



(REVIEW ARTICLE)



## Application of Kant's universal moral principle to the context of Kenyan political unrest

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International Journal of Science and Research Archive, 2024, 13(01), 1413–1422

Publication history: Received on 14 August 2024; revised on 28 September 2024; accepted on 30 September 2024

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/ijrsra.2024.13.1.1796>

### Abstract

This paper focuses primarily on the practical application of Immanuel Kant's universal moral principle to the context of political unrest in Kenya. Kant's universal moral principle embedded in the categorical imperative argues that we should act in a way that our actions can be at the same time be regarded as universal moral laws. The paper applies critical method of philosophy so as to attain the objective. The troubled land of Kenya, beset by political unrest, the infusion of Kantian ethical considerations in the political discourse, charts the pathway toward reconciliation and the construction of a more just political order. A collective commitment to moral principles will thus pave the way for a harmonious society in Kenya, where the voices of her natives are heard and respected.

**Keywords:** Political Violence; Categorical Imperative; Good Will; Duty; Ethnicity; Maxim.

### 1. Introduction

This paper focuses on analyzing the practical application of Immanuel Kant's universal moral principle to the problem of political unrest in Kenya. According to Longman dictionary, political unrest is referred to as a political situation in which people protest through demonstrating violent behavior. In this paper, however, the term 'political unrest' is consistently interchanged with 'political violence.' This is because both terms are used to refer to acts by groups of people that are intended to disrupt a community or organization. In this paper, we look into several ways in which Kant's universal moral principle can be applied to unravel the mystery of political unrest in Kenya. In other words, we are answering the question of whether Kant's ethics bear any pragmatic relevance in Kenya's political spectre, specifically when it comes to political violence.

#### 1.1. Conceptualizing Political Violence in Kenya

Where all forms of violence are said to relate to power, political violence has been defined as the commission of violent acts motivated by a desire, conscious or unconscious, to obtain or maintain political power (Moser & Clark, 2001). It is therefore the pursuit of political objectives (and not the end result of gaining or not gaining political power) that is at the core of this notion of unrest.

Defining political unrest is typically contingent on a typology that separates the politically motivated from economically and socially motivated forms of unrest. In this sense, political unrest takes place in the collective sphere where acts of violence are typically committed by a multitude of individuals from one group against individuals from another group, primarily because the targeted individual happens to belong to this group (Moser & Clark, 2001).

According to Moser & Clark (2001),

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Political violence typically takes the form of murder, assaults, sexual abuse such as rape, forced pregnancy or sterilization. Economic violence, on the other hand, is characterized by an individual (or a multitude of individuals) illegally pursuing financial enrichment by means of violence (or threats of violence), and typically manifests as street crimes such as robbery, drug related crimes or kidnapping. Social violence is said to pursue the empowerment of one individual over another, for example through domestic violence.

Many people, however, recognize that political unrest should not analytically be disintegrated from economic and social violence because all forms of violence interrelate (Rios, 2004). In Kenya, political violence takes place in relation to political competition, but as a notion with strong economic and social underpinnings that may be the determinant for the prevalence of political violence. It is worth keeping in mind that the term political violence is used for a broad variety of situations, ranging from terrorist attacks, armed revolution, violent demonstrations or attacks by citizens aimed at less than the overthrow of their government to humanitarian intervention and intra-state wars (Coady, 2007).

Hansen (2009) on his part argues that political unrest is not confined to non-state actors' use of violent means to further a political agenda but can also relate to the state's exercise of force, both against its own citizens and against other states and their citizens. It is important to keep in mind that mass-scale violence is sometimes portrayed as essentially apolitical while in reality being predominantly political (Hansen, 2009). For example, someone might characterize the 2007 Post election violence as a crime of hate, implying that it was fueled by irrational ethnic hatred. While we cannot rule out entirely against that, the violence was primarily a political agenda. At the same time, the 2007 post-election violence in Kenya highlights how the intention to carry out violence that is essentially political can be enhanced by ambitions to settle private scores or obtain material benefit, thereby exemplifying the difficulties in operating with a clear distinction between political, economic and social violence.

## **1.2. Root causes of political unrest in Kenya**

Identifying the root causes of political unrest in Kenya can be controversial, because any attempt to explain a phenomenon such as political unrest can be subjected to the objection that attempting to establish causal connections to certain economic, social, or political realities is simply the wrong way of approaching political violence. However, the research has identified some root causes of political unrest in Kenya, which have been discussed in the subsequent section.

### *1.2.1. Strong Executive Powers, Gaining Political Office as a Struggle for Survival, and Manipulation of Ethnicity*

As established in the previous sections, support and resistance to political leaders of the country have often followed ethnic lines. When forming government, some political leaders have rewarded and ensured advantages to individuals from supportive ethnic groups, while marginalizing or excluding individuals belonging to ethnic groups associated with political opponents. The Waki Report (2008), for example, noted how Moi rewarded his supporters, particularly the Kalenjin, through appointments to political offices and with jobs in the public service and the military. The Waki Report (2008) also noted how during the 1990s land grabbing and the allocation of public land as political patronage were part of the gross corruption of this period. In this way land allocation was often turned into a reward to politically correct individuals. Consequently, political power has been perceived as vital for obtaining access to public goods, and the distinction between individuals benefitting or marginalized from such access is viewed in ethnic terms (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

In a sense, gaining political office has been seen as a struggle for survival: if power is obtained, the perception is that access to sparse resources is ensured, and if not; marginalization and exclusion is reckoned to follow. This crisis of governance, where many leaders work not for the country as such but for themselves and their political supporters, is sometimes said to follow from a system where power has been centralized in the hands of few since independence (Human Rights Watch, 2008). The Waki Report (2008), in a similar mood, notes: "Power has been personalized around the presidency... Laws are routinely passed to increase executive authority, and those laws seen as being in the way are often changed or even ignored."

This is said to result in the perception that,

Given the power of the president and the political class everything flows not from laws but from the president's power and personal decisions. This also has led the public to believe a person from their own tribe must be in power, both to secure for them benefits and as a defensive strategy to keep other ethnic groups, should these take over power, from taking jobs, land and entitlements. All of this has led to acquisition of presidential power being seen both by politicians and the public as a zero-sum game, in which losing is seen as hugely costly and is not accepted (Waki Report, 2008). Yet, as Hansen (2009) notes, the perception that ethnic groups, as such, benefit from one of their own gaining presidency or

a high political seat is highly miscalculated because only a very limited number of individuals actually benefit from these arrangements.

Independent Kenyans have all along worried about who will be the next leader, especially in regard to the ethnic background, disregarding moral qualities of the said person, so that the leader assumes greater importance than the rule of law. As a result, Kenyans have time and again witnessed political violence nearly every time the General elections are held, perpetrated for political gains, yet, dubbed 'tribal clashes.'

There have been numerous commissions of inquiry formed to investigate the so called 'tribal clashes' yet little seems to have emerged from these expensive ventures. Loss of life and property has been witnessed as well as abuse of human rights and dignity whose perpetrators have not been brought to book. The recently concluded International Criminal Court (ICC) proceedings have not yielded results in respect to restorative justice for the victims and their families. Similarly, the activities of TJRC have not been brought to the common man to participate in search of a viable solution to the recurrence of political violence.

Therefore, there is a need to re-examine these considerations so as to unearth what has not been brought to the fore by peace researchers to effect national reconciliation and dialogue. Despite the efforts that were put in place at reforms after the 2007/8 political violence more needs to be done to reconcile the masses. The cycle of violence must be stopped so that Kenyans can begin enjoying their diversity within the commonwealth in which they have appointed to co-exist as members of the human society guided by laws which they have appointed.

One of the ways to achieve this is by a re-examination of historical consciousness which can be an eye opener to the realities of the day, through presenting the truth about events which precede and shape current peace discourse to the general public and cultivate the inherent social need present in man. This consciousness is crucial as truth telling involves memory through which one has the capacity to reproduce violence as a revaluing of peace by breaking with the violent past as a way of conceptualizing social transformation.

#### *1.2.2. Rule of Law Problems and the Institutionalization of Political Violence*

Strong executive powers are also said to circumvent transparency and checks and balances, thereby decreasing the likelihood that the executive, or political supporters of the incumbent regime, are held accountable for political violence. The Waki Report (2008) noted that;

Checks and balances normally associated with democracies are very weak in Kenya and are deliberately so. Individuals in various parts of government whether in the civil service, the judiciary, and even in Parliament, understand that, irrespective of the laws, the executive arm of government determines what happens.

The argument often goes that beyond dubious or extra-legal acquisition of public goods, the executive may have interest in maintaining structures that diminish the rule of law, thus facilitating government action (or inaction) that may include political unrest (Waki Report, 2008).

Africa Watch (1993) observed that impunity in Kenya can be observed as playing out in three different, but yet related, ways. Firstly, responsible agents of large-scale violence that correlate with a political agenda are seldom thoroughly investigated, arrested, or prosecuted. Commenting on political violence surrounding the 1992 election, Africa Watch (1993) noted how Kalenjin warriors, who backed then president Moi, were allowed to attack villagers from other ethnic groups with no or only little attempts of the police to intervene. Not only did the police according to Africa Watch refuse to take statements from victims of the violence, in some cases they also stood by passively while attacks were ongoing (Africa Watch 1993).

Kalenjin warriors' who were actually prosecuted often received lenient sentences or were acquitted because the executive interfered in the work of the judiciary. Inaction from authorities again prevailed when political violence erupted after the 1997 elections. Despite judicial inquiries into these outbreaks of political violence that named several persons as involved and recommended prosecutions, neither the Moi-administration nor its successor, the Kibaki-administration, had interest in prosecutions commencing (Huma Rights Watch, 2008).

In a similar vein, violence committed prior to the 2007 elections did seldom result in perpetrators being held accountable. The European Union monitoring commission (2007) notes: "In most cases, abuses did not receive an appropriate response from the police and the judiciary and there was therefore impunity towards perpetrators." The

Waki Report (2008) concluded that out of more than 1,000 homicides related to the election violence, only 19 were prosecuted.

Impunity has also played out as a matter of state agencies' excessive and sometimes extra-legal use of violence, with other authorities ignoring or for other reasons failing to address responsible agents. For example, when the police responded to the violence following the 2007 elections, they did so in a partial manner where extensive use of force was deployed in areas dominated by Odinga supporters. The Waki Report (2008) assumes that more than one third of the total casualties during the election violence results from police shootings.

The report also concludes that in many instances the use of lethal force by the police targeted individuals who were seemingly posing no immediate threat. In Kisumu, for example, the Waki Report (2008) found that 30 out of 50 casualties of police shootings had been shot from behind. Some police officers were involved in criminal acts such as sexual violence and looting. Despite allegations that Kenyan police officers have violated the criminal code, according to the Waki Report (2008), the Kenyan police force did not initiate any comprehensive internal investigations into the behavior of police officers during the election violence.

Impunity has prevailed historically in Kenya in the sense that political figures that have called for or sponsored violence have seldom faced criminal accountability. The rule of law has thus tended to be put aside in contexts of political competition. This is likely to have led to the presumption for next generation perpetrators that committing acts of violence in a context that relates to political competition will remain not accounted for (Hansen, 2009).

#### *1.2.3. Socio-economic causes: Poverty, unequal Distribution of Resources and Land Issues*

Socioeconomic factors such as widespread poverty, unequal distribution of resources, high unemployment rates and land disputes have often been pointed to influence political unrest in the country. By estimation, about two million youths are unemployed despite acquiring necessary skills. Being desperate for jobs, some join dirty hustles like being members of crime gangs. Sometimes they are paid by politicians to cause chaos, especially during demonstrations. These gangs carry out activities like looting and destruction of property during the demos.

Participation in political violence is said to be furthered by a widespread sense of dissatisfaction in the distribution of wealth. Distribution of wealth is extremely unequal in Kenya. Access to resources varies highly from region to region. With these lenses, political violence is a way of demonstrating dissatisfaction with the cruel conditions of life that stand in contrast to the elite's comfortable way of life which is perceived by the poor to result from political connections and corruption (Hansen, 2009).

In particular, questions related to land distribution and ownership are central in explaining political violence in Kenya (Klaus, 2020). Some of these forceful land evictions are politically orchestrated, leading to displacement of people and destruction of their properties, like in Mau Forest Mavoko evictions.

#### *1.2.4. Deprivation and Social and Economic Inequality*

One of the triggers of a conflict situation is deprivation. Closely related to this is inequality a phenomenon that has been cited as a major trigger of political violence (Muhula, 2009; Ayai, 2009). During oppression, availability of resources is used as a means of control, ensuring that those with access to the much-needed resource, whether in terms of capital or goods and services, are supporters while dissenting voices are deprived. Similarly, high income concentration increases the perception of relative deprivation by affected segments of society and thereby increases the risk of political disintegration. Policies that lead to inequality, for example, land distribution, taxation and public expenditures, can "exacerbate ethnic and regional competition and conflict" (Nafziger & Auvinen, 2002).

In Kenya, political violence has most often resulted from feelings of socio-economic and political exclusion. Some members of the community feel they have been excluded from access to the basics that the government should provide. When political elites mobilize and remind the communities of such inadequacies, violence erupts especially during elections' period as the general attitude is to associate political power with access to the 'national cake' (Miguel, 2004).

Political domination in the country and the benefits for those who dominate has been an issue spanning around politics in Kenya for a very long time. As Muhula (2009) says, "Historically, the region that controls political power in Kenya also controls the direction and magnitude of economic and political resources of the state."

In a state of nature, the law of the jungle dominates in that even when the neighbor does not threaten to grab what one has, there is always that possibility s/he can. Like *status naturalis*, independent Kenya's politics are guided by the

'winner- take-all' attitude that renders political competition a struggle for resources. Regrettably, this economic link has largely been ignored to the detriment of viable solutions that would place citizens on a sure path to peace and prosperity. Thus, if Kenya's political violence is to be understood in its proper context a critical study of her economic history is crucial.

The history of colonialism provides overwhelming evidence of how manipulation of "more friendly" peoples to conquer "more stubborn" peoples, through primitive expeditions of denial of basic social services to the latter, laid firm foundations for conflict-in-waiting, a time bomb which exploded when the colonial administration was succeeded by independent governments. It is surprising that when ethnic conflicts arose in Moi's era, he simplistically dismissed them as effects of tribalism, without bothering to trace their evolution, maturity and eventually their occurrence (Oucho, 1996).

Socio-economic and political differentiations amongst a people sustain grievances. When such differences are based on social-cultural identities such as religion, race or ethnicity, horizontal inequalities abide, different from vertical inequalities which are a result of variations in individual income (Stewart, 2000). Unlike deprivations at communal level, vertical inequalities may not cause conflict as members of the same income group always cooperate with each other despite their ethno-regional basis (Langer, 2005). The political elite in Kenya, for example, support each other in parliamentary debates that aim at shielding or increasing their pay, despite their different ethno-regional backgrounds and as long as they are content with the status quo they are unlikely to incite political violence (Crammer, 2003; Muhula, 2009).

Political violence has had an undue attention. Instead of perceiving the true causes right from their machinations, the West, incidentally former colonialists, concludes that the skirmishes are ethnic violence (Oucho, 1996). It is informing that violence erupts in areas where inhabitants are perceived to have benefited from the colonial regimes as centers of ethno-regional power. The Central and Rift-Valley provinces, for example, have had a chance to produce presidents during the five republics, but, have also heavily suffered the blunt of political violence whenever it occurs (Branch & Cheeseman, 2008; Stewart, 2000; Yieke, 2007).

As Thiong'o says:

The oppressed and the exploited of the earth maintain their defiance: liberty from theft. But the biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb... to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves...decadent and reactionary...forces which would stop their own springs of life...amidst this wasteland which it has created, imperialism presents itself as the cure and demands that the dependant sing hymns of praise with the constant refrain: 'Theft is holy'. Indeed, this refrain sums up the new creed of the neo-colonial bourgeoisie in many 'independent' African states (Thiong'o, 1981).

Peace scholars working for Kenya's problem would, therefore, be better placed if they approach her history from the vantage point of a disinterested observer to objectively unearth the unwritten code of historical injustices.

### **1.3. Application of Kantian Universal Moral Principle to Kenyan Political Unrest**

Many regions have disorder; in Kenya, it has been very serious at times. Growing tension and attendant power play, extending over the years, have been witnessed as complex ethnicity, socio-economic dynamics, historical resentments, and competition for resources all interplay to increase instability. This kind of instability cannot be discounted in its effects on governance; it equally causes a lot of suffering that raises another important question on moral frameworks for interpreting and handling conflicts.

The guidance of moral philosophy can be obtained from Immanuel Kant, known for his deontological ethics that insist on strict moral views. His principles of good will, duty, categorical imperatives, and autonomy provide real insights into political behavior and governance. Kantian ethics holds the position that moral acts are products of obligations and not personal desire. It is in this aspect that is related to the dilemma between ethnic interests and the greater good that Kenyan leaders often find themselves in. Maybe such a commitment towards the goodwill may enable leaders to pass through ethnic frictions and wide socio-economic disparities, hence offering them a means to promote political stability by serving all citizens, not just a few.

The categorical imperatives by Kant call for an examination of the ethical duties of several stakeholders in Kenya. The political class, civil society, and citizens have to play their part in building a culture of accountability and engagement that stretches beyond tribal lines, recognizing the dignity of each person to foster unity. Moreover, the autonomy of the will encourages active citizen participation in governance, which may reduce the violence resulting from feelings of disenfranchisement. Using their capacity for reason in making informed, ethical decisions, Kenyans could very well support policies with the common good at heart and celebrate diversity.

Ultimately, application of Kantian moral theory might help in unraveling what has been going on in the political crises in Kenya. A culture of good will, duty, and shared moral imperatives provides a potentiality for leaders and citizens to create a more harmonious and just political landscape as a way of conflict resolution and paving toward a cohesive national identity amidst diversity.

### *1.3.1. Good Will*

As established in the previous chapter, good will is the basis of human life according to Kant's moral philosophy. It represents moral intention and commitment to act in accordance with the law of morality for morality's sake, irrespective of the consequences. In that perspective, good will attains a special value in the situation of political unrest in Kenya, where often the genesis of political actions forms the basis of what dimension and range turmoil will take. This thought reflects Kant's "egalitarian views based on principles of reason combined with those of public accountability and freedom of speech" (Kemp, 1968).

Political leaders, therefore, wield great influence among their respective constituents in a country where trust in public institutions is normally very fragile. Hit by historical injustices and socio-economic inequalities, many citizens find themselves increasingly disenfranchised, yearning for representation and accountability. It is imperative to remember that moral obligation cannot be separated from the good will (Timmons, 2013). The ever-persistent political unrest can be seen as a manifestation of the failure of good will on the part of these leaders. They do not attend to the interests of the people but serve their own interests and the immoral behavior results in them losing public trust. An example is in 2007- 2008 post-election violence that is the worst case of moral failure whereby the political leaders provoked the members pertaining to ethnic bases that led to massive killings and other brutal activities during that period of time.

Kantian good will would require of political leaders an acknowledgment of obligations to the greater good and justice. In this regard, it can offer a strong moral framework within which to hold individuals in the Kenyan political realm accountable. Armed with a good will attitude, political leaders will rise above ethnic affiliations to their duties regarding fair governance and distribution of resources. By so doing, some of the conditions that breed political unrest can be alleviated.

### *1.3.2. Primary and Secondary Duty*

Indeed, the core of Kant's ethics entails duty: the moral acts according to him are not just mere consequences of events but get their basis in acting in accordance with the universal laws of morality. Applying this idea of duty in the sphere of Kenyan politics can serve to revamp political utterances and activities toward a realm of ethical governance. In a nation plagued with corruption, mismanagement, and impunity, the predisposition to create a sense of obligation among the political class and government functionaries takes the back seat easily under the assault of narrow self-interest. A case in point involves accountability for the gross violations of human rights that were perpetrated in the post-election violence of 2007-2008. About these violations, there is unquestionably an absolute failure to fulfill their obligation, since the wrongdoers walk free and the victims continue to waste away. This rotting society easily breeds disorder even while trashing people's belief in institutions of the state.

Kantian ethics further argues the law of duty enjoins individuals to act as though his or her maxim were to become a universal rule. The act should come from a duty that is either primary or secondary (Stratton-Lake, 2000). With this in mind, when the political leadership in Kenya adopted such a stand, they would be under an obligation to govern without abuse. Although Kant argues that we have a duty of not acting from duty, impulsive actions can be used to argue otherwise (Walschots, 2022). Politics are emotive especially when the electorate feels lied on. The culture that people might have developed is destroyed by a single act of omission or commission. The tendency of live within the confines of the defined culture makes people emotive and throws them from the culture. Engendering this sense of political culture based on duty opens up the possibility of civil engagement and reconciliation, perhaps even quelling political unrest and creating a common identity for Kenyans.

This is careful not to become a case of where the citizens have a duty to themselves. The assertion of moral agency and rational thinking in Kant is brought out in the emphasis of civic duty. Kenyans, as the subject of the political life, would

go ahead and defend their expectation to challenge the government decisions and actions, to strive for justice, and to work towards reasonable solutions to political and social problems. This mutual expectation of the government and citizens among it creates the stage for a healthier political life.

### 1.3.3. *Autonomy of the Will*

Arguably the most central part of Kant's moral philosophy is that of the autonomy of the will, the individual rational will endowed with self-legislating capabilities. The recent unrest in Kenya has brought the sentiment of autonomy of the will into a contextual perspective. The autonomy is understood from the perspective of an individual acting without coercion or any external force (Darwall, 2006). In Kenya, amidst spiraling political violence, an argument for autonomy supplies the conduit for citizens to become informed and powerful agents of politics.

On the flip side, Kantian ethics rely on the principle that people are moral agents who can make free, rational choices. This free will is, however, alienated in the history and socio-political context of Kenya. Large numbers of poverty, systemic inequality, and restricted access to education have often worked against a majority of citizens being full participants in the governance of their nation. Therefore, individuals transcend the basic understanding of self and immerse themselves “In the imperfect duties of self-perfection and the practical love of others” (Taylor, 2005). Recognizing this dynamic is significant in understanding how to reduce unrest through working within the rubric of autonomy.

Education and awareness are very important in the empowerment of citizens so that the society of Kenya can exercise autonomy. Creating a politically literate population capable of rationally judging the actions of the rulers will allow people to exercise their rights and responsibilities and hold their rulers accountable. Education acts as a means for moral development that shall help in bringing out actions consistent with the Kantian principles of ethical governance.

This autonomy of the will applies not only to citizens but further extends to political leadership. The former, on the one hand, must become fully responsible for their own self-esteem through their moral agency and not allow base impulses toward ruination practice and self-interested behaviors. Rather, leaders could use such autonomy of will to make, with self-regulation under Kantian ethics, their decisions more in accordance with the needs of the public good as dictated by duty.

Furthermore, collective autonomy would be increased if an inclusive democratic process were nurtured in which some level of power was held by the marginalized groups themselves. Further, when women, youth, and minorities have an equal voice in all areas, they contribute to a fairer political climate and thus work against exclusionary trends that breed violence. This is a proactive approach that finds a parallel in how Kant viewed treating others as ends in themselves and as individuals who are capable of making valuable contributions to the discussion at hand.

### 1.3.4. *Categorical Imperative*

One of the basic tenets of Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy, elaborated in his seminal work *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, is the Kantian categorical imperative. The Categorical imperative thus provides the universal moral law prescribing actions conforming to universalizable maxims and distinguishes them from merely subjective inclination-based or hypothetical imperatives dependent on desires of the person. Kant provides several formulations of the categorical imperative. Probably the most often cited is the formula of universal law: Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law (Kant, 2018). This formula puts much weight on the universality of moral law: an action is permissible only if one can rationally will that everyone acts on the same principle in similar circumstances. Therefore, categorical imperative is one of the most central pillars of Kant's ethics and a criterion whereby one can measure moral acts, all based on universalizability and respect for persons. If this principle were to be imposed upon the state of Kenya regarding the political unrest, one would reach the following conclusion: the present situation necessitates a scrutiny of the ethical implication of decisions.

Another formulation is that of humanity, which says one ought to deal with humanity, whether in oneself or another, always at the same time as an end and never merely as a means to an end. It means that inherent dignity has to be treated with respect, that is, moral laws must be in accordance with the intrinsic value all rational beings have in and of themselves for Kant. It is emphasized that this concept rejects utilitarian ethics, an ethic by which people can be justifiably treated as a means to an end: the greater good. Furthermore, Kant posits that an individual should only act in a way that one can will the maxim whereby the whole world simultaneously should adopt it as universal law (Kemp, 1968). In this maxim application, politicians in Kenya should weigh their decisions against the universal background to its possible acceptance. For example, leaders should ask themselves whether their policies or political rhetoric serve collective well-being and the dignity of each and every citizen.

Kant's moral system rests on the ground of rationality and autonomy. He believes that all moral agents are capable of first, rational thought, and second, self-legislation, which enables a moral agent to make a moral law for himself. This autonomy lies at the root of all morality. Actions should be done in conformity with one's rational will and free from every external coercion or personal interest (Johnson, 2008). That means that moral actions are done in accordance with duty, a commitment to act according to moral law from respect for the law itself.

Critics of the absolute law, or categorical imperative, say it can realize rigid moral conclusions oblivious to context or consequences. One of the popular critiques has been that Kantian ethics could give rise to conflicting duties, culminating in moral dilemmas where following one of the duties implies breaking some other (Kagan, 1998). For instance, adhering to the maxim "One must always tell the truth" strictly can lead to situations wherein lying would be a better action, such as when it could save someone from harm. The absolutism of the categorical imperative, applied within an incredibly complex moral landscape, may prove unrealistic and beg the question of its bearing on ethical decision-making (Kant, 2018).

Moreover, the significant criticism of the law under discussion is that the Categorical imperative appears to exclude what emotional involvement adds to moral reasoning. Critics like Nussbaum, (1992) argue that moral philosophy needs to include emotions and relationships because, in their view, emotions are significantly involved in the processes of ethical decision-making. This sort of emotional dimension is necessary in case a round life in the presence of morality has to make considerations of the full richness of human relationships in any ethical issue. In defense of Kant, Hill (2000) responds that while the Categorical imperative may seem rigid, it offers a general basis for moral deliberation that is universal and impartial. Supporters contend that making a distinction between maxims and particular situations can dispose of ostensible inconsistencies in such a manner that rational reflection may well be able to devise some higher principle or priority among duties (Hill, 2000).

Ultimately, it is in begetting broader discourses on autonomy and universality, with respect for human dignity, that the Kantian Categorical imperative has made a deep contribution toward contemporary ethical thought. This creed of rationality and morality thus remains relevant today in arguments about human rights and moral duty. Thus, the common backdrop of the sporadic, yet serious, political violence that have hit Kenya from time to time is exemplified by inflammatory rhetoric and exclusionary practices. Politicians have too often played the card of ethnicity as a game of winning support, which begets hatred, culminating in cycle after cycle of violence and retaliation. According to the Kantian view, the use of categorization of people serves geopolitics and negates the imperatives of morality. It does not treat people as an end to them but as a means to a political end.

The applications of categorical imperatives underline the need for political leaders to adopt policies expressive of universal ethical principles. For instance, the pursuit of social justice and equal distribution of resources could be pursued as maxims whose reason would be echoed within various sectors of society. Leaders would then have the painful task of contradicting discourses of violence and discrimination toward an ever more dialogical and inclusive political climatism.

Furthermore, the notion of categorical imperatives can be extended to include the actors in civil society, who are obligated to relate in coordinating discourse and their specific advocacy proper. Civic bodies and grassroots movements can engage in applying Kantian ethics as an effort at collaboration in carrying out their activities to exert coexistence and seek a remedy for systemic disparities. Such can be perceived as moral agents with their assertion of being a commitment to justice at a time of such political convulsion.

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## 2. Conclusion

This is the basis upon which such applications of the Kantian universal moral principles as good will, duty, categorical imperatives, and autonomy of the will constitute an important starting point to indicate a full ethical framework of which the complexities of political unrest in Kenya have to be situated. Concerning this, historical and socio-economic factors fueling the turmoil better illustrate the call for political leaders and citizens in this world to take up these principles in order to have a more just and equitable society. A good will is seen in political leaders so that the relationship between the government and the citizens is restructured to take up shared responsibility towards the corporate good. Recognition of duty will direct political discussion towards ethical governance, and categorical imperatives will govern actions in considering their universal implications. Finally, empowering citizens through will autonomy would achieve a more active and informed electorate that could hold its leaders to account.



## Compliance with ethical standards

### *Acknowledgments*

My sincere acknowledgement to Beth my wife for her immense intellectual, financial and moral support.

### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

There are no possible conflicts of interest.

### *Statement of ethical approval*

The research that led to the development of this paper was authorized by the Board of Post Graduate of Chuka University- Kenya and a research permit issued by National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), under license number NACOSTI/P/24/38423.

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