit to the church, 5 February 2012).

 8  For example, the Nairobi Baptist Church had a fixed pre-elections programme in which every week, during the main service, a different county was being prayed for (visit to the church, 8 April 2012). This example is also telling of the ambiguity of such initiatives. Having visited the church on the week in which it was praying for Kilifi county, we noted that the prayer did not limit itself to the aim of peaceful elections alone, but also included the aspiration for bringing the work of God to the county's 'indigenous people'. Considering the county's Muslim dominance, such a declaration of intentions risks fuelling tensions between communities rather than quelling them.

 9  The endorsement of candidates by religious organizations was evident in the case of Muslim leadership, as Raila Odinga was the presidential candidate of choice of the Muslim Leaders Forum, whilst the Association of Muslim Organizations backed the eventual winner, Uhuru Kenyatta.

10  This was certainly the case with regard to the presumed architects of the 2007/2008 post-election violence. Accused before the ICC, they sought and obtained, in 2010–2011, the support of Christian forces. They ostensibly attended church every Sunday and partook in specially organized prayer sessions endorsed by leading clergymen, thus confirming the tight links between the state and certain factions within the national clergy.

11  Wanjiru is the head of Jesus Is Alive Ministries (JIAM) in Nairobi. During her time in office, she served as the Assistant Minister for Housing. In the run-up to the 2007 elections, Wanjiru claimed that 20,000 members of her church were also eligible Starehe voters. If these figures are even remotely true, then they gave a significant boost to her election (Kareithi 5 November 2006).

12  NPC is the popular acronym of Nairobi Pentecostal Church, a popular Kenyan church also known as Christ Is the Answer Ministries (CITAM). Bishop Adoyo's long career covered a number of distinguished leadership roles, including, incidentally, membership in President Moi's Commission of Inquiry into the Cult of Devil Worship (Adoyo 2009).

13  For discussions on the application of the concept of hypocrisy, see (Shklar 1984, Crisp and Cowton 1994).

14  For example, in the second half of 2012, Kenya's two leading daily papers, the *Standard* and the *Daily Nation*, featured about 70 articles that referred to hypocrisy in the church, about 45 articles that alluded to the commercialization of Christianity, and about 25 articles that mentioned so-called sects (Gez 2018).

15  A similar, more recent example involves the television exposé, on 2 November 2014, of so-called prophet Dr. Victor Kanyari Mwangi of Salvation Healing Ministry and his elaborate and disturbing operation built on false testimonies and miracles. Incidentally, Kanyari is the son of controversial Prophetess Lucy Nduta, who in 2006 was sentenced to jail for similar charges, having

marketed herself as a healer of incurable conditions including HIV/AIDS (KTN 2 November 2014).

16 Thus for example, Kenya's 2007/2008 post-election violence was fuelled by seemingly strategic rumours aimed at undermining political rivals (Osborn 2008). See also Buijtenhuijs's consideration of witchcraft-related rumours as a popular mode of political action (Buijtenhuijs 1995), and (Bayart 1992).

17 For a literary example, see Martin Njaga, *The Brethren of Ng'ondu* (Njaga 2008).

18 One extreme example that we encountered ourselves involved a 2013 interview we conducted with Rose, a student in her early twenties. Some months before the interview, Rose's cousin was brutally murdered by her pastor and lover, a murder to which some church members were accomplices. The story, which made Rose question her faith in religious institutions, made it to the headlines, and was mentioned by other interviewees as well as an example of the erosion of their trust in religious leaders.

19 The research (2010–2015) was conducted in Kenya, Brazil, Switzerland and Ghana.

20 Hence the concept of 'territory', being the imagined limits of one's legitimate range of practice, which we explore in our research (Gez et al. 2017). The concept was inspired by the work of Ronaldo de Almeida on religious practitioners' institutional fluxes (de Almeida 2004, de Almeida and Monteiro 2001).

21 An interesting case study on Chrislam in Nigeria offers examples of *butinage* and of institutional bridging between Islam and Christianity (Janson 2016).

22 The application of alternative religious practices as a mode of resistance is not new to Kenya. Early conversions to Christianity, dating as far back as the 1930s, can partially be read within the context of a struggle, complete with strategies or tactics of resistance (Scott 1985; de Certeau 1980; Siméant 2010, Fassin 2009). Religious resources – and especially education – were adopted as a popular mode of political action by the newly colonized (Bayart 1992), and especially among the Kikuyu people (Lonsdale 1992, Neckebrouck 1978), in preparing for revenge against the British.

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