



By Oyunga Pala



Friday, August 11 2017

The axe forgets what the tree remembers. African proverb

The tension was palpable 3 days after voting. Media had prepped Kenyans for a big announcement. Serious discrepancies had emerged over the vote tallying and opinion was sharply divided and emotive. The kind that could trigger off a big reaction.

People who had shown up for work on that Friday reported the lack of transport and the light traffic in Nairobi. Employers and business owners with good sense had to ensure the premises shut by 2pm. We received reports of heavy police presence in the hotspots, in our case the poor ghettos in the opposition chief's stronghold that were primed to react in protest after the announcement.

I had made frantic calls, to family and friends in Kisumu, Mathare and Kibera. There was a niece with a 9 month old child in Nyalenda. Arrangements were made to move her out of the neighbourhood.

"Do not be anywhere near Kondele, Obunga or Nyalenda!"

Kisumu town centre had been cordoned off by heavily armed police in battle gear. A clash was inevitable. I made more calls.

"Who was traveling? Stay where you are. Do not come to Kisumu".

"Anything could happen after the announcement".

We knew what that thing was. Violence!

There is an expression I picked up listening to a [podcast interview](#) of Tom Mboya, the chairman of Democratic Congress Party. When asked about the tense pre election political climate he replied,

“We are afraid because we know ourselves?”

We knew what Kenyans were capable of when the masks came off. The trauma of ethnic profiling witnessed during the post election violence of 2007 was still fresh.

The tension was palpable 3 days after voting. Media had prepped Kenyans for a big announcement. Serious discrepancies had emerged over the vote tallying and opinion was sharply divided and emotive. The kind that could trigger off a big reaction.

Violence is a bushfire and the innocents bear the brunt when the wind blows their way. There was no room for regrets. I had a nephew who traveled from Nairobi to Kisumu to vote. His first time voting. He could read the anxiety in my voice when I told him to make sure he left Kisumu before the results came out. He tried to get out during the day but transport out of Kisumu was scarce. He eventually got a night bus to Nairobi leaving at 9pm on Friday night.

I reasoned that the bus could get to Kericho before IEBC made the announcement and be spared the wrath of angry protestors barricading the highways. I trusted that he would be fine past Kericho. They would be in a Jubilee zone and possibly only run into celebrations in that part of the country that were bound to be peaceful.

I called my wife’s workplace to urge them to close business early. Everyone should go to the safety of their homes before the announcement. The entire country was glued to their TV screens from 12 noon to 12 midnight. It was like watching a high suspense series too compelling to take your eyes off. The numbers on the lower third of the screen remained stagnant, Jubilee 54.27%, NASA 44.74% holding us in a daze.

I was stuck in the house flipping through channels, revolving around KTN news and NTV broadcasts. The anchors were buying time, filling the stretches with analysts who held open biases. All the news crews were transmitting live from Bomas, with feeds from different parts of the country, where the announcement was anticipated.

There was a dispute mounted by the opposition playing out live. But the young IEBC CEO assured the country that the commission was looking to all concerns raised.

Violence is a bushfire and the innocents bear the brunt when the wind blows their way.
There was no room for regrets.

Chiloba had a wry smile as he appeared on the screens to give periodic progress updates. He became a topic of distraction, just like [the Githeri man](#), what a jolly fellow. Kenyans on social media welcomed anything that would distract them from the election suspense. Chiloba’s looks and temperament fitted the bill, grabbing the attention of female admirers and his eligibility turned into a trending discussion in social circles.

The final tallying was running into the night. When the NASA side stepped out of the negotiating

room looking exasperated, the verdict seemed conclusive. James Orengo, the deputy chief agent declared that NASA would not recognise the official results. Nor would they contest the decision in the courts. The tension was calibrated up a notch. The pundits on TV weighed in, urging the election losers to follow the law.

Go to the courts, seek redress, respect the constitution. We must focus on the lessons learned. Kenya is greater than all of us.

The credibility of the electoral process was the big pink elephant in the room that the foreign observers had skirted around. John Kerry, Thabo Mbeki and John Mahama, leaders of global stature had pronounced the credibility of the elections before the final results prepping anyone who was watching for a certain verdict.

I was stuck in the house flipping through channels, revolving around KTN news and NTV broadcasts. The anchors were buying time, filling the stretches with analysts who held open biases.

Even as IEBC prepared to make the announcement, it was a foregone conclusion. The tally placed the incumbent President Uhuru Kenyatta way ahead of the opposition challenger Raila Odinga.

The country wanted peace at all costs. Matters of justice could be looked into later.

NASA leaders were asked to appease their dissatisfied supporters and concerned Kenyans pleaded for calm.

"We do not want trouble from the masses again. This cycle must stop, don't you ever learn? Do not die for your leaders. This is not your war. Raila and NASA principals won't be on the streets with you?"

Protestors were up against armed police authorised to use all necessary force. The police were ready.

Meanwhile celebrations began in areas that voted overwhelming for the Jubilee party. The cameras, moved from Gatundu, Nyeri, Eldoret and back to Nairobi's KICC where happy supporters danced in anticipation of Jubilee's candidate's sure victory.

Local media covered the Jubilee celebrations, ignored the skirmishes between protestors and the police until social media feeds from desperate people defied the silencing "Police are beating and killing us?" and we switched to Al Jazeera and BBC to find out what was happening at home. It was not a safe time to be a poor Luo living in the troubled slums.

At about 10.38 pm, IEBC chairman, Wafula Chebukati finally declared Uhuru Kenyatta the president elect.

The Jubilee supporters turned to the sky to thank the lord for victory.

The NASA supporters looked upwards and prayed to God for justice and mercy.

Protest erupted after the declaration in Nyanza and some inner cities of Nairobi.

Local media covered the Jubilee celebrations, ignored the skirmishes between protestors and the police until social media feeds from desperate people defied the silencing “*Police are beating and killing us*” and we switched to Al Jazeera and BBC to find out what was happening at home. It was not a safe time to be a poor Luo living in the troubled slums.

When I made calls early Saturday morning to family in Kisumu and relatives and friends in Mathare and Kibera, the response was, “*Tuliona usiku mrefu*” (We survived a long and tense night). People began to share experiences of continuous gunshots ringing through the night, tear gas in the air and police brutality making its way indoors.

Chiloba had a wry smile as he appeared on the screens to give periodic progress updates. He became a topic of distraction, just like the Githeri man, what a jolly fellow. Kenyans on social media welcomed anything that would distract them from the election suspense. Chiloba’s looks and temperament fitted the bill, grabbing the attention of female admirers and his eligibility turned into a trending discussion in social circles.

However as these accounts started to circulate through whatsapp groups, there was widespread denial, defensive positions and accusations of fake news peddling. The horrifying experiences of the victims of the police operation dismissed by official sources as criminal elements attempting to destroy private property who met the full wrath of the law.

The silence from most quarters was deafening. Those affected retreated to ethnic cocoons, paralyzed by their fears of a prolonged police crackdown against anyone challenging the official position. I knew this language. Author, Yvonne Owuor in her novel *Dust*, called it Kenya’s third official language...

The language of Silence.

Mourn your dead quietly. Pray for peace. Do not demand justice. Do not provoke state scrutiny or criticism from people who are pro establishment. Walk with a straight face, suppress your outrage. Say nothing alarmist that would upset the sense of normalcy, so as not to cast any doubt on your patriotism and neutrality lest one is tainted as a tribal sycophant. Remember, that your tribe is peace.

To protest in the streets was suicidal. But as the ghetto youth would testify, you cannot understand the pain and anger, when you have never lived in a shanty, with fading hope of experiencing a life devoid of poverty and destitution.

We had seen the dark clouds gathering, over our skies, the signs were clear and we remained afraid because we know ourselves.

It was all normal election “*kelele from those disturbing the peace?*” the criminals and looters, until reports filtered through to the mainstream media that a 9 year old girl [Stephanie Moraa](#) had been shot while standing on a balcony in Mathare. A 6 month old baby [Samantha Pendo](#) had been beaten by police who had broken into their house in Nyalenda in Kisumu. Bullets had killed innocent people hiding in the safety of their houses.

The elections had burst open old wounds that were trying to heal. These were the seeds of hatred that had been watered by marginalisation and exclusion in the 50 years of the Kenyan project.

Political polarization was Kenya's original sin and the ghost had returned to haunt us. The state had turned on some of its citizens and other Kenyans stood aside and watched.

There was a line from a local hip hop prophetic classic, "Wanasisa" featuring Kitu Sewer from the group Mashifta and Frank Mtuele, that talks about our rabid political culture. The verse goes,

"Kura yako ni card, ballot box, ATM yao... Hapo ndiyo mi hujiuliza jo, hii siasa hutasaidie aje saa zingine?"

Disputed Elections and violent reactions have become our new normal. History repeats itself.

Rest in Peace.

Baby Samantha Pendo

Stephanie Moraa.

The unknown victims of the 2017 Post Election violence.

The ethnic prejudices they release into the air are raw. We may still love our neighbours but we want them to stay behind a wall. When normal returns, the fear may recede and our neighbours will start to look human again. The open smiles may return but the trust would take forever to be repaired.

We had seen the dark clouds gathering, over our skies, the signs were clear and we remained afraid because we know ourselves.

Rest in Peace.

Baby Samantha Pendo

Stephanie Moraa.

The unknown victims of the 2017 Post Election violence.

By Oyunga Pala

Published by the good folks at [The Elephant](#).

The Elephant is a platform for engaging citizens to reflect, re-member and re-envision their society by interrogating the past, the present, to fashion a future.

Follow us on [Twitter](#).