

“ ETHNICITY AND THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS ”

IN CONTEMPORARY KENYA

BY

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A B S T R A C T

This study aims at bringing out a clear understanding of both ethnicity and democracy and their interaction in the democratization process in Kenya. Ethnicity is a complex phenomenon whose salient characteristics are ethnocentrism, common consciousness and identity, and exclusiveness. Democracy as a form of government derives its authority from the consent of the governed. It advocates for limited government where the power of the entire government is allocated to different organs which are required to act as independently as possible. Elections which should be held from time to time are to be free and fair as a means of seeking new consent from the governed. Democratization is therefore, a process of establishing a democratic culture through institutions that will ensure that democracy is put into practice.

By the use of historical analysis and inquiry methods, facts were collected from various written sources and analyzed. It is observed that the various ethnic groups in Kenya though living as independent 'nations' before the coming of Europeans, had mutual co-existence. The findings concluded that colonialism greatly contributed to the advancement of ethnic consciousness and animosity.

The distribution of power is observed as lacking. The Legislature which ought to have the highest authority in a democracy has been subjected to the Executive. By use of Provincial Administration and direct influence on the Judiciary, the Executive through the Institution of the Presidency has taken up most powers thereby weakening the Legislature. The ruling party takes a more prominent position in policy making than Parliament. Since parties in Kenya are ethnically oriented, the power a party wields is, in other words, ethnic power. This leads to suspicion and ill feeling among the ethnic groups which view themselves as left out in power sharing.

Multi-party politics which are expected to bring about practical democracy, has divided Kenyans into various parties which are ethnically based in nature and lacking national support. This has encouraged ethnic competition which has led to ethnic conflicts.

It is suggested in this study that it is possible to achieve unity in diversity. In this sense, Federalism (Majimbo) may not be the answer to the ethnic conflict problem in Kenya. The assumptions here are that ethnic conflict is more likely to be avoided if there is a general agreement upon political norms rather than creating separate political subcultures with antagonistic values.