He was a force to reckon with

BY KWENDO OPANGA

The death of Dr Zachary Onyonka has deprived the Kitui Chache Constituency and the Omogusii of a man who bestrode their political landscape like a colossus.

Dr Onyonka has been the MP for Kitui Chache since 1969 when, as a deputy in politics, he was seated to the seat from the late Lawrence Sagaa who had represented the constituency since 1963. Since that year also, Dr Onyonka has been in the Cabinet, making him a force to reckon with in his constituency and the politics of Omogusii.

He was the most prominent politician in Kitsi and the land of Omogusii and, not surprisingly, when the advent of multi-party politics introduced another name, Mr Simon Nyachae in 1992, some thought a turf war was looming large.

And it came to pass. At the time of his passing, Kisii District had been polarised into two antagonistic camps, one fronted by Dr Onyonka and the other by Mr Nyachae. What were the issues or bone of contention?

The current scenario could only be understood if one went back to 1987 in the run-up to the infamous 1988 General Election. That is, if one is only interested in the short not so distant past, for there are those who think one can go so far back as 1966 to be better placed to see issues in their proper perspective.

Back to 1987. Then Mr Nyachae, freshly retired from the civil service, was set to run for election in the newly-created Nyaribari Chache Constituency when all hell broke loose.

Almost all elected MPs met at a place called Kebirigo in South Mugirango and declared that a certain powerful personality was sponsoring candidates in their constituencies. This, they found anathema and unacceptable. The Kebirigo Declaration came into being. Dr Onyonka led the anti-Nyachae charge.

In 1996, the Kebirigo Declaration has been revived. As in 1978, the argument is that Mr Nyachae is out to sponsor candidates in other Kisii District constituencies and again, until his death, Dr Onyonka led the group against Mr Nyachae.

If one goes as far back as 1969, observers say that then Mr Nyachae, who was a civil servant, supported the older Sagna, to whom he was related, against the youthful Onyonka. The rivalry had began and, to some, it never ended.

The difference between then and now is that Mr Nyachae, as a civil servant, could not come out in the open and so he was thought by Dr Onyonka’s supporters to he tacitly backing their political enemies.

So they always argued that Dr Onyonka’s perennial opponents Jimmy Nari Angweny and John Bosco Mbega were, in fact, propped up by Mr Nyachae. That would be the background to the current wrangling in Kisii that is expected to revive the Onyonka.

Though Mr Nyachae’s supporters deny it, the Onyonka camp in Kisii has been boasting that it has managed to clip the wings of the Minister for Agriculture at the grassroots as to almost isolate him from the electorate.

They point to the Maendele Ya Wanawake Organisation (MYWO), Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNU), county, urban and town council and Shabana Football Club elections where they claim the candidate was in or was in, those thought to be allied to Mr Nyachae.

Then there is the matter of the third district for the Omogusii that was shelved due to disagreements between leaders and which are also thought to be more influenced by the polarised politics. The Onyonka groups, of course, sought to portray Mr Nyachae as the villain of the piece and the Nyachae group has presented itself as more sinned against than sinning. In 1987, as now, the Nyachae group’s trump card against Dr Onyonka’s camp has been that the latter are in the employ of outsiders whose business is to destabilise and divide the Kituyi community.

In 1987, the argument was that certain external forces, principally Rift Valley-based, were out to ensure that Mr Nyachae would not enter Parliament to make his contribution to the development of the people of Kisii District and Omogusii in general.

In 1996, the argument runs that the selfsame Rift Valley interests are out to ensure that Mr Nyachae’s ambitions for a higher office are checked or nipped in the bud.

The higher office mentioned here is thought to be the Vice-Presidentcy which Mr Nyachae has never said publicly he wants and whose holder is appointed by the President.

In Kitui Chache, Dr Onyonka has been dominant for such a long time that, apart from the people who have run against him before, new names had not been floated as yet.

Above: Dr Zachary Onyonka with wife Beatrice in a recent picture. Right: Dr Onyonka in a courtroom when he faced a murder charge. (File Pictures)
Leaders send condolences

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Leadership, both at home and abroad, send their condolences to the family of Fares Kuindwa, the late Cabinet Minister. Dr Onyonka, who served this nation as a man of who had demonstrated outstanding qualities as a Cabinet Minister, and as an astute academician, legislator and Cabinet Minister in various Ministries without favour, fear or hindrance.

The Head of the Public Service and Secretary to the Cabinet, Mr Faris Kimbwa, described Dr Onyonka as "a man of who had demonstrated outstanding qualities as a Cabinet Minister." Transport and Communications Minister Wilson Ndolo Apai and Dr Onyonka was one of the most dedicated public leaders with a keen sense of interest and loyalty. Finance Minister Munir uddin said Dr Onyonka brought with himself a distinctive intelligence to all the ministerial portfolios he held.

The Democratic Party also sent a message of condolences to Dr Onyonka family. Secretary-General Joseph Munyar said: "During a recent seminar in Nairobi, we prayed for his good health. We now join other Kenyans in mourning our departed colleague."

Other messages came the Kari headquarters, the Electoral Commission, the Minister William Che Maina, the Chairman of the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, Dr Gikonyo Kiano, Assistant Min-

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Members who do not fall under the above category and are for instance working with other ministries or organisations are requested to contact the office of the General Manager for their payments. Additionally, members who may have withdrawn from the society after 31st December, 1995 are also entitled for the said dividends and should therefore contact the office of the General Manager.

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