

# **Seeds of genocide were sown a decade ago by Moi**

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Roads are blocked with trees, lamp-posts and burning tyres. Young men drunk on booze and blood, armed with Iron Age weapons, paraffin and matches scrutinise ID books to select victims for tribal murder.

That was the scene in Kenya last week. It has happened before, not just in Rwanda but a decade ago in Kenya. And there is very little time to act before Kenya's tribal tensions explode into more widespread massacres. It is no surprise, or accident, that up to 50 Kikuyu were murdered in the western city of Eldoret last week in revenge for alleged rigging of the elections by the Kikuyu President Mwai Kibaki over Christmas.

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His predecessor Daniel arap Moi, a Kalenjin, allowed Kalenjin warriors, who dominate the region around Eldoret, to conduct a pogrom against the Kikuyu in 1991-92 and again in 1999-98. It was the Kalenjin who torched terrified men, women and children seeking sanctuary in Eldoret last week.

In 1992, 1,500 Kikuyu or 'non-indigenous' people were slaughtered in the Rift Valley east of Eldoret by Kalenjin and Masai moran, or warriors, armed with pangas. Many were hunted down like animals with bows and arrows in the woodland and farms around Nakuru, the provincial capital. An estimated 300,000 fled their homes. Back then their 'crime' had been to vote for the opposition parties against Moi's Kenya African National Union (Kanu).

There were no arrests, no proper inquiries, and very little publicity for these atrocities - most foreign correspondents were too busy cataloguing the larger horrors of Congo and Rwanda. But the seeds of the genocide that engulfed the Great Lakes of central Africa were sown by Moi in Kenya. Until now they lay dormant, but in fertile ground.

Kenya is the most stable and economically successful state in the region. It has been the base for international emergency relief operations to Somalia, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi and Sudan for decades.

But it is no less riven by ethnic hatred than any of its neighbours. Put crudely, very few Kenyan tribes get along well with one another -

and almost all hate the Kikuyu. The Kikuyu are the biggest tribe, with 42 different ethnic groups, and make up about a fifth of the population. They fought the British in the Mau Mau uprising that led to independence in 1963. Led by President Jomo Kenyatta until his death in 1978, the Kikuyu did well out of freedom, the other tribes less so.

Under Moi, the Kikuyu, who hail from the fertile highlands around Mount Kenya, concentrated on commerce and sedentary agriculture. A failed coup against Moi in 1982, by mostly Kikuyu air force officers, resulted in a purge of their ethnic group from the civil service and armed forces.

They kept their heads down until Kenya began to democratise in the 1990s and, in spite of a punishing campaign of ethnic cleansing in the Rift Valley, the Kikuyu returned to the centre of the political stage when Kibaki won the elections in 2002 - much to the undisguised anger of the smaller tribes.

Kenyans have disparaging stereotypes for almost every ethnic group. Kibaki's challenger, Raila Odinga, is a Luo, the brunt of any joke about sexual deviance; Masai and Kalenjin are 'ignorant and lazy'; xenophobic rivals say that a typical Kikuyu, or 'Kuke', is 'wily and dishonest'.

At best these ugly attitudes have provoked no more than workplace tensions. Today, after seven years of incompetent and wildly corrupt rule by Kibaki, culminating in a dubious election giving him a 200,000-vote lead in a population of around 35 million, they are an excuse for murder.

Kikuyu students hide in their dormitories from their classmates and Kikuyu doctors, nurses, accountants, farm workers and bank clerks stranded in the 'wrong' (western) part of Kenya hide, flee or die.

Kenya is most certainly on the brink. The insouciant attitude of young Kalenjin men, who confessed to having taken part in the Eldoret massacre of Kikuyu last week to Xan Rice [the Observer and Guardian correspondent] shows that they see nothing wrong with what they are doing. After all, it's only a decade since the ruling party actively encouraged the killing of ethnic and political rivals. And they're not really supporters of the political opposition, they are simply anti-Kibaki because he's a Kikuyu.

A pogrom has already begun against the Kikuyu as Archbishop Desmond Tutu and other African dignitaries rush to Nairobi to try to bring

Kibaki and Odinga to the negotiating table. But wider chaos threatens to ignite ethnic rivalries throughout the country.

So far the Luo and their allies the Luhya (together accounting for about a quarter of Kenyans) have directed their anger at the police, who have been using live rounds, tear gas and water cannon to break up their efforts at a Romanian or Ukrainian-style 'revolution'.

But as tensions mount, and the leaders of the rival parties fail to agree to new elections, power sharing or some other peaceful compromise, Kenya will no longer be a paradise holiday destination - but another equatorial war zone.

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