

BLACK FRIDAY: Behind The Battle for Kawangware

I visited Kawangware, the sprawling ghetto on the outskirts of Nairobi city, days after it had quieted down from a “political showdown” - a euphemism for brutal ethnic fighting- following the October 26 repeat election.

The air was sombre. There was an uncanny feeling that this was not your normal, bustlingly busy Kawangware. The people moved in rhythmic motions, melancholy and solemnly. It was as if they were mourning. And they were. A day after the repeat presidential election that was ignored by Raila Odinga, the opposition leader who had successfully petitioned President Uhuru Kenyatta’s win in the August 8, 2017 general elections, a massacre had occurred.

Kawangware 56 has been a melting cauldron of ethnic tensions for the last three months. After the August election, problems started brewing in the area. “The antagonism between Jubilee Party supporters and the Opposition National Super Alliance (NASA) had been palpable even during the tense campaign period,” Philip, who lives in Stage Two, one of the neighborhoods within Kawangware 56, told me.

A day after the repeat presidential election that was ignored by Raila Odinga, the opposition leader who had successfully petitioned President Uhuru Kenyatta’s win in the August 8, 2017 general elections, a massacre had occurred.

“When the Supreme Court of Kenya (SCOK) annulled Uhuru’s victory there were wild celebrations in Kawangware 56,” he added. “Businesses owned by Kikuyus - of all of them - did not open at all, especially on the main Macharia Road. The boda boda (motorcycle) riders largely Luhyas, Luos and Kisiis spent the whole day riding up and down the road, shouting, yelling and taunting the Kikuyus, who were too scared to venture out or conduct their day-to-day retail businesses.”

On October 10, Raila, who had polled second to Uhuru Kenyatta with 6,762,224 votes against Uhuru’s, 8,203,290 votes in August, had pulled out of the fresh presidential election ordered by the court, citing a recalcitrant Independent

Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) that had refused to reform.

Up until the fresh election date, both sides of the political divide had been exchanging ethnically loaded expletives and invectives. By October, the taunting had reached its apogee: Kikuyus, who had overwhelmingly voted for Uhuru were daring the Luhyas, Luos and Kisiis - many of them supporters of Raila - not to vote.

“There is not one trigger that led up to the violence that eventually erupted on October 27, but a culmination of piled up anger and animosity,” said Philip. “Matters came to a head on the eve of October 26, when hoards of NASA supporters, moved around in Kawangware 56 - which largely consists of Congo, Gatini and Stage Two areas - and vowed to chop of any finger, the following day, if found with the pink ink,” referring to the indelible ink applied to the fingers of voters during elections to prevent electoral fraud.

One of the big Kawangware 56 business moguls, who runs Waiyaki Supermarket, located on the ground floor of a multi-storeyed building in Congo area facing Gitanga Road, is said to have been one of the people who mobilized the dreaded Mungiki.

On the election day itself, businesses did not open, but that did not prevent them from being looted and vandalized by NASA allied gangs who were roaming in Kawangware 56, ostensibly hunting for those who had voted.

The following day, likewise, Kikuyu youth were also on the prowl, hunting for those who had not voted. A witness, Josphar Ochwaya, told an AFP journalist that “a group of people started attacking people questioning them why they had not voted.”

“Harassment, destruction, looting of business premises was the order of the day on election day in Kawangware 56,” said Philip. “That is the day Mwireri Supermarket on Macharia Road was broken into and looted. The other supermarket PBK Supermarket was well secured so they did not break into it.” Although PBK was not looted, it remains closed as I write. Many people did not vote, Philip said, because they were afraid of the NASA gangs.

“There was no voting at Hope Centre on Macharia Road, Kabiru Primary and

Kabiru Health Centre. Although there was heavy presence of the police and GSU (a paramilitary outfit), still that did not guarantee complete safety for voters, so many kept off.” Alarmed by the escalating tensions, which spilled to the following day, Kikuyu business people mobilized Kikuyu youth to protect their property.

One of the big Kawangware 56 business moguls, who runs Waiyaki Supermarket, located on the ground floor of a multi-storeyed building in Congo area facing Gitanga Road, is said to have been one of the people who mobilized the dreaded Mungiki.

It is not clear how many people were actually killed that night. The government and local media reports claim only 10 people were killed, but the residents I spoke to say the number could easily reach 100.

Mungiki, a Kikuyu youth movement started in 1987 in Nyahururu town environs, later spread to urban towns of especially Nairobi and Nakuru, where there are large Kikuyu populations. The youth settled in the slums, where they quickly and successfully built extortion rings, the first target naturally being their own Kikuyu people. In no time, they came to be feared for their macabre killings, which were a way of sending coded messages to business concerns that refused to pay blackmail money.

As time wore on in the 1990s and 2000s, the group expanded its extortion businesses – from offering security services to running and managing matatu businesses. At the same time, it mutated into a militia for hire to wealthy businessmen and politicians. In Kawangware, less than 15km west of Nairobi’s city centre, the Mungiki became famous for terrorizing landlords. Later, the same landlords were to rely on Mungiki in dealing with difficult tenants, majority of whom were non-Kikuyus. The landlords had found a symbiotic way of co-existing with the dreaded youth group.

Philip says that “the youth assembled outside [the Waiyaki Supermarket] at around 5.00pm, I saw them. Charged and chanting, they were ready to shed blood. In the heat of the moment, they killed two NASA supporters,” though the local press reported three deaths.

Following this, for seven hours, from about 8pm to 2.30am on Friday October 27, with the Mungiki on one side and Luhya, Luo and Kisii youth on the other, a fierce

battle was fought into the dead of the night. At the end of the clash - according to several Kawangware 56 residents and a landlord in the area, many bodies lay dead.

It is not clear how many people were actually killed that night. The government and local media reports claim only 10 people were killed, but the residents I spoke to say the number could easily reach 100.

Many of these deaths, they say, have been concealed. "Families that lost their kith and kin have been mum about their loss. They are not talking about them - it is as if they have been sworn to silence," said a source who did not want his identity revealed for security reasons. But more significantly, according to the source, "all of the youths killed on Macharia Road [where much of the fighting took place] were picked up by the police that night, put on their trucks, which drove away with them," said the source. This may explain the disparity in casualty figures.

Most of Raila's supporters had heeded his call and stayed away from the polls and word was going round that Luhya and Kisii youth were chopping off fingers of anyone who had the pink ink on his finger. Njogu had supposedly dared the Bunge youth to cut his finger if "they were men enough".

Kawangware is basically divided into two areas: Kawangware 46 and Kawangware 56. The numbers are city bus routes that the defunct Kenyan Bus Service (KBS) came up with in the 1980s when it was still providing public transport services across the city. The route numbers were adopted by matatus and outlived the collapse of KBS.

Kawangware 56 borders Kangemi and the wealthy Lavington suburb across Gitanga Road. Kangemi - a slum settlement - is in many ways just like Kawangware: it is a Kikuyu indigenous area, now majorly occupied by the Luhya community. It is also host to Mungiki youth, who today engage in turf wars and gang battles with the Luhya youth.

The most popular myth of the origin of the name Kawangware is the one that refers to a Kikuyu man named Ngware, who is believed to have opened the first shop in the area in the early sixties. Kikuyu shoppers would say they have gone to Ngware's shop or "Ka - wa - Ngware". Another myth suggests the place got its name Ngware, because it was the place of the "guinea bird" (Ngware in Kikuyu

language). Yet another claim is that Kawangware is a corruption of the Maasai name, Ewa Engare, or the place of floods.

Be that as it may, Kawangware was a traditional weekly market place which in colonial times was part of the original Kiambu district and under paramount chief Kinyanjui wa Gathirimu, the chief of Riruta area. From 1904 to 1959 African farming and land ownership was confined to native reserves. During this period, land in Kawangware and the neighbouring area of Satellite was made available for African freehold ownership. In the run up to and following independence in 1963, partly as a result of the area being exempted from taxes and from strict building and planning regulations, the area witnessed a huge influx of immigrants coming from other parts of the country in search of a good city life and cheap accommodation. Thus by 1964, when it was swallowed as part of Dagoretti District within the city boundaries, the largely Kikuyu population had swelled to include Kisii, Luo, Luhya, Nubians and Maasai. A 1979 [study](#) found that following sustained immigration from Busia district, Luhyas by then made up 20 percent of the population.

“The Mungiki had no inkling that the Luhya, Luo and Kisii youth already expected that they could be attacked any time and had prepared for battle,” said Karanja.

Both Kawangware 46 and 56 are densely populated, but it is Kawangware 56 that is the hotbed of cross-cultural ethnic politics, because it is today largely populated by non-Kikuyu communities from western Kenya: the Luhyas and Kisiis. Official figures regarding the current ethnic composition of Kawangware are hard to come by. According to the 2009 Kenya Population and Housing Census, the population was 133,286 -that has doubtless grown in the 8 years since- but offered no account of the ethnic breakdown. “Nine out of 10 people who live in Kawangware 56 is either a Luhya or from the Kisii community,” estimates a Kikuyu landlord, who has been renting his houses to the Luhyas from the mid-1990s.

Stage Two is where Kawangware 56 Bunge la Mwananchi (people’s parliament) meet every evening. Established in the early 1990s, Bunge la Mwananchi is a grassroots movement that provides social space for debates and discussion on social, political and economic issues by ordinary Kenyans. During the campaign

period for the August 8, elections, the Kawangware chapter met even more regularly: early in the mornings before everyone started on his day's business and in the evenings to exchange notes on the day's politics. Bunge la Mwananchi in Kawangware 56 comprises largely Luhyas and Kisii.

At about 10.30am, On October 26, a middle-aged Kikuyu businessman known as Njogu, who ran the Zebra Bar and Restaurant Club on Macharia Road, opposite Stage Two, and who had just voted, was said to have come to the meeting place and waved his small finger with the ink mark. "I have just voted: what are you gonna do?" he is said to have taunted the assembled youth.

All that violence could not have taken place without the unseen hands of the politicians across the political divide. The galvanization of the respective militia gangs was the work of local politicians.

Most of Raila's supporters had heeded his call and stayed away from the polls and word was going round that Luhya and Kisii youth were chopping off fingers of anyone who had the pink ink on his finger. Njogu had supposedly dared the Bunge youth to cut his finger if "they were men enough". They knew him very well, the club owner and took this as a direct affront.

Njogu went away, but not before warning the youth and reminding them that they were foreigners and could be sent packing any time. Not long afterwards, the bunge was adjourned and the youths left Stage Two.

To the NASA brigade, the deaths of their kinsmen the next morning, was an ominous sign of what was to come and, unbeknownst to the Kikuyus, they alerted their brethren in Kangemi and in the Kibera slum .

At about 4.30pm, around 400 Mungiki youth started moving down in a column from Waithaka wielding pangas and clubs in broad daylight heading towards Kawangware 56 along Naivasha Road. Little did they know that the Luhya, Luo and Kisii youth lay in wait. "The Mungiki had no inkling that the Luhya, Luo and Kisii youth already expected that they could be attacked any time and had prepared for battle," said Karanja.

Meanwhile, Mungiki had also summoned reinforcements from their Kangemi fraternity. Kawangware 56 and Kangemi are connected by Mau Mau Bridge - a

low level stone bridge with metal guard rails on both sides that crosses a stream meandering through Kangemi. "On Friday evening, I counted about 300 Mungiki youth rolling down to Mau Mau Bridge, carrying pangas, sticks and clubs singing Kikuyu songs," said a source who spoke to me in strict confidence and who asked me to hide his name. "I was able to count them because they passed just outside my house."

Karanja told me Mau Mau Bridge, which is strong and wide enough for motor vehicles to pass, has seen many a gang battle between the Mungiki and the Luhya youth. "Whoever controls the bridge carries the day", said Karanja, who has aptly nicknamed the bridge "ground zero."

"In all of my 20 years at the market, business has never been this bad," confessed Kabuda, a seasoned vegetable seller.

Once the Mungiki youth from Kangemi had crossed the bridge, their would-be targets emerged and sealed it off trapping them. From the Mau Mau Bridge, which is on a valley, the road climbs up to connect with Macharia Road, which links up with Naivasha Road. It is therefore a corridor that runs about 1.5kms. Left only with the escape route at the mouth of Macharia Road, the Mungiki had been out-manoeuvred and were out-numbered. They would soon be overpowered and overwhelmed,

Some sought refuge at Zebra Bar. It was a deadly mistake as the club was surrounded, locked and set ablaze with them still inside. The rest of the Mungiki youth, pursued by the panga wielding Luhya and Kisii, ran up the road and attempted to hide at the rental houses and shops located at the junction of Macharia Road and Naivasha Road. It became another death trap. The compound was also razed, the fire engulfing retail shops butcheries, M-Pesa agent kiosks and residential houses.

"In a conventional battle, the Kikuyus are no match for the Luhyas and Kisiis" Karanja told me. "The Mungiki youth thought they would stalk their enemies but instead walked into a trap." What saved the Mungiki youth from further annihilation were the police and the paramilitary, who came to their rescue. However, even the police were no match for the combined force of the well-armed and prepared gang.

“10 policemen were caught in the ensuing battle and died,” an intelligence officer based at Central Police Station told me. “Six died on the spot on Macharia Road.” Many, he added, were maimed and driven by ambulance vehicles that came to pick the wounded officers that night. They are being treated at Defence Forces Memorial Hospital, a military hospital on Mbagathi Way that is reputed to be one of the best equipped referral hospitals in the country.

All that violence could not have taken place without the unseen hands of the politicians across the political divide. The galvanization of the respective militia gangs was the work of local politicians. One name on the lips of many, including the Kawangware 56 residents, is that of rambunctious area MP, Simba Arati, of the Orange Democratic Party (ODM), an affiliate of NASA coalition.

Jubilee politicians have accused Arati of being an instigator of the violence, which he has denied, claiming in court papers that he had been hospitalized at the time and only heard of the fighting through social media. The MP has successfully applied to the high court for anticipatory bail, which prevents the police arresting him.

Many in Kawangware are not buying it. “Simba Arati is the one who orchestrated all the chaos,” said a Kikuyu landlord from Gatina. “After Arati was elected the MP, he began inciting both the Luhya and Kisiis to engage in acts of violence.” Arati, an ethnic Kisii, is distrusted by the Kikuyu landlords and business class, who accuse him of fomenting trouble, in the ultimate hope of ejecting Kikuyus from Kawangware 56.

“Before Arati was elected MP, there was peace and harmony in Kawangware 56,” said the landlord. “He is the source and inciter of the violence. He has been telling his people they cannot remain tenants forever. They must secure their space. What does that mean?” posed the landlord. “Already we have been outnumbered by these foreigners. That is why they are able to elect one of their own in our homeland.”

The landlord said there is vacant government land in Kawangware 56, “and I suspect Arati is ‘mark timing’ for that land, so that he can settle his people there as he plans on how he is going to overrun the rest of us Kikuyus.” The landlord was genuinely concerned that if the government machinery does not come to their aid, there was a real danger of ultimately being overpowered by the Luhyas

and Kisiis, who he kept referring to as “foreigners.”

Arati knows Kawangware 56 like the back of his hand. He was first elected as the area MP in 2013. Considered a frontline foot soldier in the ODM party ranks, he first entered competitive politics at the tender age of 22, when in 2003, he was made a nominated councilor by ODM. Five years later, he became an elected councilor. He is therefore a household name in Kawangware 56 and is reputed to have his own gang of loyal youth, who he can mobilize in the twinkling of an eye.

“The truth of the matter,” said Karanja, “is that today’s Kawangware is totally different from the Kawangware of two decades ago. The population dynamics of the area have altered who drives the local economy.” In short, what Karanja was saying to me was, without the non-Kikuyu communities, the Kawangware economy was dead.

The Mungiki youth are alleged to have been bankrolled by Jubilee politicians and three names were mentioned by those I spoke to: Kiambu governor Ferdinand Waititu, the former MP for Dagoretti South, Dennis Waweru and Gatundu South MP, Moses Kuria.

Tuesdays and Fridays are the busiest days in Kawangware, because they happen to be market days. Residents of the wealthy suburbs of Hurlingham, Kileleshwa, Lavington and Valley Arcade drive to the market in swanky SUVs on Saturday mornings to buy fresh farm produce.

Ten days after the battle on Macharia Road, I went to the Kawangware Market, which is located in the 46 area. I had gone to see Kabuda aka Mwaniki. It was on a Monday afternoon. Short and stocky, Kabuda, is one of the better known faces at the market. Self-effacing, he was his jolly self nonetheless. My mission to the market had been to see for myself how badly the rising ethnic tensions had affected the flow of business at the market.

“In all of my 20 years at the market, business has never been this bad,” confessed Kabuda, a seasoned vegetable seller. “Since that black Friday, market business has been just going down and down.” In this era of smart phones and the explosion of social media, information travels at the speed of light. By the morning of the Saturday October 28, information had reached Kabuda’s suppliers that Kawangware was now a no-go zone.

“My suppliers from Molo, Njabini, north and south Kinangop were already calling me asking about what was happening in Kawangware,” said Kabuda. “The burning of the club and the houses had scared them off.” Kawangware Market receives fresh farm produce – from bananas and beetroot, to cabbages and carrots, to pears and potatoes. Medium sized trucks are driven all the way from Kinangop, Kirinyaga, Molo, Njabini and Nyahururu to Kawangware Market.

Kabuda specializes in selling fresh cabbages direct from the farms in Njabini in Nyandarua County. “When business was at its peak, I would order cabbages in three Mitsubishi FH Canter trucks each carrying 3.0 tonnes, which would be delivered by Thursday night.” By Monday evening, his suppliers would again make the 100km journey to Kawangware Market to restock Kabuda’s stall.

“My customers are both retail and wholesale,” said Kabuda. And because of his huge consignment – 9.0 tonnes worth of cabbages need hours to offload- his goods would arrive on the eve of each market day. On the Monday afternoon I went to interview Kabuda, he was, as usual, expecting arrival of his goods. So we took tea and buttered bread, as we bantered away on the vicissitudes of Kenyan politics.

“Political violence and instability are destructive to business. On the Saturday morning following the fight, *itonga cia Lavington itiokire thoko* (the Lavington rich kept off the market),” pointed out Kabuda. “I made huge losses, because weekends are very busy for me – as they are indeed for the entire market.” He added that since the night of the violence, no supplier had been willing to risk taking his truck to the Kawangware Market.

Kabuda told me the violence had escalated an already bad situation to a worse one. “Already business at the market had been severely affected after the September ruling, which overruled the President Uhuru’s win.” The hazy political uncertainty, he said, had created an atmosphere of fear for his many customers, both retail and wholesale. Kawangware, like many of Nairobi’s 200 informal settlements, according to a 2012 study by the African Population and Health Research Centre, is a crucible of the intense ethnic passions, ignitable at the slightest provocation, that have come to pervade our political landscape.

Kabuda, said no one was willing to tempt fate. “This state of affairs has badly affected business at the market, which depends on the movement of goods and

people. If goods and people keep off, there will be no market to talk about.” At about 5p.m., a 2.5 tonne Canter truck entered the market – it was the only truck that I had seen in all the time I sat chatting with Kabuda. His perishable cabbages had been delivered.

“Look, I can only now manage to order for half a Canter truck. I am splitting up the goods and costs with a friend – that is how bad business has become.” From the 9 tonnes that he would quickly sell in two days, Kabuda now was only moving 1.2 tonnes in a whole week. “If by Friday – the next market day – I will have offloaded all these cabbages, I will indeed be very lucky,” he surmised.

Kawangware Market is one of the economic mainstays of the area. The others are hardware supermarkets, real estate and transport logistics (spawned by a booming construction industry) and the matatu industry. “The truth of the matter,” said Karanja, “is that today’s Kawangware is totally different from the Kawangware of two decades ago. The population dynamics of the area have altered who drives the local economy.”

In short, what Karanja was saying to me was, without the non-Kikuyu communities, the Kawangware economy was dead. “What Kabuda did not tell you is that many of his customers – retail or otherwise – are the Luhya and Kisii, who today constitute three-quarters of the total population of the entire Kawangware combined,” said Karanja.

“With the talk of boycotting certain products very much in the air,” he said, referring to the call by the NASA coalition for consumers to stop buying products by companies it accuses of helping Jubilee rig the elections, “it does not take a genius to know the Luhyas and Kisiis could be keeping away from the Kawangware Market.”

Kawangware has two markets: the main Kawangware Market and the much smaller and less well known Soko Mjinga Market which is in the heart of Kawangware 56. “Soko Mjinga Market is the market for the real ghetto dwellers of Gatina, Stage Two and Congo areas,” said Karanja. “Here, the real *kadogo* informal economy is at play: with just about two hundred shillings, one can buy ¼ kg of sugar, ¼ kg of unrefined cooking oil, kerosene, tea leaves complete with a ½ packet of homogenized milk.”

Mbuthe cursed the prevailing political climate and hoped the boycott proposed

by the opposition leader Raila Odinga on certain goods and products would not translate into NASA supporters boycotting any business run by a Kikuyu.

Karanja's assertion that Kawangware's economy rested on the goodwill of non-Kikuyu communities was supported by Jackson Mwangi, the owner of a well-established hardware shop on Naivasha Road. A stockist of cement, metal, timber and varied construction materials, Mwangi candidly told me: "Majority of my clients are Luhyas and Kisiis. Let nobody cheat you: without them, many of the hardware businesses in Kawangware would cease to exist."

For the last two months, Mwangi said, his business had faced hard times. "It has been the political uncertainties occasioned by the Supreme Court of Kenya judgement and now the violence that rocked Kawangware 56." The businessman told me if the political uncertainty persisted and the random ethnic flare-ups were not checked, the business which he has built for well over 15 years would be in big trouble.

"I will tell you this: I used to deposit Sh500,000 every Friday at my bank. Today, I am barely making it to Sh100,000. I have six employees. If this situation continues, I will have to let them go. I am not in a good place." Mwangi said that he used to enjoy credit facilities from Co-operative Bank, his bank for many years. "But you know what? I went there the other day, and the manager told me they had stopped the privilege forthwith. Nobody is taking chances."

"My suppliers are now demanding cash. Before, they would provide me with the materials and would give me up to 90 days grace period to pay up. They trusted me, because I would honour the pledge, as I was moving the goods. With the bank covering my back, I was not worried. I could always run to my bank manager in case of a shortfall. Well, that is no more for now," he says.

Mwangi pointed out that there was not much construction going in Kawangware anyway. "I would know, because many of my customers who have been putting up [housing] estates have suspended their work. They are no longer coming to me for materials. Nobody wants to invest in an area that might explode at any time."

For Stephen Mbuthe, setting up a computer college business in Kawangware 56 has been a learning curve. "When I first came here five or years ago, I did not have a clue who would constitute my students," said Mbuthe. We were standing

outside the rented premises where his college is located. "*Reke gikwire, Gikuyu gitithomaga.* (Let me tell you, Kikuyus are not interested in acquiring additional skills). Why am I telling you this? For all the time I have ran this college, my students have been Luhyas and Kisiis. They are eager to first acquire new knowledge which will help them find jobs afterwards."

The converse is true of Kikuyus: "They are interested first in acquiring money, then if it is a must they have to acquire some computer skill, that is when they will come here for short courses. But even those ones, I can count on the fingers of my two hands for all the time I have operated the college." Bottom line: the ethnic confrontations between the Kikuyus and Luhyas/Kisiis were hurting his business.

I had gone to see him on a week day. "Look, the class is empty, my students have stopped coming, and their teachers are just lazing about." Mbuthe cursed the prevailing political climate and hoped the boycott proposed by the opposition leader Raila Odinga on certain goods and products would not translate into NASA supporters boycotting any business run by a Kikuyu.

Like Mbuthe, David Ruraya, a landlord, who has lived half of his life in Kawangware 56, was a worried man when I went to meet him to Stage Two. He lives 500 metres on the right of Stage Two, as one approaches from Macharia Road. "All my tenants are Luhyas," said Ruraya. He did not tell me how many they were, but he made the point that fellow landlords also hosted Luhya tenants. "We have been outnumbered by 10 - 1. If they choose not to pay rent, there is practically nothing we can do."

Truly fortunes had changed. Barely a decade ago, no Kawangware 56 landlord would have imagined his tenants would hold him at ransom. The landlords' association lays down the law and if tenants proved to be difficult, the Mungiki youth - at a small fee - were there to enforce it. "Let me be honest with you: the Mungiki today are not a match for the Luhya youth," Ruraya said to me matter-of-factly. The Friday battle on Macharia Road had removed any lingering doubt about the efficacy of Mungiki's terror tactics.

"The Luhya gangs are better organized, they are united and constantly hang together," noted Ruraya. "*Anake aitu nimanyuire muno, matingehota mbara.* (Our (Kikuyu) youth have taken to reckless drinking, they can no longer fight)."

Karanja had also told me that a big part of the reason why the Mungiki had been routed by the Luhya youth was many of them were inebriated. “The Mungiki incurred heavy casualties because they staggered away instead of running for dear life.”

“Let me be honest with you: the Mungiki today are not a match for the Luhya youth,” Ruraya said to me matter-of-factly. The Friday battle on Macharia Road had removed any lingering doubt about the efficacy of Mungiki’s terror tactics.

Ruraya reminded me that Kawangware was Kikuyu ancestral land, “so we the Kikuyus own the land, but the Luhyas and Kisiis have taken over our houses.” The houses in question are semi-permanent, oftentimes two-roomed affairs, with corrugated iron sheet roofs and cemented floors. “My tenants have yet to refuse to pay. I hope we don’t go there, so I am having to deal with them softly, softly,” said Ruraya.

Although in his hearts of hearts Ruraya holds his tenants the Luhyas in utter contempt, he needs them now more than they need him. If they were to vacate his houses or refuse to pay, he would suffer gravely. He told me he was hoping for peaceful co-existence. The dream of chasing away the Luhyas and Kisiis from Kawangware was just that: a dream.

That is what Micah, a mechanic from the Kisii community told me about his Kikuyu landlord. Micah who has ran a successful motor garage in Kawangware 56 for close to two decades now, said that on the day of the battle, his landlord had secured his garage and the other businesses on the property and ensured that they were protected from any malicious attacks.

I asked him how his garage was doing. “Business had slumped,” he owned up. He was reluctant to discuss anything remotely touching on politics, but with some prodding he told me his business had seen better days. “Just two months ago, if you came here like today, I would not have had the time to spare and to talk to you even for a minute. That is how busy I was. Look around now – the garage is empty.”

He pointed to a gearbox which, he said, was what was left of a Nissan matatu that was set alight just across the road. The owner, a fellow Kisii, had entrusted it to him for safekeeping. When I wanted to know who had burned the matatu, Micah

moved me aside and whispered into my ear - "Mungiki." Nearly all the Kawangware 56 matatus - big and small - are owned by the Kisiis. But while they own the matatus, the Mungiki control the termini. Hence, there has been a never-ending tussle between the matatu proprietors and Mungiki youth over the control and management of the route. Micah was of the view Mungiki burned the matatu to spite the Kisiis. The mechanic told me the Kisiis were very angry and hinted they could be plotting revenge.

"The settling of the Luhyas, and later, Kisiis in Kawangware in the last 30 years or so, has affected the work ethic and labour dynamics of the indigenous Kikuyu people," observed Karanja. "Today, the Luhyas and Kisiis make up the reservoir of labour that is today employed in the posh suburbs of Hurlingham, Kileleshwa, Lavington, Loresho, Mountain View, Westlands and Valley Arcade." These rich neighbourhoods are within a 5km radius of both Kawangware 46 and 56.

"The Luhyas and Kisiis are employed as domestic workers - baby sitters, cooks, gardeners, house helps, laundry women and security men - in these areas. Unlike the Kikuyus, they have accepted lowly and menial jobs and walk to their respective work stations. Overtime, with their collective meagre wages, these people, who are derided and looked down by the Kikuyus, have helped expand and grow Kawangware's economy in a mighty way," explained Karanja.

"I am afraid to say this - and I wish I could be proven wrong - but I strongly believe there is a looming ethnic conflagration that, if not checked in good time, will consume parts of Nairobi County."

"Kawangware would still be like your typical Kikuyu rural settlement had it not been for the advent of the Luhyas and Kisiis. They have spawned a local economy that cuts across real estate, provision of goods and service and, provided a ready wage labour market that is not afraid of manual work. All the mechanics, metal welders, panel beaters and spray painters in Kawangware are Luo, Luhya and Kisiis." In Kawangware, the Luos are mainly concentrated in the adjacent Kabiria and Riruta areas.

"Because the Kikuyus have this notion that they are the owners of Kawangware, the male youth especially have largely spurned wage labour, preferring instead, to idle around as they wait for business opportunities to avail themselves. Meantime, they spend their time drinking poison and engaging in nefarious

activities such as joining the Mungiki,” said Karanja.

The Luhya and Kisiis of Kawangware 56 have sworn they are not going anywhere. “We are not afraid of the Mungiki, we are ready for them - any time, any day,” said one Kisii youngster from Gatina which is a predominantly Kisii neighbourhood.

On October 31, when Cabinet Secretary for Education, who is also the acting CS for Internal Security, Fred Matiang’i, went to Gatina Primary School to inspect preparations for the next day’s start of the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) examinations, he was confronted by a band of marauding Kisii youth, who pelted his motorcade with stones forcing him to flee.

“Kawangware is a microcosm of the future ethnic warfare that is going to be fought on the dusty roads of the Nairobi’s murky and sordid slums,” Karanja reminded me once more. “The armageddon that was witnessed on that fateful Friday in Kawangware 56 is a powerful signal sent across the other ghettos that Mungiki should not scare anyone. I am afraid to say this - and I wish I could be proven wrong - but I strongly believe there is a looming ethnic conflagration that, if not checked in good time, will consume parts of Nairobi County.”