



By Kevin Mwachiro



You don't know me, but the first thing I'd like to say is that I'm sorry. I'm sorry that our country let you down and put you down before you learnt the beauty of dreams. Come to think of it; I'm struggling with dreams these last few days, at least good dreams for Kenya.

I got to know of you the day after the IEBC (election organisers) announced that Uhuru Kenyatta (the president) had won the election.

Before I go on, let me introduce myself. I'm a 44-year-old man who lives in the relative comfort of Nairobi. Well, that comfort all depends on what side of the highway you live in, what you earn or even what tribe you are from. I doubt we'd ever meet, but your name is now known across the land and even in some parts of the world. I got to know of you the day after the IEBC (election organisers) announced that Uhuru Kenyatta (the president) had won the election. There were other presidential candidates, but Baba had lost. This was not your baba, but Baba and I'm sure you'd heard his name being tossed around Nyalenda quite a bit. Many had hoped Baba would win; this was his last chance. You see, he had tried twice before, but it was not to be. Such is the nature of siasa in this country. I don't want to open old wounds, I've accepted and moved on. Anyway, Baba lost again, and many were disappointed, some very angry, and they took to the streets to vent. Serikali stepped in to stop this venting with even more rage, but they had rungus and teargas to assist their anger. The cockroaches had company that night. Serikali descended on your neighbourhood Nyalenda, and also on Kondele, Manyatta, Obunga, Bandani, Nyamasaria, and Mambo Leo. Like you, Kisumu was not allowed to sleep that night. Hearts were heavy, and tears were forced out of people's eyes. If you felt your eyes sting and you struggled to breathe, it was serikali. Ok, it was tear gas, but tear gas

that was bought by serikali. Your parents say this all happened in the dark of the night. Boots were knocking on doors, lives threatened and bullets not mosquitoes sang that night. Your baba, is a strong man, for he tried to protect all of you but once the tear gas was thrown in your home, he rose like Samson in the Bible and took down the door so that you all could not choke. But with the door open, it allowed the rain to begin. And then it rained and rained and rained. This was not ordinary rain though; it was violent, wooden and hateful. It was that rain, that took you back to sleep. Your little house stormed! Fortunately, you didn't hear your mama's anguished scream for too long, or feel your sister's trauma or see the helplessness of your father, as he learnt first-aid on you. He had to give you life again. Even serikali feared, but they did nothing, so they fled. Only the night knows what was in their hearts at that time. You eventually ended up at Aga Khan Hospital after two hospitals said they couldn't help you. Aga Khan is a good hospital. Consider yourself lucky. Otherwise, your sleep would have ended on the streets. That is how we got to know about you, Samantha Pendo. That night when Kisumu was forced to cry.

We all went into a state of tension. Tension for you and the country. Our kuras have become like that. We pray for peace, vote peacefully, go home and watch tv mfululizo, pray that our choice wins and then we either cry or celebrate. After that, we fight or attempt to fight. Then we move on. Unga calms us down; blows and burnt tears are not food.

The cockroaches had company that night. Serikali descended on your neighbourhood Nyalenda, and also on Kondele, Manyatta, Obunga, Bandani, Nyamasaria, and Mambo Leo. Like you, Kisumu was not allowed to sleep that night.

But this time round there was you in the picture and another girl, Stephanie Moraa in Mathare here in Nairobi. She rested too after a bullet went to find her on her family balcony. She was only ten years old. But there was you. We were introduced to your shiny forehead, that amazing smile, your chubby cheeks and that little red dress. You were only six months old, a kadonye. But you were caught up in the madness of Kenya that even we don't understand. We hoped and prayed you would get better, but you still slept, and then we were told you rested. That broke me. I remember seeing your baba on TV, trying to be so strong telling the world that you had gone. He was Samson brave again, demanding justice, but getting choked up in emotion. Joseph was valiant but broken.

I questioned many things after that. Questioned this country and my country men. Can't we vote without blood? Can't we vote without hate? Before the elections, we see people down on their knees praying for the nation, but those same people will not raise their hands up for justice, even your justice! What is haki our ngao? I hear people even had the audacity to blame your mama and baba for your death. Some claim that you were used as a human shield! What mother would do that? They don't know that Linser had two miscarriages before you were born. They don't know or recognise that you were called Pendo because your parents believed that you were a gift of God's love. They don't know you but only see your parents' heritage. *Hawa watu wako hivyo* is what they would say. Why can't we just be Kenyans? It's a real pity, nyathi, child, that the only time we come together is when a national tragedy occurs. Our warmth and kindness know no bounds, but after that, we go back to our cocoons. I wish we had more equalisers than elections; that would make us share our spaces more. Where our flag would continually fly in our hearts and not just when we win in athletics or rugby! Maybe that would have happened in your time?

Our kuras have become like that. We pray for peace, vote peacefully, go home and watch tv mfululizo, pray that our choice wins and then we either cry or celebrate. After that, we fight or attempt to fight. Then we move on.

We dread Augusts here, and this one is no different. Coups, bomb attacks, school and airport fires, Likoni police attack, plane crashes, rail and bus tragedies and you. Pendo, you have joined Mzee Kenyatta, Masinde Muliro, Kijana Wamalwa, Martin Shikuku, Mrs Michuki, Karisa Maitha, and Father Kaiser, in having this 'jinxed' month as the one you rested. Pendo you have also joined another rank of Kenyans who lost their lives thanks to our heated and fractious elections. A PEV victim that will see no justice. I have no faith that the officer who rained on you with his club will face the book. He has a higher ngao that will protect him and his kind. Our polisi have an amnesia like no other. And maybe eventually we too will forget about you, just like them. Me included, but I hope this letter will remain to preserve your memory. I know your baba, mama and sister will not forget you, Samantha Pendo Oloo, for you brought love into that house near the road in Nyalenda.

At times, I think that maybe you are the luckier one. You will not know the disappointment of being judged by your name or tribe, religion or even who you love. You see, as Kenyans, we love to box people, and hence we limit the individual. If one chooses to do things differently, 'Hatumwelewi,' they lament. You are free from being caged by people's narrow perception.

You see, we have developed a stupid mantra that will keep us mired (forgive the big word) in this place unless we change. Accept and move on, accept and move on. It might even replace our national motto, harambee. Our pulling together to this state of inertia (kutodo) will make us ignore our history, and we will therefore not learn from our mistakes, and that is why we get mesmerised by the scandals and shidas that recur. Apathy, be plenty in these borders.

At times, I think that maybe you are the luckier one. You will not know the disappointment of being judged by your name or tribe, religion or even who you love. You see, as Kenyans, we love to box people, and hence we limit the individual.

Pendo, I'm sad that we have become a nation that is afraid. Afraid to change, afraid to learn, afraid of difference, afraid of the individual, afraid to appreciate and afraid of one another. We have chosen to hide in an 'Africanness' that doesn't go beyond our borders. Religiosity, prosperity and conformity are our walls. Pendo, you were born into one the most beautiful countries in the world. It's a pity you didn't get to see it. We are far from being a great nation. We are pulling apart rather than pulling together.

The other day I had gone to the City Market to buy a few things, and there was a group of women holding gunny bags and negotiating for something that I initially couldn't see. I got to discover that they were negotiating for fish carcasses to cook and sell. You see they were several women, and you couldn't miss them. Their dresses were wrapped in kangas, handbags in one hand, and a gunia in the other. Apparently, there was a shortage of fish in some of Nairobi's neighbourhoods. They were haggling, Nairobi hustle style. There was a gentleman next to me who asked one of the shop attendants, "Hawa Wajaluo wanalilia nini?" That's how I got to understand there was a fish shortage. There was a judgemental 'othering' tone in his question, and that annoyed me. He didn't see their struggle nor respect how cooking fish carcasses was how they made a living. He didn't see their inability to buy whole fish. He only saw their Luo-ness. Maybe because they all were buying fish, so they were Luo and in his head that was enough for him. We are 'othering' one another more than ever.

Pendo, all my talk has made me tired, because I'm thinking too much about a situation that I fear may not change. I still want to believe in Kenya, but at times it's so hard.

I hear some people have given up on Project Kenya altogether. What is Kenya? Who is Kenya? To be honest, there are many different Kenyas in our Kenya. I realised we are a country of the KKK. Kula, kura na kabila or kula kila kitu, we stopped being the nchi ya kitu kidogo. Kitu kidogo still lives you empty. We have an insatiable appetite for more. Insatiable is like when you were nyonyaring from your mama, and the milk in one breast was not enough. You get?

Pendo, all my talk has made me tired, because I'm thinking too much about a situation that I fear may not change. I still want to believe in Kenya, but at times it's so hard. We as adults of Kenya often say we want to do good things for this country, but that is where it starts and ends. Child, I don't want to be one of those people who only act with their mouths, and I know I am not alone. We just need to find one another.

Pendo, rest in your innocence. Rest in your peace, because you are the one who has gotten to see Canaan.

Kevo.

By Kevin Mwachiro

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](#).

