

Ethnocracy as the Pitfall of Democracy in Kenya, by Gideon Githiga.

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Gideon Githiga, PhD, a retired Anglican Bishop and former Seminarian Professor (St. Paul's United Theological College, now St. Paul's University, Limuru), sets out his 13-chapter book, *Ethnocracy as the pitfall of democracy in Kenya* (2023), to demonstrate the realistic way in which the Kenyan dream of a prosperous country can be achieved. This is squarely given as prioritising the slaying of ethnocracy. He uses a strong image (pitfall), which reminisces Donald Trump's offensive word, 'shithole', to demonstrate the dangers of negative ethnicity, xenophobia and, by implication, all prejudices that kill our ability to reason as members of the human race.

Second, this is a highly authoritative book that makes everyone understand Kenya's historiography from a sincere and original scholar who relies on primary data, as in the case of interacting with both the Kikuyu and the Luo Councils of Elders, his interaction with Hon. George Thuo (1967-2013) who narrated inner details in the corridors of power to the author, his first-hand information regarding the depth of post 27 December 2007 election violence as they shuttled via a Chopper to the troubled areas with the visiting Archbishop of Yoke and the Primate of England from 2005 to 2020, now retired Archbishop John Tucker Mugabi Sentamu (1949-) among other ground-breaking issues therein.

Put differently, as the title suggests, the book is about ethnocracy as the Pitfall of Democracy in Kenya, and the subject is generously addressed in a manner hitherto unknown, from A to Z without mincing words and without sparing facts as they are. Or

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was the author under pain to call a spade a spade in his endeavour to “let the truth set you free” (John 8:32) in its literal sense? It is totally in tandem with Mahatma Gandhi’s dictum, “if you want to preach *Satyagraha*, you must live *satyagraha*!” That is, if one wants to preach change and/or soul-force, one must demonstrate it by living according to what one espouses in his or her public utterances. This said, the book challenges everyone: reader, leader, Minister of the Word, political operatives and people of all walks of life to preach *Satyagraha* (change) and live *Satyagraha*. And in this case, if we publicly condemn ethnic chauvinism, ethnic Balkanisation, ethnic prejudices, negative ethnicity (a better word to use when describing tribalism), and indeed ethnic bigotry, let’s expose it as we prepare for its burial and other final rites. The author views negative ethnicity, which breeds ethnocracy, as the single major threat to the welfare of post-colonial Kenya.

In a nutshell, the author demonstrates successfully the extent to which ethnocracy has done to both the colonial and the post-colonial Kenya. It also shows the extent to which ethnocracy can do to any nation under the sun! Kenya is case studied to provide the nitty-gritty of ethnocracy among our post-colonial leaders in Africa. Were we ready for constitutional independence that came in most African countries in the 1960s, with Kenya becoming the 34th African country in Africa on 12 December 1963? Have churches promoted or fought against ethnocracy at all times, or have they succumbed to its attractive trajectories? Are churches guilty as charged in matters to do with ethnic chauvinism that breeds ethnocracy? Are the huge donations given out to the churches by politicians, especially during the electioneering period, promoting ethnocracy and other related vices? Such are the questions that emerge after reading this informative and authoritative book.

Regarding Kenya, this book on *Ethnocracy as the Pitfall of Democracy in Kenya* takes us from colonial times, 1922, to 2022, as Kenya was gearing towards the Seventh Multi-Party democratic elections on 9 August 2022. In this centenary enterprise, the various dimensions and/or evolution of ethnic bigotry are well elaborated. First, Ethnocracy has been defined successfully as the governance that allows some ethnic groups and/or racial groups to hold a disproportionate amount of government power compared to their percentage in the larger population. The apartheid South Africa, which began in 1948 when the racist National Party got into power till 1990 when the resultant laws were reviewed, and which advocated separate development that privileged the minority, is a case in point.

In other words, this book points out the dangers and influences of negative ethnicity, as it leads to ethnocracy, especially when one team gets into a position of power and subtly promotes the culture of exclusivism. In this understanding, negative ethnicity has no room for the neighbour and promotes unquestioning loyalty to our ethnic cocoons; it overtly or covertly promotes ethnic bigotry that makes us treat others unfairly and with prejudice. It builds the culture of “our time to eat philosophy” as we hold others under suspicion. Such mistrust that is engineered by ethnic stereotypes and prejudices

graduates into full-blown conflicts that pit neighbours against neighbours and pollute the air of peaceful co-existence in a nation. It is no wonder that elements of dictatorships, torture, detentions, state-sanctioned violence, police brutalities, the culture of impunity, imprisonments, political assassinations, economic strangulation, exclusion of some from the economic dinner table, promotion of the least qualified, promotion of mediocrity rather than meritocracy, unfair sackings from positions of power and other vices keep on recurring. In turn, this eventually informs the emergent society that now shuns its own professionals rather than view them as key drivers in the nation's economic growth. Indeed, shunning experts in place of the novice or promoting a mediocre rather than a professional is in itself defeatist. In any case, the 3Rs of professionalism (Responsibility, Respect, and Risk Taking) should inform any government striving for authentic growth.

Back to history, European ethnocracy, as the author demonstrates, was ironically replaced with African ethnocracy in 1963 and continues to trouble post-independent Kenya right into the twenty-first century, as Kikuyu ethnocracy and the Kalenjin ethnocracy played out clearly in both Jomo Kenyatta (1963-78) and Moi (1978-2002) presidencies respectively. The post-27 December 2007 electoral violence can be seen along with such fears. The fact that the Kenyan multi-party elections (1992, 1997, 2002, 2007, 2013, 2017, and probably 2022) in a country that is 85.5% Christian have been decided along ethnic lines rather than through party ideologies and manifestos shows that the blood of ethnicity has always remained thicker than the blood of Christ in Kenya's democratic evolution. It also shows that while the seed of ethnic prejudices was planted by the colonialists (1895-1963), the Daniel Moi and Jomo Kenyatta presidencies must have watered it well, to the extent that we can as well agree with the old adage that 'old habits die hard.'

As the author has briefly stated, this ethnocracy remains the greatest impediment to democracy and the resultant democratic culture. The book hypothesises that successive communities that produce the Heads of State (HoS), starting with the British colonial regime, have always tended to favour their own kinship in running the government and in redistributing material and other resources. Given this injustice to some, the discontent of the ruled arouses them, as the marginalised class, to fight for democracy.

Besides the negative effects of the vice, *Ethnocracy as the Pitfall of Democracy in Kenya* helps us to retrace the colonial factor in the birth of ethnic Balkanisation in Kenya and tropical Africa. In the nature of things, it introduces touching issues such as the case of Harry Thuku (1895-1970), who led a militant demonstration in the streets of Nairobi, which led to his arrest on 14 March 1922 and detained at Nairobi's Central Police Station. For voicing his concerns against European ethnocracy, Thuku was deported to Kismaiyu in the then British Somaliland and remained a political detainee for eight years.

In trying to defend their ethnocracy, the colonialists employed all tricks in the game to suppress dissenting voices. One chilly incident cited in the book is the case of women's contribution in the Mau Mau war of independence, where the colonial operatives badly beat up the author's mother (Joyce Njeri Githiga) for hosting people whose houses had been burnt down by Home Guards, who were destroying houses for Mau-Mau (freedom fighters) suspects, in the 1950s. Another case in point is on 16 March 1922, when over 7,000 people who were protesting against Thuku's arrest were massacred in cold blood by colonial rule as a measure of defending their ethnocratic culture.

Overall, the 13-chapter book is rich for all historians, Africanist scholars, religious scholars, political scientists, ecclesiastical leaders, and readers from all walks of life. It is written in a captivating manner that makes one understand the adulterated history of Kenya, as it reveals deep details that only compare with Wangari Maathai's book *Unbowed: A Memoir* (2006). Interviews with inner peoples, especially matters to do with Uhuruto's presidency (2013-2022), Uhuru-Raila's Building Bridges Initiative (BBI), 2018-2021), Uhuruto's rise and fall, and Moi and Jomo's presidencies are some of the issues that make it a masterpiece in modern literature. Equally, revelations regarding the Clergy's partisanship during the 2007 elections drive one to see Kenya's clergy like the ones in France during and before the French Revolution of 1789. Certainly, this ought to be treated as a *Handbook of Kenya's historiography*, as few writers would dare to tackle the in-depth issues under discussion. It boldly tells Kenyans, by implications: "Deal with your own sewages, and save the future of this great nation!" We can now tell where the Kenyan shoe has been pinching and wear the right pair of shoes.

The book ends with the following statement: "The third liberation which all the stake holders need to participate in, is the fight against ethnocratic leadership." Thus, while politicians have insisted that the third liberation has to do with economic liberation, the author tells us that the real beast under the table is ethnocracy, or does he extend it to xenophobia? Both vices xenophobia and ethnocracy tend to eat away all that we value as a country and as a people. Economic liberation will only be achieved after we achieve liberation from ethnocracy. Arresting the beast of ethnocracy will clearly guarantee genuine freedom and, indeed, liberate us from neo-colonialism.