



By Zukiswa Wanner



The signs have been there but in the run-up to the elections we ignore them, no matter how glaring. As the adverts remind us constantly pre-election, we are for peace. And we define peace not as absence of war but as a request to remain silent. I arrive at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in the afternoon of July 30.

When I turn on my phone and data, a screenshot of a tweet announcing the disappearance of Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission official Chris Msando is on the family WhatsApp group. *'This is going to be bad,'* one family member states. Another responds with an expletive. The one who sent the screenshot continues, *'Add this to the KDF leaks, the attack on Ruto's home and the extra 1.2 million ballot papers that IEBC has printed and bam. This country may burn come 9th August.'*

If texts could whisper, these would be whispered messages. We are, after all, for peace.

After our initial expressions of worry, we focus on the fact that South African Airways has lost my luggage. In the early hours of the 31st, my luggage arrives. Everything is intact and I am happy. But if my personal privileged problems are resolved, the bigger political world is not quite okay. At lunch time, Gatundu Member of Parliament, one Moses Kuria, posts a picture of himself in front of a Land Rover Discovery allegedly belonging to the missing Chris Msando. His post reads: *"So this is Chris Msando's vehicle right now here at Roysambu. The idiot is enjoying sweet time with a woman. And the story was that he is privy to 'rigging' and he can't be found. Verily, verily I say unto you Raila. You will not burn this country. Not when I am alive."* Could Kuria be right? What games are being played? When Msando's body is found in Kiambu County not long after on the same day, Moses Kuria pulls down his post. Humans may have short memories but the internet, unfortunately for him,

never forgets.

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The weekend before the elections, a news item informs us that a non-governmental organization has donated first aid equipment including gloves, stretchers and body bags to Kisumu. The body bags raise questions but when Nyanza regional coordinator, Wilson Njenga, states that there is no ill-will in the body bags and that the police will not act outside the law, the murmurs die down. After all, we are for peace. It is curious though that there are no reports of similar emergency kits being deployed anywhere else in the country. But maybe the media is too focused on Kisumu and this happened elsewhere. It is also curious that none of the media houses give the name of the non-governmental organization that donated the body bags.

In Nairobi on election day, we watch the NTV new bulletin as journalists show us how people are voting peacefully in what international observers announce are 'free and fair elections.' At a voting station in Upper Hill, a group of young people are standing on the side. All of them first time voters. They have not been permitted to vote. One of them, Moraa, is interviewed and seems on the brink of tears. They cannot find her name in the system although, she alleges, she registered to vote and double-checked. She has a voter's card too and speaks of a presiding officer who is very rude and who suggested that our Moraa may have got her voter's card from River Road.

I do not remember this much security in 2013 elections. The irony of men holding guns to ensure that citizens maintain the peace is not lost on us.

Moraa on NTV appeared as outraged about the fact that she could not vote as she is about the fact that anyone would assume that a young woman of her calibre would get anything from River Road. Days later, her name, shared with a nine-year old in Mathare, will return to haunt us. An hour before voting stations are due to close, I accompany my partner so he can vote. I am curious to see whether there are any lines and have been indoors the whole day. As we enter the gate, a truck full of soldiers arrives. I do not remember this much security in 2013 elections. The irony of men holding guns to ensure that citizens maintain the peace is not lost on us. And yet perhaps it is better if the country is safe and peaceful than sorry. And with that much security, it means for those who manage to vote, unlike Moraa, their votes shall be secure.

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The signs are there but while we await IEBC announcements of the result, we ignore them. After the provisional results are screened on Tuesday night, the Chief Agent for Jubilee Party, Raphael Tuju, announces that they have won but are generous enough to allow the opposition to wait for the official announcement. Not long after, NASA Coalition states in a press conference that there have been irregularities. Both announcements come before sunrise. It is interesting to note that in the NASA press conference, as in all the subsequent ones, the coalition will constantly tell its supporters to remain calm. Those of us following are on tenterhooks but IEBC is playing catch-up to announcements from the two parties and not setting the narrative as one assumes they should do. When IEBC Chair, Wafula Chebukati, finally walks up to the podium at Bomas of Kenya, it is after midday. We are to ignore whatever we saw on screen, he tells those of us following. The proper

results are yet to come, we are told. Perhaps it is testament to how unconvincing he is because of the three major local news stations, NTV, Citizen and KTN, only one removes the 'provisional' results.

KTN.

The others maintain them as we have seen them since Tuesday night. Some 8 million plus for the incumbent versus 6 million plus for his closest runner up. The pressure on IEBC is increased a day later. After running a few errands, partner and I join a friend who is a journalist with an international media house for lunch at one of the local hotels in the CBD. After lunch, we go into the media centre. She has told us that there is to be a presser we do not want to miss. We are curious and so we join her at their media centre. Around 5 in the afternoon, NASA Coalition come on to make a shocking announcement. They demand that the IEBC announce their Presidential candidate as the winner of the elections as soon as possible. According to them their candidate has 8 million plus win against 6 million plus for the incumbent. NTV cuts the conference less than five minutes in. They show us more advertisements of what they seem to feel is most important at this time. A peace that passeth understanding of issues above us like Forms 34As and 34Bs. Citizen, on the other hand, decides to focus on comedic relief for their watchers. If NASA Coalition are jokers, they have something that will give us more amusement: the Twitter sensation that is the Githeriman.

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Only KTN airs the full conference and questions afterwards.

On 11 August, it is KTN too that shall be the only television station to show a parallel NASA tallying centre and show economist David Ndiu walking the watchers through as we await announcements of Presidential results that many of us already know. It is KTN, too, that shall tell us about the barricade that has been put around Kibera. Later that night, Chairman Chebukati announces President Uhuru Kenyatta and his deputy, William Ruto, as the winners of the 2017 elections. Although the opposition has walked out from Bomas and refuse to acknowledge him as a winner, Mr Kenyatta gives a conciliatory message of unity, peace and gratitude to his worthy opponents who fought a fair fight. That is the last we shall hear from the head of state until Tuesday.

And authorities shall deny there being any unrests and that information on any deaths is 'fake news'. For the average person, it shall be difficult to discern what is true and what is false.

The morning after announcements of the results, social media shall tell us of shootings and killings in Luo Nyanza, in Mathare, in Kibera, in Kawangware, in Baba Dogo. KTN shall show Senator James Orenge holding live bullets from the Kenya Defence Forces, allegedly found in Kibera. He will tell us that 100 lives have been lost, ten of them children. International media houses like Al-Jazeera shall write about three fatalities and several injured. And authorities shall deny there being any unrests and that information on any deaths is 'fake news'. For the average person, it shall be difficult to discern what is true and what is false.

When young Stephanie Moraa is fatally shot while on a balcony in Mathare, the story shall change. We shall be told that a stray bullet got her, as police were chasing some hooligans who attempted to

loot and destroy property. No-one shall properly explain why live bullets are being used at all. There are those on social media who shall latch on to this to justify any killings. When those who would justify the lives lost are asked whether those implicated in Eurobond scandal, in land grabs, in maize scandals, in National Youth Service scandals and in Health scandals were placed in front of firing squads and shot, there shall be no response.

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In Kenya, as indeed in many countries on this continent and in the world, suspected petty theft is more deadly than grand looting. Raila must say something to stop his hooligans from provoking the police, one side will say. Raila is not the commander-in-chief who is sending his militia to kill people, the other side will say. Friendships cultivated over many years will be lost in the click of a mouse as long-held but deeply-hidden ethnic stereotypes are exposed because of support for one or another presidential candidate.

On Tuesday the 14 of August, a young man who has been helping out with the injured in Kibera and Mathare shall come through to pick up clothes, food and bedding for those victimized over the weekend. We shall ask him for the veracity of the attacks. Have lives indeed been lost beyond the young Moraa? Have there been injuries? He shall tell us of bullets in the walls of schools and women calling for help from underneath their beds. He shall tell us of young men dragged from their houses by uniformed yet dreadlocked men. In the midst of telling us, he shall receive a phone call and put a finger to his mouth. When he gets off the phone with his shoulders slumped, he shall tell us six-month old Samantha Pendo, clubbed by a policeman in Kisumu a few days before, has just died.

He shall tell us of bullets in the walls of schools and women calling for help from underneath their beds. He shall tell us of young men dragged from their houses by uniformed yet dreadlocked men.

On Tuesday, the 14 of August too, the President-elect shall speak. The leader of the opposition shall speak. They shall both talk of citizens' right to protest. They shall both talk about remaining calm. And we will think of Stephanie Moraa, Samantha Pendo and all those who lost their lives or got injured over the last few days. We will then realize the warnings were all there but we did not speak up loudly enough because we thought silence meant peace. And we will wonder whether those who died will rest in peace if we at least work to get them some justice.

By Zukiswa Wanner

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