SACRALISING POLITICS: PATTERNS IN KENYA’S 2017 ELECTIONS
To Sacralise means
• To make holy;
• To make sacred;
• To imbue with sacred character, especially through ritualized devotion

J.S. Mbiti (African Religions and Philosophy, 1969) famously declared that Africans are notoriously religious.

Religion dictates relations with men, relation with the environment; and exerts the greatest influence upon the thinking and living of the African
Major opponents in Kenya’s election of 2017 were National Super Alliance (NASA Coalition), and Jubilee Party. Both parties appealed to not only reason, but also to a sacred calling in their quest for election/re election.

Both parties sacralised their political discourse; NASA choosing the narrative of “Road to Canaan” and Jubilee relying on the rhetoric of “Chosen Servant of God”
Discussion will rely on data collected from the media.

- Mainstream media (newspapers, television and radio)
- Social media platforms
- Both parties’ official channels of communication (blogs and websites)
Why the media?

- Opinion in the media is largely freely given, and it is easily accessible. (Abstract and analysed opinions, or arbitrary views)
- Arbitrary views in form of rumours and innuendoes can be particularly valuable for analysis because they provide insights into the perspective of the speaker as well as the object of discussion (Mainz, 2004:344)
- Jubilee Party is digital
- NASA has joined the digital bandwagon.
- Statistics from June 2017 shows internet usage in Kenya has been on a steady increase since 2010.

(http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm)
Theoretical explanation of politics sacralisation in Kenya

Functionalist views of religion

- Sociological functionalist perspectives, for example religion as an institution for maintaining social stability, (Emile Durkheim); religion as a tool used subjectively to reach desired ends (Marx Weber)
- Marxist functionalist views of religion
  - opiate of the masses
  - ideological instrument used by elites to pacify masses
• Road to Canaan was Opposition Party’s campaign slogan. Quest for power was equated to the biblical story of the Israelites move from Egypt to Canaan (Book of Exodus)
• NASA presidential candidate Raila Odinga was effectively given the title of Joshua
• The Road to Canaan discourse adopted from a local TV show; the XYZ Show
Interpreting “Road to Canaan” narrative

- Appropriating the Israelites journey makes NASA supporters special.
- Religion gives legitimacy to quest for power. Ethnic nationalism is boosted by religious conviction.
- Validate previous experiences of bad governance, poverty, while at the same time gives them hope for the future.
- Raila’s saviour complex re-affirmed by religious conviction.
Canaan for the grassroots supporter

Please send that money to ... My usual number has issues with M-pesa.

Be patient. In Canaan, money isn't everything. I have been told life will be good. Be careful not to be left in Egypt.

Please come home and vote for Baba(Raila)... Even though you are already in Canaan.
• NASA grassroots supporters’ views of Canaan reveals a much deeper need for good governance and its attendant advantages.

• In order to realise their Canaan dream, all things related to Egypt and ‘Pharaoh’ had to be rejected.
Chosen Servant of God
Jubilee Party’s Chosen Servant of God

• In the months preceding the election, Jubilee leaders began exhibiting Christian religious expressions, and slowly the narrative of God’s chosen servant evolved

• In the biblical story found in the book of Kings, David; a nobody, was favoured by God to become the leader of the Israelites. He was to become the greatest Israelite king

• God’s favour was sufficient enough for leadership
Interpreting “Chosen Servant of God”

British historian Lewis Namier declared that “...religion is a sixteenth Century word for nationalism...”

Religion is the primary basis for solidarity and mass belief. Faith provides both a template for popular engagement which state rulers and their opponents seek to emulate in the secular

• Jubilee leadership is sacralising politics to legitimise their rule. Historically, religion has been used to legitimise dominance
• Ethnic aspirations are being veiled as religiosity. Religion assumes motivating forces when the incentives of political power and financial support are present.

• Religion as opiate of the masses. Having a God chosen leader makes Jubilee supporters’ lose the willingness to confront the oppressive realities of Jubilee regime in Kenya.
God’s Chosen Servant for the grassroots supporter

On 8th August, 2017 at 2:00am, I saw heaven open and God’s Angel-Gabriel came down and went to Coast, Nyanza, Western and Eastern provinces of Kenya. He directed some voters on who to vote for as the president. They ticked Uhuru. Then I said, glory to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. And so it came to pass. Amen. Thank you God for Angel Gabriel for saving kenya.

Now I consent the Scripture, God’s fear is the beginning of His wisdom, humility is greatness, never bank on humans and oneself.

You are not going to Canaan
• Linda Colley (Britons Forging the Nation, 1992) posits that nationalism begins with an act of demonising a religious other and creating a sense of community by defining an “us” and “them”. Sacralising politics is a result of fear of domination by “them”. Being out of government threatens Jubilee supporters survival.

• Hope for being next in line. Patron client politics are at play.