

Drama of the popular struggle for democracy in Kenya

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National elections were held in Kenya on December 27, 2007; the results of the Presidential election were announced three days later. Within minutes of the announcement that Mwai Kibaki had emerged as the winner, there were spontaneous acts of opposition to the government in all parts of the country. The opposition was especially intense among the jobless youths who had voted overwhelmingly for change. A ruling clique that had stolen billions of dollars in a period of five years had stolen the elections. This was the verdict of the poor. However, this verdict was obscured by ethnic alienation and the constant refrain by local and foreign intellectuals that the crisis and killings emanated from deep 'tribal' hostilities. This tribal narrative was intensified after the burning and killings of innocent civilians in a church, in Eldoret, in the Rift Valley region of Kenya. But while these killings had all of the hallmarks of the genocidal violence of Rwanda and Burundi, more importantly, they heightened the need for Kenyan society to step back from the brink of all out war. Violence and killings provided a feedback loop that threatened to engulf even the political leaders of the society.

This analysis argues that the calls for peace and reconciliation by the political and religious leaders will remain hollow until there are efforts to break from the recursive processes of looting, extra judicial killings, rape and violation of women, and general low respect for African lives.

This short commentary on the elections and the aftermath seeks to introduce a unified emancipatory approach: liberating humanity from the mechanical, competitive, and individualistic constraints of western philosophy, and re-unifying Kenyans with each other, the Earth, and spirituality. This analysis draws from fractal theory and seeks to place Africans as human beings at the center of the analysis. Fractal theory is founded on aspects of the African knowledge system and breaks the old tribal narratives that refer to Africans as sub humans needing Civilization, Christianity and Commerce.

Those who condemn the post-election violence in Kenya have failed to condemn the traditions of killings and economic terrorism in Kenya. It should be stated clearly that using African women as guinea pigs for western pharmaceuticals is just as outrageous as burning innocent women and children in churches. Rape and violation of women, and exploitation of the poor and of jobless youth have been overlooked by the commentators who focus on one component of the matrix of exploitation in Kenya — ethnicity.

In tandem with much of the current discourse on fractal theory, this commentary is addressed to progressive intellectuals from Kenya and calls for a revolutionary paradigmatic transformation- one that is intrinsic to African knowledge systems and can be witnessed in practice in the everyday activities of African life. Revolutionary transformations are necessary to break from the processes

that have been unleashed in Kenya and East Africa since British colonialism and the British Gulag. This break requires revolutionary ideas in Kenya, along with revolutionary leaders and new forms of political organization. Thus far, neo-liberal capitalism and neo-liberal democratic organizations, along with the focus on party organization have created leaders who organize for political power. These leaders are not even concerned about forming lasting political parties. Far more profound transformations are required in Kenya, beyond the winning of elections. However, until new ideas and new leaders emerge, the current struggles will serve to educate the poor on the limitations of the old politics and ethnic alliances that privilege sections of the Kenyan capitalist class.

The analysis is presented as a drama of three acts. The first act was played out in the form of the election campaign. The second act involved the drama after the announcement of the results and the violent reactions from all sections of the society. The third act of this drama continues to unfold with the call for a fractal analysis that will place revolutionary transformation as the central question on the political agenda in Kenya and East Africa.

Act One - The Struggles over the election and the campaign for the Presidency.

The Scene: Kenya had been the epi- center of imperial domination in East Africa from the period of British colonialism. Caroline Elkins in the book, Britain's Gulag, has documented for posterity the extreme violence and murders bequeathed to the Kenyan political culture by the British government. At independence in December 1963, Britain handed over power to people who, in essence, agreed to act as junior partners with British capitalism in Eastern and Central Africa. This partnership included an acceptance by the ruling class in Kenya of the western European forms of land ownership that stated that Africans had to be modernized from their "tribal" and "backward" ways. For forty years, Kenya was presented as a success story where a parasitic middle class and a thriving Nairobi Stock Exchange (composed of foreign capital) sought to prove that capitalism could take root in Africa.

Act 1 Scene Two of this drama took the form of a campaign for the tenth Parliament of Kenya. The drama of the struggle for change in Kenya was played out before the world in the form of an electoral struggle that gripped the society for many months. At the end of Scene Two one of the principal props of this drama - the local media - reported that the results were like a "blood bath." The headline screamed " energized voters sweep out Vice President, Cabinet Ministers and seasoned politicians as wind of change blows across the country." But the newspapers were not yet aware of the implications of using language like "blood bath" in their headlines. Every one awaited the final results of the news of who would be President. The results were being delayed while the votes were being cooked. As news of the parliamentary routing of the incumbent President and his allies in the Party of National Unity (PNU) splashed on the streets, on the screens and on text messages while the principal actors and actresses of the drama, the people of Kenya, sought spontaneous actions to ensure that they were not silenced by the power brokers who had placed themselves at the head of the movement for change. These central actors and actresses (wananchi) had enthusiastically participated in the election campaign articulating their demand for peace, reconstruction and transformation of Kenyan society.

By the time of the third scene of this drama, those from the den of thieves around the incumbent Mwai Kibaki sought to silence the media. In order for this scene to be played out without an audience, international observers and the media (both national and international) were ejected from Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) election center at the Kenyatta International Conference Centre. The Chairperson of the ECK went to a small room and announced the results of the elections

naming Mwai Kibaki as the winner of the election. Three days later, the same chairperson of the ECK said in the media that he was not sure if Kibaki won the elections.

Earlier in the drama Raila Odinga's team of regional barons and aspiring capitalists argued that the true results of the elections showed that Raila Odinga had been chosen by the majority of the main players to be the leading man on the Kenyan stage. How was it possible for his Movement to win over one hundred seats in the Parliament (when Kibaki's den of thieves had won less than thirty parliamentary seats) and still lose the Presidency? Local and foreign observers cried foul. The elections had been rigged. Ballot boxes had been stuffed. Results were being announced that did not correspond to the votes from the constituencies. The integrity of the process was flawed. These voices were soon drowned out by the might and power of those with strategic control over the military and media sections of the performance. Neo-liberal politics include rigging, so that the international observers used 'measured' language of "irregularities," "anomalies" and "weighty issues" to conceal the reality of outright theft. Raila Odinga termed the process a "civilian coup." But international capital became confused, because, after all the precedent of election rigging in Florida, U.S.A in 2000 had given the green light to electoral fraud internationally.

The Swearing in of President Kibaki

Act One Scene Three of this drama was performed within the guarded confines of State House where parastatal executives, mostly defeated cabinet members and a small section of the media were invited. In this scene, Mwai Kibaki was sworn in as the Third President of the Republic of Kenya. The stage and setting of this scene was markedly different from the previous swearing in at the Uhuru Park (in Nairobi) where an enthusiastic audience had cheered on the President on December 30, 2002. The 2007 swearing in scene had to be played out without the audience because the principal actors and actresses did not endorse this new act. Minutes after the announcement of the victory of Kibaki, there were spontaneous demonstrations all over the country, especially the urban areas. Popular outrage at the theft of the elections brought violence and the killings of innocent civilians in Kakamega, Kisumu, Mombassa, Nairobi, Nakuru and other centers. The police killed innocent demonstrators as the foreign media portrayed the demonstrations in ethnic terms. The gendered, class and ethnic dimensions of the opposition to Kibaki began to be played out in the poor communities that were called slums, but the media focused on one dimension, the ethnic alienation of the poor and exploited.

Hundreds of dead brought home the reality that the elections and vote counting were simply one site of struggle in the quest to break the old politics of exploitation and dehumanization in Kenya. However, because so much of the old politics of exploitation had been masked by the politicization of ethnicity, poor members of the Kikuyu nationality were targeted in some communities, with the killings in Eldoret bringing home the long traditions of ethnic cleaning that had been going on in this region during the Moi regime. The same media neglected to report that poor Kalenjin also torched the home of former President Arap Moi.

Would there be a break from this recursive process of killing of the poor?

Odinga and members of the Pentagon condemned the killings of members of a particular ethnic group but the anger was too deep for the youths to listen. Unfortunately, the ODM did not have structures to properly mobilize the youths away from looting.

Raila Odinga and the Orange Democratic Movement

In order to avert the possible war that could emanate from this new act of the drama there was the need for fresh if not revolutionary ideas to harness the pent up energies of the people for change. The radicalization of Kenyan politics had merged with the anti- globalization forces internationally to

the point where in 2007 Kenya hosted the World Social Forum. The radical demands of the Bamako appeal of the Africa Social Forum (for profound social, economic and gender transformations in Africa) could not be carried forward by the old Non Governmental Organization elements allied with international NGO's from Western Europe. What the World Social Forum had demonstrated was the reality that new revolutionary ideas with new revolutionary forms of organization were needed to realize the goals and aspirations and appeal of the Africa social forum. Raila Odinga and his group of regional ethnic barons had tapped into the radical sentiments of the youth all across the ethnic divisions. Calling his team, the Pentagon, Odinga mobilized the popular discourses about youth, women and disabled to speak about 'poverty eradication' and "corruption."

Absent from the platform of the Orange Democratic Movement was a clear program for reconstruction and transformation. Raila Odinga had been a major political actor on the Kenyan stage for four decades. He had participated in every major political party and formation since his father, Odinga Odinga had emerged as the opponent of the Kenyan form of neo-colonialism. The 2007 elections exposed the reality that there were no real political parties in Kenya. Leaders on all sides were not interested in building a lasting movement for change. They were interested in parties as electoral vehicles to capture state power. There were more than 300 parties registered in Kenya and over 117 participated in the elections in December 2007.

Local and international writers who earlier had been voices for the poor enthusiastically supported the enactment of the first scene of the drama (the election and voting). Some of these writers moaned and groaned that the script had been changed when those who controlled the state machinery unleashed violence against the poor. In order to unleash state violence against the poor, the Minister of Internal Affairs banned the broadcast of live images. The state also toyed with the idea of banning SMS messaging in Kenya. But

Kenyans simply tuned in to the international media to confirm what they knew, that the recursive processes of killings and revenge were spiraling out of control.

Without enacting an official state of emergency (in the fear of further hurting the tourist industry) the majority of poor Kenyans lived under curfew-like conditions as the military, the police, and General Service Units were deployed all over the country and new forms of censorship were implemented. The political leadership that stole the elections had to be careful with the use of the police, military and the intelligence services in so far as the divisions within the security forces challenged the authority of those who stole the elections. Raila Odinga sought to tap into this division of the coercive forces by calling a demonstration of a million Kenyans to oppose the stolen election results.

The International media and international capital

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and other cultural voices of imperial power were from the outset one of the props of this drama. The British were particularly active because the interests of British capitalism were very much an important part of narrative of the drama. During Act 1 scenes two and three, this foreign prop had been condemning the "irregularities" and "anomalies" of the drama and carried the press statements of the International Observers of the European Union and the Commonwealth. The head of the European Union observer mission issued a statement declaring that, "the Presidential poll lacks credibility and an independent audit should be instituted to rectify things."

This clear statement led the US government to reverse its earlier recognition of Mwai Kibaki as the winner of the Presidential elections. There had been concern in Washington over the future of Kenya in so far as the US authorities sought to mobilize Kenyans in the war against terrorism. During the period of Kibaki, Kenyan citizens were shipped out of the country to be tried as terrorists under the

US policy of kidnapping, called rendition. The ODM signed a memorandum of understanding with the Islamic community during the election campaign and members of the ODM condemned the rendering of Kenyan citizens by the government. It was argued that if these citizens acted contrary to Kenyan law, they should be tried under Kenyan law.

The propaganda war had been virulent and since Raila Odinga held the moral and political high ground, sections of the international media began to retreat from endorsement of the electoral coup. However, the occupation of the moral high ground was shaky. Would the government and opposition be more concerned with the lives of the poor than with political power?

In the face of the absence of resolute moral leadership to condemn these killings, the international media had a field day portraying the struggles for democracy in Kenya as primitive “tribal” violence.

Act Two - Stalemate and brinkmanship in politics

Raila Odinga and his team called the Pentagon had entered the drama seeking to play on the terms of those who had seized power from the time of colonialism. The very naming of his team as the ‘Pentagon’ had shown an insensitivity to the international revulsion against military symbols. The five leaders of the Pentagon were, (i) Vice Presidential running mate M Mudavadi, (ii) Charity Ngilu, (iii) William Ruto, (iv) Bilal Najib and (v) Joseph Nyagah. These regional ethnic barons had emerged from multiple political formations and many had family and business linkages with capitalists inside and outside of the government. During the campaign these regional leaders had campaigned on a pledge to devolve power from central government. The poor believed this would bring power closer to the village and communities so that health care facilities, water supply systems, road and pathways in the villages, education, sanitation and other services could be delivered so that the conditions of exploitation are ameliorated. These localized services were interpreted by various local communities as job creation avenues for the jobless youths. For the regional barons, the devolution debate was carried out to ensure easier access to the treasury. The word ‘majimbo’ re-emerged in the political vocabulary of Kenya to reignite the memory of the alliance between the ‘home guards’ and settlers at the dawn of independence.

Youths all across Kenya had transcended the ethnic identification and wanted real change in the quality of life in the society.

Entering the drama without a real party and without a real organ to bring the majority of the actors and actresses to the center of the drama, it was easy for the team around Mwai Kibaki to stall so that the spontaneous anger would peter out. Would the Orange Democratic Revolution learn the lessons of popular power in the streets of the Ukraine Orange Revolution and shake the old power with new bases of alternative power? This provided the setting for the central aspect of the drama, the stand off between the forces of orange and the forces of the defeated power. Kibaki came across as an imprisoned leader, surrounded by politicians and financiers who argued that Kibaki must enter any negotiation from a position of strength. Odinga countered that negotiations could only begin when Kibaki accepted that the elections had been stolen. The hardening of positions ratcheted up the tensions in the country as regionally countries such as Uganda, Rwanda and the Southern Sudan began to feel the effects of the shutdown of the transportation system in Kenya.

Mwai Kibaki and the neo-liberal regime in Kenya

Mwai Kibaki had been associated with the ruling class in Kenya for over fifty years. Starting his career as a representative of Shell Oil Company in Kampala, Uganda, Kibaki moved from an academic position at Makerere University to the top echelons of the independent government of

Kenya after independence. In the book, *The Reds and the Blacks*, William Atwood, then-US ambassador, had identified Kibaki as one of the steady 'reformers' who would guarantee the interests of foreign capital. Kibaki emerged as a stable force in the ruling circles serving both Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel Arap Moi as Minister of Finance. It was under the leadership of Kenyatta and Moi that the forms of theft by the ruling elements in Kenya were refined. Extra judicial killings and accidental deaths of prominent trade union leaders and politicians were papered over by the foreign press that labeled Kenya a 'stable' democracy.

Arap Moi and international capital.

After the death of Kenyatta in 1978, Daniel Arap Moi moved decisively to cement an alliance of foreign capitalists and local political careerists to loot the society and spread divisions and ethnic hatred among the poor and oppressed. British capitalism had been the dominant force in Kenya with British companies such as Unilever, Finlays, GSK, Vodafone, Barclays and Standard Bank becoming leading names on the Nairobi Stock Exchange. Britain had made a deal with the independence leaders and awarded a small sum to enhance this new class of African yeoman farmers to join the British settlers in the exploitation of Kenya and indeed, East Africa. Molo, in the Rift Valley (one of the constituencies at the center of the row over the rigged elections), represented one of the places where Kikuyu settlers had been relocated after independence.

Moi during his Presidency remained at the center of the alliance between British capitalists, Asian capitalists and Kikuyu entrepreneurs from Central Province. By the time of the electoral defeat of Moi in December 2002, the Moi family and cronies in the ruling party, Kenya African National Union (KANU) had become junior capitalists in the game of exploitation. It was under the leadership of Moi that imperialism used Kenya as a base to subvert African independence. A report commissioned by the Kibaki administration, (called the Kroll Report), had named Moi and his sons as billionaires with assets in banks in Britain, Switzerland, South Africa, Namibia, the Cayman Islands and Brunei. The 110-page report by the international risk consultancy Kroll alleged that relatives and associates of former President Moi siphoned off more than £1bn of government money. This documentation placed the Moises on a par with Africa's other great politicians-cum-looters such as Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo) and Nigeria's Sani Abacha. The Kroll report of the levels of theft when presented to the Kibaki government was never acted on. The alliance between Moi and Kibaki forces became clearer during the election campaign when Moi and his sons fiercely campaigned for the re-election of President Kibaki. The sons of Moi were decisively defeated in the elections.

The documentation of the level of theft by Moi was exposed before the public in what to become known as the Goldenberg scandal. This scandal brought to the fore the alliance between Moi, KANU and Asian capitalists in Kenya. These capitalists had looted the country with such impunity that Kamlesh Mdamani Pattni (an Asian capitalist named in the Goldenberg scandal) took over one party Kenda to contest the 2007 elections.

Prior to the 1992 multi-party struggles, Kibaki had sought to distance himself from this group of capitalists. These were the capitalists involved in settler agriculture, manufacturing, transport, services, old forms of banking, insurance, real estate, construction and engineering and the health and education sectors. These capitalists from inside and outside the political arena provided cover for looters all across Eastern Africa. In the Kenyan economy money from oil in the Sudan (especially Southern Sudan), commercial interests in Somalia, gold and diamond dealers from Rwanda, Burundi and the Eastern Congo circulated with the resources from the exploited Kenyan working poor so that in the past ten years there has been a growth of the Kenyan economy. Felicia Kabunga, wanted by the International Criminal Tribunal on Rwanda (ICTR) for crimes of genocide in Rwanda was the kind of looter and money spinner who found safe haven among the money launderers in Kenya.

Kibaki and the rise of new capitalists.

Although Mwai Kibaki had campaigned on an anti-corruption ticket in 2002, his tenure as President of Kenya was marked by an explosion of new schemes for accumulation. The rise of the telecommunications, information technology and banking sectors boomed with new enterprises such as Equity Bank and a number of communications companies (Safaricom, Flashcom, Telecom etc) rivaling the old capitalists. The floating of new shares in the form of an Initial Public Offer (IPO) for the Company, Safaricom, became a central question in the election campaign in so far as those who got access to the shares at the time of the issuing of the IPO became instant millionaires.

The Kibaki government was in the main dominated by elements who formed a company called MEGA (a regrouping of the old Gema Gikuyu, Embu, Meru Association), and through TransCentury Corporation had elevated themselves to be among the leading capitalists in Kenya. This group presented a program called Vision 2030 where Kenya would become the leading capitalist country in Africa, becoming the Singapore of Africa. Control of the governmental apparatus was crucial for Vision 2030.

Space does not allow for an elaboration of the individuals of this capitalist clique and their place in the interpenetrating directorates of the Nairobi Stock Exchange. What is significant is that the names of the capitalists and politicians of TransCentury figured in the scandal of corruption that rocked the government of Mwai Kibaki. This was termed the Anglo-leasing scandal which involved awarding huge government contracts to bogus companies. One insider, John Githongo, exposed the scandal and repatriated to Britain.

No money from the Anglo leasing scandal had been recovered before the elections and although European and US governments made noises about corruption there were no moves to repatriate the stolen wealth back to Kenya. These scandals were very much a part of the election campaign. Three of the four ministers who resigned after the Anglo Leasing scandal was exposed had been reinstated by Kibaki. These ministers along with twenty other ministers lost their parliamentary seats in the December 2007 elections.

The poor of Kenya had used the ballot to send a message to the capitalists in Kenya but those who stole billions of dollars from the Kenyan Treasury were not above stealing an election.

The real test in Kenyan politics was whether the team called the Pentagon was serious about changing the political culture of theft, looting and storing billions of dollars in foreign banks. The people of Kenya had voted for change. Was the Orange Democratic Movement a movement for change or a movement for political power? This was the outstanding question as the cast and the writers got ready for Act three of the drama of the struggle for democracy.

Act 3. A Revolutionary situation without revolutionary ideas and real revolutionaries.

Because the drama is being played out it is not possible to make a presentation of the last act of this drama. This is the act where the peoples of Kenya are torn between two traditions. These are the traditions of the freedom fighters for independence and the traditions of violence, looting and the low respect for African life. The youths of Kenya have been brought up in the period of the aftermath of the end of apartheid and the defeat of Mobutism. These youths have risen above the politicization of ethnicity and along with progressive women want to end the rape and violation of women. These youths have been heard to say that Kenya is in the midst of a liberation war.

While the consciousness of the youth may be high with the thought of a long term struggle, there are very few revolutionary leaders and a poverty of revolutionary ideas in Kenya. If anything, the poorer youths are being mobilized into counter-revolutionary violence where poor and oppressed people burn and kill each other. This was the lesson of the killings, burning and massacre in the Rift Valley. Counter-revolutionary violence of the Rwanda genocidal form lay just below the surface and the same politicians who gave refuge to genocidaires from Rwanda are not above fomenting genocidal violence among the poor. The media images of marauding youths with pangas provide the necessary imagery to represent to the world another version of African savagery. This same media will not prominently carry the news that poor peasants from the home area of Danieal Arap Moi burnt his house to the ground. The prospect of real class warfare in Kenya frightens both the government and the opposition so there is a delicate effort to manage the crisis so that the forms of capital accumulation can return to the business pages rather than the front pages.

Raila Odinga and the Orange Democratic movement are now caught between the aspirations of the regional capitalists of the 'Pentagon' and the demand for real change across Kenya. The post election mayhem is a clear demonstration that the ODM did not sufficiently engage their followers on new ideas transcending ethnicity and patriarchy. This demand for democratic change in Kenya will require new forms of organization beyond electoral politics and new ideas about the value of African lives. This requires a break with the European ideation systems that promote capitalism as democracy and genocide as progress.

P.S.

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