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Kenya Research project by Robert M. Press [see: Press, Robert M. (2006)

*Peaceful Resistance: Advancing Human Rights and Civil Liberties*. Aldershot, U. K.: Ashgate.]

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Interview conducted by Robert M. Press ([bob.press@usm.edu](mailto:bob.press@usm.edu); [press.bob@gmail.com](mailto:press.bob@gmail.com))

Interviewee: Edward Oyugi

Location of interview: Nairobi, Kenya, in his office.

Date of interviews: October 2002.

**I = interviewer (Robert Press); R = respondent (Edward Oyugi). Double ?? or bracket indicates unclear point. A ...indicates repeated words or sounds were deleted. Some tape counter numbers are also shown. Some key points are in bold or underlined by the interviewer.**

Dr. Oyugi is a psychologist who was convicted by the Moi regime in July 1991 for his activism, along with George Anyona, Njeru Kathangu, and Ngoto Kariuki. They were released on bail in February 1992 in the aftermath of the regime's acceptance in December 1991 of multiparty politics. [Press 2006, p. 167, f 52.] Dr. Oyugi later became active in a non-government organization in Kenya.

**Themes:** activism and non-government organizations in Kenya during transition; underground opposition movements; how some political activists used human rights as a step to power, or jobs; how other activists stayed active through NGOs, not political office.

I Okay go ahead.

R Well, I don't know if that distinction helps you?

I Yeah, go ahead, follow the idea.

R Okay I think, I think we have to differentiate between the kind of, of organisations that activists went into from say 1990s; the NGO outfits which absorbed several activists who had either came from detention, from jail, or were sucked into it from various walks of life; from the university and from trade union movement, from any other platforms which had been used for political activism.

I Previous Journalists?

R Journalist for that matter, yeah this distinction is important for me because, already from the seventies, mid seventies, there were already underground movements in the country.

I I know.

- R University, and non university based, and these were, also political organisations which produced their different forms of activisms and activists.
- I Let me just see if I am recording. Okay
- R Yes, so, I think after making that distinction, I think you could say, and coming back to your, to the is it graph you've been drawing. I think it is obvious that most of the political organisations that produced or provided platforms for a wide variety of activists, from, the mid - '70s up to say, mid 80's, when the government now had a very deliberate crackdown on university based radicalism, on university based political activism, I think there was a rise of these type of movements or these type of organisations continuously from the mid '70s to late 80s.
- I What were some examples of those organisations?
- R Well the December 12<sup>th</sup> movement for instance which produced several copies o several issues of *Pambana* leaflet, leaflets and all that. There was Mwakenya for instance [Mwakenya was an underground movement in Kenya in the I980s of undetermined size which was blamed for several acts of sabotage against the government].
- I Pambana is spelt P - A - M - B - A - N-A, right?
- R Yeah, yeah. And then, am sure you remember the Mwakenya era, that was of course, what developed out of the, the, the dissipation of the organisational energies of the, of the, of the 12<sup>th</sup> December Movement after the detention of several activists from the December 12<sup>th</sup> movement. Those who remained behind formed Mwakenya, still, less university based than, than its predecessor.
- I Right, and after that you had several other, I don't know if they are offshoots or how would you describe the Kenya Patriotic Front
- R Kenya Patriotic Front, those were now either based in countries outside Kenya
- I Uganda for example?
- R Yeah, most of them were formed when I was in jail, so I am not able to really give you a good account of how many they were.
- I Ya, probably they came later, chronologically they came later
- R They came later, definitely, they came later, and then, you have the NGO phenomenon,
- I Okay of say, the early 90s.
- R Say from '90s. Yeah of early '90s best I think it's better, I think early '90s it's a better eeh

I because December 12<sup>th</sup> ... late seventies

R Mid – ‘70s.

I Mid – ‘70s. But still that was underground so they couldn’t exactly have a lot as much crowd as

R Exactly, exactly, exactly. They influenced a lot at the university, they influenced a lot, they were in contact with certain political [unclear] over political activities, like those of the, you know of the unofficial opposition, parties of, in the persons of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, George Anyona, Shikuku and the rest of it and even the group of the so called seven sisters as you remember they were informal contacts with them

I And those are members of parliament, standing up?

R Exactly, exactly

I I don’t know if I have all their names actually, it would be nice to give them credit do you, remember most of them?

R Well , I do , I do, I ,remember there was Wamalwa, there was Abuya Abuya,

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I The same Wamalwa-

R Yes, yes, Abuya Abuya, ah there was-

I So you had a, your, your point here, is that there were organisations.

R Yeah

I Even before the ‘90s

R Even before the 90s

I One of them was ..Seven [Bearded] sisters [a name given to describe seven members of Parliament who were in the government party but active critics of it.]

R Exactly

I Underground we had December 12<sup>th</sup>, later we had Mwakenya

Twenty opposition groups?

R And many others which were operating from external. can’t, there were more than, more than 20 organisations.

I Okay, so it is numerous

R Numerous, numerous, there were many, yeah, there was one based in Europe, there was one based in Zimbabwe, that is Michel Mugo and Co.. who is now in Syracuse [NY], you remember? The exile group that went to the southern Africa.

I Yeah, yeah

R They also formed some groups there, Guto,

I Guto, yeah, yeah. He is in South Africa now, or is in Namibia

R Namibia. He is now in [unclear] He is teaching there?

I In South Africa, yeah. I know I have the name but I haven't talked to him.

R Yeah

I Okay, so how big was **Mwakenya**?

R I can't give the exact size of the movement because it was formed when we were out in, when I was in detention. When I came out of jail, or detention, I think the movement was, had been exposed, and I think most of its members and followers were in jail, because the biggest crackdown if you remember was around, took place, around 1985 – 86 – 87. And the majority of the leadership was, either ran away, left the country or jailed, so for practical purposes the movement almost died by 1988.

I So if you had put like years around it, when did it start?

R I think, immediately after '84, because of it was the result of the disarray, caused by, by the jailing of some of the... core leading members of the December 12<sup>th</sup> movement. Historically, yeah.

I Was this December 12<sup>th</sup> movement mostly academic or entirely academic?

R Mostly, mostly.

I Mostly. So what did they do? I mean they sit around and complain?

R Well, they had established structures, organisational structures, reaching out to other non – academic actors, I think, they had already made, began making efforts to...establish some contact with the working class movements. But you are not wrong if you say that it was university – based in the sense that the leadership was still, really academic. Produced irregular publications clarifying, certain-

I Ya, historically. Clandestine?

R Clandestine, yeah. Formed several cells in high schools, and among the trade unionists.

I It wasn't Marxist? I mean it has all, all the trappings of a Marxist [organization].

R **It was Marxist**, Marxist, it was Marxist, it was Marxist

I Yeah

R I think ideologically, we could say, it was Marxist, yeah.

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I Yeah. But it was a definitely resistant to authoritarian rule that was its purpose, right?

R I mean that, that was it's the entry point of its activism.

I Was it a human rights movement for instance?

R At that time , the substance of their politics, of the politics of the movement had to assume human rights angle. And a human right perspective because there is where the most blatant expression of totalitarianism and dictatorship was located, really in the human right arena.

I Yeah.

R Where people were being taken, being jailed without... trial and people were not allowed to express themselves, the way they felt, so that was definitely, that is the only hurdle that a movement, a clandestine movement of that kind would have so as to show to explain. Even most of the literature that , if you read the literature between ... '78' until '83, you notice that it is all geared towards exposing human rights violations of the country.

I I like to read some of that, because it's a good background to what I want to know, you can't just start life [study period] at '87 you know, to '97.

R Yeah, the literature, I don't know, it's difficult to, to, to access them because I think  
*(tape recording interruption)*

I The next is between bad government and bad governance

R Yes and human freedom

I Okay

R Yeah

I So it really was the precursor to the human rights efforts of the '90s

R It was, it was definitely, definitely.

- I Yeah, I don't wanna forget that.
- R Yeah, there is a direct link...if you look at individuals who then started the human rights movement, either they were directly connected or they were in some cells of the 12<sup>th</sup> December in the periphery. But people who had started already reading materials, may not be formally integrated into the movement but who are already being brought into the movement through gradual indoctrination and political education
- I And that's an important point from a psychological point of view, because I mean correct me if I am wrong, but I think that there had to be a certain level of consciousness raising before you build the sort of the bedrock of a public participation in human rights...
- R Yeah there was need for critical mass really, there was a need for critical mass and the critical mass really coincided with, with, the strangling of political, of overt political expressions in 1989 when KANU became so vicious and Matiba walked out of the government and some lawyers definitely had no connection, had no history of radical politics, particularly no radical leftist, politics like Kamau Kuria, took over, began to see the need, because the critical mass had been reached.
- I Okay.
- R And so there were very many, maybe you can put that off for  
*(tape put off)*  
there is a very important moment, between 19.. and here individuals must be raised below, beyond there just individual contributions to history, and that is the German Ambassador, [Berndt] Mutzelberg [who, often along with U. S. Ambassador Smith Hempstone, protested against the Moi government's abuse of human rights during the early 1990s.
- I Mutzelberg
- R Mutzelberg and the American Ambassador
- I Hempstone
- R Hempstone. And a few others whom I can't remember by name. But you must remember that they helped to give courage and they helped to push for the critical mass to exist, by opening the critical discourse against the government to some sections of the society which were more politically motivated, not politically motivated in the sense of trying to bring very basic ideological changes but who wanted just change that Moi, was no longer good for the society, and this is where you put [activist lawyer Paul] Muite, this is where you can bring in-
- I [Activist journalist and politician Gitobu] Imanyara?

R Imanyara, this is where you bring in -

I Maybe James] Orengo, I don't know; no Orengo goes further...

R Orengo has a longer history of leftist movement [participation] -from 1973 already; he was already in-

I How about [human rights attorney Gibson Kamau ]Kuria?

R Kuria definitely fits in there

I Who were taking their professions or in some cases their political interests,

R Interests into-

I Potential, opening

R Thank you, you got it right, that is right

I And that includes Kiraitu Murungi,

R Yeah, yeah.

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I Yeah, yeah he jumped from law right into the as the cells the-

R Exactly, exactly and then some political actors, who like [Presidential candidate Kenneth] Matiba.

I [Charles] Rubia?

R Rubia, the former Nairobi mayor. [Andrew] Ngumba.

I Okay, yeah, I don't know much about him

R Ngumba was the former mayor of Nairobi.

I Yeah

R He even in went to exile...to Sweden you remember.

I You mean the current M.P. from Westlands [an affluent section of Nairobi]?

R No Ngumba is old, that is Gumo,

I Okay, okay

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R This one died, I think he died about six, seven years ago. But you had... because very few people are able to kind of piece this together you know, I am getting this in pieces. I-

R Yeah

I What you are saying that is that there was a ground breaking consciousness, a sober consciousness, awareness raising something that was built on, I think what you are saying is that this kind of a stairs effect here.

R It is so, yeah, yeah, yeah

I So, so to look at the early 90s would be to miss some of the early stairs

R Yeah, you would if you didn't see the connections, if you disregard the connections

I Does it take a certain amount of psychological preparation to have a human rights movement in an authoritarian state like this?

R I think it does and I want to...draw your attention to a very important event that took place during our trial, we were tried for almost a year.

I Which time, you were tried twice

R No, the first one we were not tried. The first one was detention, we were just, we were interviewed for one month then just given a detention order which says you have been detained for as long as the president will be-

I Interrogation is, a euphemism.

R Is a euphemism for torture actually yeah, that...

I Your second one?

R I think the second one has an historical importance, because for one year, we were able to communicate with the outside world though the media from the law courts; we were able to say what happened, how we tortured, we were able to call the government with its own name, that's the first time in, daylight we were able to compare Moi and [executed Romanian President] 'Ceausescu; using our lawyers to say what he was, what we could say. And from one year, we had engaged the government in revealing a lot of what finally, and which were being printed, if not locally, internationally.

I Well, I was here.

R Unfortunately also some of our colleagues who were outside helped to drum up support for us with the international human rights movements.

I Why, you said unfortunately?

R No fortunately. No I think I meant fortunately thanks

I Okay

R Thanks, thanks it was fortunately I am wrong, I meant fortunately. And that meant a lot; it weakened Moi on the ground,

I It was a short trial?

R It was a short trial, for one year, they gave us a chance to expose the government for what it was .

I Why was it that you, the other three, decided to go publicly, go around and talk about multiparty and the benefits of it when you knew you gonna get arrested for that?

R Not, we, I don't think we even thought of the fact that we were doing something illegal because our meeting was really we were taking stock, most of the three of us had been detained. Anyona had been detained earlier, mind you, from 1985 to 88,.. No '75 to 78 he had been in jail he was detained by Kenyatta before even Moi, so Moi released him and we went to jail with him in '82, Ngotho had been in detention with me from 90..from '86

I Let-

R We were reviewing the developments towards multipartyism

I This was what, 91?

R That was '90 , early 90, [Moi's Foreign Minister Robert ]Ouko had just been killed [government officials were later blamed by Scotland Yard]; there were a lot of problems in the country, people had become more courageous while raising questions

I Yeah

R Matiba had already revolted against the KANU party, was demanding that they be allowed to form a party the Saba Saba meeting [an illegal public political rally held July 7, 1990] had just taken place. Or was going to take place

I Yeah

R And there were individual groupings of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, was consulting already with Oneko, Achieng' Oneko.

I Yeah,

R Matiba, Ngumba, and the rest of and-

I Lots of things happened?

R Lots of things happened? Lots of things were happening, and...

I So why did the four of you get together and do what you did. I am not quite sure what you did besides talking, public talking.

R Politically, politically we had the three of us had a history,

I Yeah

R Ngotho and myself were members of the Staff Union and also had some history of radical politics of the University [of Nairobi].

I Okay

R Yeah, Kathangu was known only to George Anyona, had been an old friend, we had been in detention for over 4 years with him, and so, we had developed some common understanding of how, where Kenya needed to go

I Yeah

R And so we were consulted to find out what the new opening, what this, where we, how we could be part of what was happening

I Yeah, yeah, how do you fit in?

R Yeah, how do we fit in what was happening, so each one of us was given as his views from the point of view of what he knew was happening close to him, either ethnically or politically. So, Ngotho was given views about what was happening. He was very close to Matiba; they come from the same place, they knew each other very closely. So he was telling us what Matiba was up to.

I What ethnic group does Anyona come from

R Kisii

I Kisii?

R Ya Anyona knew all of these people, he'd been a very close friend to Jaramogi Oginga Odinga. He was also giving us his understanding of how Jaramogi Oginga Odinga was fitting into this new situation. I was giving them my understanding of what I thought I knew, so really it was an effort to explore opportunities of engaging with this new dispensation; where so many people are talking, so many people want change, foreigners particularly the two, the German and American diplomats, were already showing enough interest and supporting almost overtly, supporting what these murmuring were in the country.

I Y a, I remember

- R Yeah
- I So you have described two groups, primarily ideological driven, not necessarily seeking political office or political control -
- R Ya.
- I Another one political driven primarily, basically politicians engaging in strategies of power, of power
- R Ya, and they also want to go, to introduce themselves to political power again
- I To office?
- R Ya, to office.
- I Okay , now human rights: place human rights on this dichotomy, where does it fit here?
- [Key point: when multi party politics began, many human rights activists were not prepared to enter the political arena and instead found certain individuals ideologically strong who wanted to just take over the reform drive. This laid seeds of future divisions. And some simply used human rights as a way to power.]**
- R Most of the human rightists are, these are **using human rights as a vehicle**, because the easiest one that you share with anti -Moi forces outside Kenya, particularly the international community.
- I Okay
- R But they are more driven by the economic gender and ideological other [underpinnings] on it at this level.
- I Okay
- R This group here produces the first generation though it's very interesting and I need to be clear, a few individuals from these, when the political arena is opened up for competition, when Moi gives in, and these individuals occupy the vacuum, that was therefore open political competition.
- I Okay, multiparty comes and they-
- R They occupy this and most of the people here, the majority of people here find it difficult to come and join, to come and occupy these spaces here.
- I Why?

- R Because they don't have the skills for, of open political work, or political, open political competition. They are not used to participating in typical 'boujoir' [??] parties.
- I Ya, Ya, Ya,
- R They don't have skills of populace politics of going to address rallies.
- I They don't know how to run a campaign.
- R Thank you, thank you. So most of them get a bit frustrated here because also they know that people who are here now, the majority are people who are potentially their enemies, politically, because Matiba, Rubia-
- I Now say that again. Who's the potential enemy of whom?
- R I mean those who are strongly ideological here, know that there are some individuals who have come from here to occupy this new space created by multipartism, do not share with them ideological objectives.
- I Okay.
- R You understand me?
- I Okay the seeds of tension are there from the beginning?
- R It is not there but the highly ideological individuals here know that you can only work with these individuals on a very broad united front, beyond which you know that there are bound to be contradictions.
- I Because the motivations are somewhat different, these people want an ideological change of the system, **these people simply wanna take over the system.**
- R Precisely. **They want statehouse to be opened for them to go in and replace Moi.** The majority, ya
- I **It's probably why you don't see any presidential candidates including now for changing the constitution to reduce the powers of the president**
- R Thank you
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- I Because even here you probably have-
- R Thank you, thank you, that's what I mean.
- I Okay

#### **Human rights activists join NGOs**

- R No, let me explain something. So individuals, some people who are

strategically open to seeking a platform here, individuals here who have no ideological hang ups using these platforms here, sneak out and come and join here.

I To get some-

R And those are the first human rights NGOs

I Clarify that for me, I was talking with you on the individuals and suddenly you get people going into NGOs. Okay let me see if I get it.

R [Laughs]

I They have this desire to.

R They still belong here politically and ideologically but because there's no space here, there's now multipartyism.

I Where do you go?

R Where do you go? You are afraid to join political parties and seek political office you still believe that you can still advance some of your ideological agenda, but there are no structures here to accommodate you. So you cross over, over to NGOs, which champion human rights linking at very faintly with what you left behind, the ideological background, the baggage which you're left behind here

I Okay, well, so in some cases its socialistic, Marxist or at least radical compared to-

R But you must also imagine that the World Bank with the Western part is very strong now with the new political parties, so you have no room to come and make your agenda here, on this side here.

I Say that again

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R The patronage of those institutions, say World Bank, IMF and even say the governments, Europe and America generally, are patronizing politicians

I Yes

R The new political institutions that have been created are being patronized because the good governance this calls and the good governance agenda, which does not address economic imbalances and does not address ideological reconstruction of society. They are supporting most of the individuals here; the Mutes of this world have got strong support from the western embassies

I Imanyaras?

R Imanyaras of this world , the Kennedy foundation and the German foundation, which want to create new leadership , well trained in liberal ideology, find a lot of room now in the rest.

I And just kind of diverse

R Please go ahead

I Cold war has just ended and the Asian community is looking for -

R And Moi is no longer a darling , you can no longer afford to say so.

I You can buy-

R Exactly

I So here, you have your [unclear], you have the politicians , new politicians

R Yes, a new party

I And new in quotes, they are really just being-

R Thank you , thank you

I Okay, they are really just re-emerging politicians looking for openings. And then you have the NGO phenomenon

R Ya, that is the main agenda

I Where human rights

R Ya, exploiting the interests of these and the money starts to flow

I Exactly, ya

R And over here you get... a few going into politics

I You get a whole lot of them , Muites, Imanyaras, Kurias

R Exactly, **using NGOs to come back to political activism**

I But these are non ideological so I am not quite sure where they come from: ideological paths?

R No, they are not part of the ideological-

I But you do not get some ideologists , we haven't had their names yet

R From the right, no from the left

I I haven't drawn it here but if this is left , okay  
*( interruption in recording )*

R Yes

I So we have accounted for them , new politicians which are really KANU and most of them

R They just want to occupy the new political spaces that are created by

I Then some of the professionals move into human rights

R Also civil society

I Civil society

R And some of them just pass through it to go to those who have their paths open, go straight to politics here

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I Okay, human rights becomes a flying ship for both the donors and some of the civil society

R Exactly

I Another group is left in the cold

R Put this off because I want to mention this  
*( interruption in recording , tape goes off )*

I Would one's view of human rights for the ideological driven, it was not really their first priority. Their first priority was a shift in the way the government is run, a shift in ideological system. Whereas for the second group which is political more motivated, human rights became a vehicle for

R Political career

I Punishing Moi?

R Punishing Moi, exactly.

I And for the third group, the not sort of professionals; it became a business

R No, no no. I think you are not cruel to anybody, I think that is a fairly accurate categorisation of those tendencies

I Okay, so you have the ideological , now which to human rights ?

R Ya

I Ideological group for shortcoming.

R Yes

I Ideological group and political group and professional group?

R Ya

I Kind of, it was the vehicle towards a new system

R To a new system and actually using to develop political capacity

I Which means?

R And also employment

**[Some activists turn to human rights ngos – for employment]**

I And employment?

R And employment as well. I must remind you that there is no way the government will allow you to teach at the University , you cannot get business this space here doubles as un -employment opportunity

I Ya

R It also retains you in constant dialogue with the system so that you can develop political capacity to possibly influence the national politics generally , but here there are so many, you must see it from the point of view that when most of the actions came out apart from a person like who could have chosen to go and practice law and a person like Ombaka? Who could have practiced law. Ombaka started by the way the first NGO on human rights in I9--.

I Known as ?

R The Public Law Institute

R **1980, Willis, he was a good friend of ours, so Ombaka could have managed to practice law. Kibutha Kibwana could have practiced law and taught at the university as a professor already. But for instance Willy Mutua [former head of the private Kenya Human Rights Commission] found this was a better continuation of what he'd been doing before the politics which cost him detention. He thought this practising law would only give him professional satisfaction but was not going to provide him with the required tools to engage the system and so and the same with Ombaka . So the first NGO's that were started here were people like those, people who, not necessarily, did not have a source of livelihood. But now we, and I must give you my own need as an individual, we are here because we couldn't get employment anywhere else.**

I Hmmh, you were shut out

R So you think where can I remain ideologically active, where can I remain politically active and earn something to feed myself, so you see some open space and you try to create an agenda that will give you hurdle over political engagement with other, actors in society.

I So yes, it was a job which is pretty basic, you need it.

R Very basic

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I You trained but where do you go?

R Ya

I But the second thing is it gives you source of satisfaction

R Exactly because it is continuation [of human rights/political concerns].

I Because it's not just making bars of soap

R Exactly, you can still be critical, you can still introduce your - you can still use that platform for advancing some political agenda over and above good governance and disco's. Second group, professional politicians, the movement of human rights as a way of sort of punishing Moi

R Punishing Moi.

I It becomes like a moral issue

R Exactly, punishing Moi in order that they can occupy the political space which Moi is likely to [unclear] them if he's wicked.

I There's no reason to be blunt about it, there's no guarantee that they are really interested in these issues per se.

R No

I Because the biggest issue is the power of the president.

R Precisely. That's now like: what good example can I give you? Mukhisa Kituyi by the way belongs to -[do] you know Mukhisa?

I The name but I don't know the person.

R He's a member of Parliament, very active, very articulate. You better interview him; he is a very interesting man. He was, is, a close friend to Peter Anyang' Nyong'o [a key player in the resistance to Moi] and he's in NAK now, He's one of them, a very articulate spokesman, he was thrown out of the University just shortly before we were detained then he ran away to Kampala and finished his studies, went to Norway and did his Ph.D came back and again joined, went to an NGO and used it as a platform to be elected and now

is still sympathetic to the NGO world, relying on all his contracts he uses in the NGO as supplementary source of political [influence].

I Income?

R Ya, income as well. He does a lot of consultancy but he's a member of Parliament all the same

I Okay, so then we get the professionals in as far as human rights, its employment?

R Yes.

I It's a job

R It's a job

I And for some, that's as far as it goes.

R The majority.

I A lot of these NGO's are-

R For them that is as far as it goes

I There's a few others which have more credibility, KHRC [the non-government Kenya Human Rights Commission].

R KHRC definitely.

I Okay, LSK [Law Society of Kenya, the professional bar association, which at times was politically active, depending on who was the Chair.] provides a lot of ammunition to a lot of members of parliament.

R Actually it's the royal road to big time politics

I Ya (laughs). It's true. When I came back [to Kenya in 2002], I found that everyone [many] that I used to talk to [as a journalist] who [worked outside government] were now inside.

R Exactly. And there's very little ideological...within LSK

I Ya, psychology (*interruption in recording stops*) as a field in what actually happened or what did happen in terms of peoples' consciousness of human rights which were kind of [unclear] by these three groups of various motives? But I'm wondering if reduction of fear was an element in bringing about mass support for movements of human rights in Kenya?

R I think it started, I don't want to talk of reward, but there came a period when it was rewarding, when it was rewarding to be associated with protest and the

number grew, there was no material reward in the feeling that you're recognised as somebody who's taking part in a very respectable and historically rewarding activities. And that some of these people went to the US and got good, other scholarships to do their PHD's in Harvard like what do you call him, like Kiraitu Murungi. Some people go to them, I received an award from Penn [State]; you know Penn?

I Yes

R Ya, I received an award for having taken a stand that had taken me to jail twice. Those had very hidden rewards that other people want to see it as something that was honourable to be part of. And politically it was even more rewarding. Let's start with 1991 or 1992 towards the end of November, say in 1990.

I Okay

R When multipartism was coming with the end of the Cold War, when the whole of western world was supporting the multiparty movement in the country-

I Right

R And these people in the media, the media also was lionising. Political spaces were open for them, they had almost an opening; they didn't need to go to plead with people to be elected to be respected as politicians. Most were called by members of the committee to come and represent them. It was easy for them to be part of the process even where competition was required; they were one up on the others.

I Because they'd pushed for human rights.

R Exactly.

I They wanted human rights.

R Exactly. It was rewarding in the sense that, people now it was easy for them to win political contests. Those who went to the NGO world started to live better because they had money as employment and so they became heroes in society generally. People started seeing something positive associated with what they stood for, what they suffered for. And so it became something even high school students want to be. Whenever I argue in my exam, whenever I went home, everybody came to congratulate me, and I would say what are you congratulating me for? 'You know without you, we wouldn't be where we are, people would not be talking the way we do now,' and so it became-

I They recognised your contribution.

R Exactly. And that recognition became a symbol of social competence, of social, how do I put it, as something that people admire and aspire to be

And that in turn gave people , the other people more courage so it was now feeling on itself.

I What other people?

**Culture of resistance grows**

R Individuals now who were finishing university started becoming more courageous to talk, even people who had not been associated with the path of protest in this country

I So university students?

R University students, trade union, unfortunately trade union was going the other side, the trade union was dying as this political space was opening itself up

I Being co-opted?

R Exactly, being co-opted generally. So I must say for those who were politically inclined, the critical mass had been reached and having been part of political opposition, regardless of what angle, whether ideological or otherwise, you formed a special class now carrying a badge of honour with them. And that helped to infuse more courage in those who were not part of it and they were aspiring to join that group of so called chosen people who had taken up the struggle, who had stood firm. It gave birth to a lot of courage , widespread courage in the country. People [talk], knowing also that Moi had lost his secret weapon of taking people in detention. The moment he was pushed to the wall and agreed to remove. It was not officially done but it was negotiated at the, what do you call that?

I Or RPP [Release Political Prisoners, an activist group for helping detained activists].

I Detention was abolished?

R It was abolished, not formally abolished. It was done at this RPG , what is it called? It was an agreement.

I IPPG [Inter Party Parliamentary Group]

R IPPG yes. Exactly. I don't know why it was escaping from my mind. That agreement was very important because it now occurred or put a stamp on the fact that Moi was not just going to call for meetings, no detentions without trial, chiefs would no longer arrest you as they please,

I No sedition

R Sedition was repealed as a law

I So going back though, this consciousness-raising business, did those who had survived the human rights push were still alive?

R Ya

I When they go back home to the village or

R They were heroes, heroes, heroes

I And people heard about them

**Activists can push for human rights outside of political office, too.**

R People were forcing them to go to politics; people kept wondering why I am not active in politics; actually, now even people keep asking me, after investing so much? I mean **I didn't invest in politics, I invested in political change in this country and that does not require that I become a politician.** I can still contribute further and sustain this, from many, many stations in life. I can do it from the NGO angle, if there's somebody who wants to support my agenda, I can do it as trade unionist, I can do it as a journalist if I was able, if my writing skills were up to the standard. So people still think somebody is not right with you, and my colleague who had a chance to go, they were all welcomed in. Just give me a moment (*tape interrupted for a call.*)

I These people thought you were crazy not to take advantage of the popularity

R Precisely.

I And go into politics. But there's more than one arena to serve your country

R If you read the books, 'nani' [refer to someone] said it very well, he interviewed me and he reproduced it almost verbatim. This guy was a journalist here from the US. I noticed him; I saw him last in Middle East

I Who's that?

R A black American, he used to be at IPS.

*[end of part A – tape recording interrupted]*

I So why aren't you in politics? [laughs]

R Well, I got disillusioned when I noticed that the spaces that had been opened, I mean there was, in psychology we use this word, over-determination, that the space that was created, was caused by one particular factor, it was over-determined; it was caused by many factors, that's what the word over-determination is about.

So I noticed that the space that had been opened was not dominated by the KANU people that I wanted to soldier on with, in the form of political arena. I would have gone into formal politics if most of the people I knew what they looked for, what they wanted after this society, happened to be in the forefront. But I found out that since this was a negotiated space, some people had smuggled their way into it, and were hogging some space there

which should have been hogged by some other people, out of my own feeling. So I thought that political discourses that are taking space of multipartyism, it needs to play itself home for some while, until maybe there's a shake out, and if the shakeout allows a strong presence of the people I share politics with, then I would want to join in. But for the moment, I notice I was able to make much difference, the agenda was generally to replace what was there.

I And you didn't just want to join that.

R I thought I was just going to [unclear] my energy. If half of the people keeping that space, particularly key actors were people with my agenda, I would have joined them, but they were so few. I admire them for sticking their neck there for me, remaining there to fight on, but I think I didn't have enough motivation to be there. I thought I could play my role elsewhere where I thought I have more energy and where I thought I have more work to contribute more.

I What do you think you have done, to advance human rights in Kenya?

R First of by example and I think by choice of areas where I want to take part. I think by example more than anything else and the carnage with which I still want to take up issues which are not in the mainstream of NGO activities like **it's my organisation that started anti – corruption movement.**

I You started what?

R Anti – corruption movement.

I What was it called?

R The same organisation we had anti – corruption agenda

I Okay

R So even when Transparency International came in, it was on the heels of what we had been doing for about four years.

I And the name of your group is called social

R Development Network

I What does it do?

R We have many agendas, we can get into that later. We have many programs.

I The main focus is what?

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R The main focus is on empowering civil society actors to develop capacity, for strategic action that can change structurally and not just complaining. So that's why we engage in budget literacy; we thought it's important to demystify the

budget as the action of some economics in the Ministry of-, so we want to popularise the idea of popular participation in the budget process. People must question where our resources go. We are engaging the process: poverty reduction paper, the World Bank blue print for fighting poverty. We want to engage with it ideologically and question whether it has the capacity to challenge policies that entrench poverty in our country.

- I Let me come back to the details of the program, that's very important. Does this relate to human rights?
- R Oh the **economic aspects of human rights**, not the first generation of human rights, definitely **the third generation of human rights** are included. We have a strong feeling that economic [needs] form the basis of any human rights. People have no right if they are exploited, if they have no capacity to participate in social life effectively and with dignity. Then they theorise that that which they may think they have is not sufficient enough for me.
- I In other words you are thinking of multiparty but they can't feed their family?
- R Exactly
- I On support.
- R Going for elections everywhere; being allowed to go hide back and talking and shouting; being allowed to go to Parliament and abuse Moi. Really, they are important, they are symbols of freedom but really they didn't address the core issues about human rights. **Because human rights must start with economic cries** and that a contested issues, contested thesis, I think it's an objective worth working towards. It's difficult to achieve it in any society, but I think it should be a full time occupation of those who think they want to improve society.
- I **The consensus point would be that hardcore political rights without economic progress is pretty shallow.**
- R **Ya, that's my contention.**  
End on interview