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**MANY ARE CRYING, “WHO WILL SHOW US ANY GOOD?” –
VOICES OF DECEMBER 2007 POST-ELECTION VIOLENCE
VICTIMS IN KENYA**

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Abstract

Purpose: This study analyzes and brings to light the voices of the victims who suffered particularly the socio-economic effects of the 2007 December violence and land clashes that took place in Kenya. During the 2007 December violence and land clashes, women, children and men were affected differently by the conflict, with women and children suffering most of the effects such as death, physical injuries and insufficient resources to take care of their basic needs. Consequently, as women experienced the immediate consequences of the conflict, they were the first to receive humanitarian assistance from international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) like the Red Cross and a few indigenous ones. The voices of the victims narrating the violence they went through and the trauma they lived with would engage the minds of peace-caring persons to speak against violence of this nature in the future.

Methodology: Utilizing a qualitative study approach, the study focuses on 17 interview transcripts, statements taken from Kenyan newspapers of January 2008, online newspapers during the same period, eyewitness accounts as recorded in papers. For the theoretical framework, I used thematic analysis because these were stories “told” by the affected individuals.

Findings: My aim was to purposely establish how the rhetorical narratives as told by the affected individuals “chain out”. Are there any running main themes and patterns across the narratives? What is the “master narrative? What are the “counter narratives”, how are they constructed, and how do they attack the master narrative? One of the key issues I identified in my literature review as the cause of violence in Kenya is land. Violence was rampant and severe in the rich agricultural region of the Rift Valley.

Unique contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice: The study underscores the importance of listening to people’s voices and the stories as told by the victims themselves. Narrative framework and mainly thematic analysis framework helped in the analysis of the stories told by the violence victims. The country seemed to be polarized along ethnic lines – which to me, is a big deterrent for development. Politically, people need to be educated on their political rights and not be misused by politicians for their own advantage. The government, the judicial system, the church and the Electoral Commission of Kenya should address the issues raised by these traumatized and overwhelmed individuals.

Keywords: *violence, trauma, voices of victims, conflict, storytellers.*

1.0 BACKGROUND

In terms of background, Inter-ethnic violence and conflict in Kenya need to be understood from the backdrop of the December 2007 violence. Kaufman (2001) says, an ethnic conflict is a conflict between two or more contending ethnic groups. While the violations of democratic rights provided the trigger for the bulk of the street violence and human rights violations in the December 2007 General elections, a number of underlying causes also contributed to fueling the outburst of violence within Kenya. Violations of economic and social rights pre-existed the recent violence as evidenced in the lack of access to water, food, health, decent housing together with the rate of youth unemployment and the gross inequality reported by civil society organizations. According to UNDP Report (2008), 45.9% of the Kenyan population live under the threshold of absolute poverty and 20% of the population experience hunger. The colonial legacy and mismanagement of land distribution especially in the Rift Valley has generated conflict over what is often perceived as the most important form of wealth and source of political power: arable land.

The violence triggered by the flawed electoral process should be analyzed in its context of longstanding conflict over land rights, prevailing impunity for human rights violations and highly unsatisfactory fulfillment of economic and social rights. There has been long standing dispute over land rights. The Kenya Government Lands Act (Cap. 280) which regulates the former “crown lands” now known as Government lands gives considerable power to the President. This act extends the power of the Commissioner of Lands – a President’s appointee – to lease land within the townships for 99 years and agricultural areas for 999 years, with the power to convert leases into freeholds. In light of the centrality of the presidential figure and the community-based political environment, land has thus often been used in Kenya to award patronage, solidify support and build alliances.

In the early 1900s, the British colonialists evicted the Rift Valley’s communities (Nandi, Maasai, Samburu and Turkana) to create the “White Highlands”. Agricultural laborers from the neighboring provinces, particularly Kikuyus from the Central Province, were recruited to work on the colonial farms. In the aftermath of Kenya’s independence from the British Empire, some of these agricultural laborers took advantage of the land-buying schemes offered by President Jomo Kenyatta and bought the land they had worked on for the British colonialists. These small lands were in Nakuru, Uasin Gishu, Nandi, Trans Nzoia and Narok districts. This situation was largely maintained until 1992-1993, when, during President Moi’s tenure, politically-instigated violence forced many Kikuyu farmers out of their farms. At this point, some ministers and national politicians from the Kalenjin and Maasai communities rallied on the reestablishment of a *majimbo* system of Government – a federal system based on ethnicity. Some proponents of *majimboism* simultaneously called for the expulsion of all other ethnic groups from land they claimed to be historically theirs, and the return of the “Kikuyu outsiders” to their “home land” or “ancestral home”, in the Central Province. That background paints a picture of a people who have been frustrated by the government establishment and by those who bought land in “their” ancestral lands and with time have been the catalysts for fueling inter ethnic aggression/violence, and when the people could not hold it any more, it sparked the national violence in December 2007. One of the ways the politicians use and which cause conflict among community members is their inflammatory and inciting statements. Kenyan Red Cross – an International NGO that

was at the center of crisis as of 27 February 2008 reported some 268,330 persons were displaced as a result of post electoral violence.

Frey (1991) posits that political violence is a tactic used to gain control of a situation or to shift balance of power (p.116). This is achieved through manipulation of target populations into compliance with demands they would otherwise reject in a more rational situation. Oyugi (1997) correctly argues that tribalism as an ideological tool is often used in economic competition and political conflicts. This assertion seems to confirm what happened during the 2007 elections when the Kalenjin and their kinsmen opted to defend the status quo of privileges, against the possibility of deprivation by potential challengers. This marked the genesis of ethnic violence in Kenya and particularly in the Rift Valley where it was severe.

Magubane (1969) and Nzongola (1997) correctly point out that the condition for ethnic conflicts in Africa was created historically through colonial and post-colonial government policies. The bone of contention in African ethnic conflicts is control of the state and national resources to which the state has access. Thus the state is both a contributor to and the manager of ethnic conflicts. Such conflicts tend to erupt because of the activities of either the elite or groups who mobilize ethnic symbols in order to achieve access to social, political and material resources. Ethnicity, therefore, is instigated by scarce resources. This is exactly what transpired in the land clashes in the Rift-Valley.

Similar views are held by Ibrahim and Pereira (1993) and Mafeje (1971) who point out that under colonial rule linguistic groups were categorized as tribes and the differences between them were emphasized. Thus stronger and more rigid ethnic relations became likely. However, with the multi-ethnic state of Africa, ethnic-based political mobilization constitutes a major threat to the stability of the state. In sum the entrenchment of a democratic culture is the panacea to ethnic conflicts because ethnic conflict can be linked to the failure of democracy to entrench itself.

Problem Statement

The key player being blamed for the violence that took place is the government because of its complicity in one way or another in the ethnic violence. The storytellers in this study tend to construct the master narrative around the role the government played in manipulating the presidential election results using the Electoral Commission which oversees the election process. Other players blamed are the church and the judiciary due to their acts of omission and commission. Apart from the flawed presidential election results, there seemed to have been other deep underlying issues that people were waiting to get something to spark them which require a study to be done to establish them – hence, the reason I established this study to listen to the voices and stories of the violence victims in order to get to the root causes. One of those issues I identified in my literature review is land. Violence was rampant and severe in the rich agricultural region of the Rift Valley. This is an area where different ethnic groups have settled since the British colonizers left after independence in 1963. But there are ethnic groups who claim that those lands belong to them. The land issues need to be addressed first.

Narrative theoretical framework was utilized in this study because it keeps a story “intact” by theorizing from the case rather than from component themes (categories) across cases. It proved to be very useful and is recommended for other studies of this nature.

Objectives

1. Establish the master and counter narratives of the violence from the stories and testimonies told by the victims and eye-witnesses;
2. Establish the socio-economic effects of the violence as told by the victims and eye-witnesses.

Research questions

1. What are the socio-economic effects of the December 2007 post-election violence to the people who told these stories?
2. How do they construct the stories of how the violence happened?

2.0 NARRATIVE FRAMEWORK

In this study, I used thematic analysis framework. The reason is because I relied on the violence and trauma stories and testimonies that the post-election victims told. The key concepts that I looked at were: violence and trauma narratives as told by the storytellers. Riessman (2008, p. 53) argues that the utility of this approach is that narrative scholars keep a story “intact” by theorizing from the case rather than from component themes (categories) across cases. She also argues that thematic analysis can be applied to stories that develop in interview conversations and group meetings, and those found in written documents (p.54). In this study, I looked at the themes emerging from the stories told. This is supported by Riessman (2008, p.56) when she says that this approach helps the research look at the themes that develop from the statements made by the interviewees. I worked at each interview at a time. In a thematic narrative, Riessman (2008) points out, “The investigator works with a single interview at a time, isolating and ordering relevant episodes into a chronological biographical account.” (p.57) In addition, Riessman (2008) asserts, “In thematic narrative analysis, emphasis is on “the told” – the events and cognitions to which language refers (the content of speech)” (p.58). She also goes on to point out that because interest in thematic analysis lies in the content of speech, the researcher interprets what is said in interviews by assuming meanings for an utterance that any component user of the language would bring. Therefore, language will be my resource for analysis. The stories that I analyze meet the specific of criteria of violence and trauma – because that is my intention and purpose in this study. The unit of analysis is violence or trauma as told in the stories. Riessman (2008, p.74) points out that theorizing across a number of cases by identifying common thematic elements across research participants, the events they report, and the actions they take is an established tradition with a long history in qualitative inquiry. The themes that emerge from the stories and testimonies the victims and eye-witnesses told inform the analysis of my study.

Positioning myself

In this study, I locate myself as being part of the interviews and the interpretative context. This position is supported by Riessman (2008, p.58) when she argues that in thematic analysis, the writer/researcher can locate himself in the interview and interpretative context rather than pretending he wasn't there. In fact, I participated in training the people who told these stories and I listened to each one of them as they told them in class and during the interviews. I was also in Kenya when this violence was taking place and I witnessed and read most the stories of what happened. Thus, I am writing from the position of an insider, with the right cultural orientation

and first-hand experience of the violence. Some of my close friends lost their family members and properties.

Ethical considerations

Some of the ethical concerns I had in mind were; how I am going to represent and report the victim stories? Will I be justified to give their real names because I have them in my interview transcripts? What harm if any will that cause? Since I didn't get an IRB permit for this study and given the nature of risks that might accrue by revealing the names of the victims, I decided to keep the names anonymous – and where necessary use fictitious names. Frank (1995) argues that narrative ethics helps the practitioner to recognize the moral dimension in every encounter, it helps to ground difficult decisions in the concreteness and specificity of each victims life. Since my study deals with self-stories, narrative ethics cautions me to approach each case with care as the moral action of responding. Ultimately, Frank (1995, p.163) points out that narrative ethics is about recognizing how much we as fellow-humans have to do with each other. As we grope toward some unknowable vision of the good and virtuous, cutting and pasting stories, borrowing and lending along the way, we become communicative bodies. My intention is to communicate the pain of suffering through violence and trauma of the post-election violence victims in Kenya from a moral stand-point.

3.0 ANALYSIS

The mode of analysis that I am using in this study as I have pointed out earlier is thematic narrative analysis. As Riessman (2008, p.53) clearly points out, in thematic analysis, content is the exclusive focus and that it is the most common method of narrative analysis and, arguably, the most straight-forward and appealing in applied settings. And more importantly, it helps the researcher to keep the story “intact” by theorizing from the case rather than from component themes (categories) across cases. From the emerging themes in each interview, I am able to identify the master and counter narrative. Looking at all the interview stories that the victims and eye-witnesses told, the master narrative was the *disputed presidential election results* and is the one considered by most of the victims as the main cause of the violence and trauma that they went through. The only counter-narrative came later when some of the victims called for peace and reconciliation, and others began blaming the *Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK)*, the *church* and the *judicial system* as the causes for their acts of omission and commission.

From the onset, the Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK), the body that was in-charge of the flawed elections that brought the violence was blamed. The theme of blame started to emerge. One of the interview respondents (Mr. Tom) who was caught up in the fracas was recorded as saying, “The chairman of ECK made the announcement late this afternoon... my vote was stolen! ECK bears the responsibility for the chaos in Kenya today. They should resign and rid us of this disgrace”. In fact, immediately the ECK chairman announced the presidential results, the violence started in the whole country and that is why this respondent is *blaming* the ECK and calling it to resign. Another respondent (Mr. Kariuki) said, “Were we naïve to imagine that our votes were important, or that ultimate power rested with the people?” (*slight pause before and after*) I'm scared. Our area was attacked last night. I can't get out. There are men with pangas/machetes sitting outside. I haven't slept for 3 days. If you sleep, they burn your house. People thought their votes would give them a government that would protect them, but instead,

they are witnessing violence – a contradiction of their voting expectations. Many people were terrorized and scared. The testimony of Kariuki is one of a person who was overwhelmed by the circumstances at the time. Frank (1995, p.138) argues that testimony has that effect: it overwhelms even as it is overwhelmed. He goes on to point out that the root of the overwhelmed memory in testimony is a body that is overwhelmed. The gravity of the violence overwhelmed everyone. The media houses did broadcast the beginning of the violence. For example, (*newscaster voice*) “Violence erupted in the slums and throughout the country when election results were announced. Houses were burned, people were killed, businesses were looted. The police and protesting youth have engaged in running battles in the streets and throughout the slums. Tear gas canisters litter the roads. “ This voice expressed the magnitude of the violence in terms of social and economic effects. An angry person was recorded in the news media as saying, “If by voting we get violence, then I will never vote again.” The blame game is still on the “voting.” He went on to say, I’m so ashamed to be a Kenyan.” These were voices of overwhelmed bodies.

Violence and Trauma Narratives

Victims and eye-witnesses of the post-election violence told vivid stories of how they were affected by the violence. Some of them narrate far-reaching social and economic effects they have faced. One of these is the story and testimony of Bishop B – when he told this story, I was there and his story transported me to where he was, and what happened. As he told this story, he could not help shedding tears, which is uncharacteristic of men from his Kalenjin culture. But he said, the pain was too much and unbearable. I even shed my tears as I listened to him tell his story of how he was affected by the violence. This is what he said;

“My wife and I had given shelter to 71 members of our church who were from the opposing tribe. A gang of young men came to our door to attack the people. But they hid in the ceiling board of my house while I talked with the gang at the door. They gave me one hour to get rid of the people. I smuggled the people into town in a car – putting 3 people in the trunk, and 3 inside, all covered by luggage. I did this 6 times, each time going through the 15 roadblocks between my house and town that were manned by violent youth who demanded a 50 shilling bribe each time.

A few days later, when I was alone at home, the gang returned. In order to force me to open the house they took the landlord’s daughter and began beating and stripping her in front of my house. To save her I opened my door to the gang. They came in and beat and tortured me, whipping me with an iron tipped scourge, among other things. At the end they hit me with an iron bar and broke my spine, paralyzing me from the waist down. Why did they do this? As a warning for having sheltered members of the “enemy” tribe and because I married a woman from outside the tribe. However, I was able to call a pastor friend and was airlifted to hospital in Nairobi, where I was cared for for 21 days and regained my movement. When asked how he felt about that incident, he said, “ I have forgiven them, I am healed, I can walk, and I am back preaching the word of God.”

Even after saying he has forgiven the perpetrators of this violence on him, I could see on his face that he was still struggling with the trauma of the incident. He did spend a lot of money on medication and he had to look for new ways of re-establishing relationships with the youth who did this crime on him and who happened to be members of one of his churches. It was a live

story of violence and trauma with far-reaching socio-economic ramifications. His testimony was in line with Frank (1995, p.143) argument that in its testimony the communicative body call others into a dyadic relationship. Testimony as an activity defines the communicative body, albeit tautologically and recursively. Thus, his testimony called on us – his witnesses of the testimony become what none of us are yet, communicative bodies. We joined him in shedding tears as he told his testimony – our bodies became communicative bodies. Because of the power of that testimony to emotionally transport, I still vividly remember and visualize Bishop B's moving testimony.

Linnet Wafula (not her real name) tells her story as an eye-witness. It is a sad story of *rape* and *looting* as the key themes. The names of the victims she gave I have changed them in to fictitious names to hid their real names. She said,

“*Mr. M* was a headmaster at Majani Mingi Primary School in Rungai, Nakuru District. His *wife K.* was the deputy in the same school. At the time of the elections their *daughter P* was on holiday as she had just graduated from college; Teachers Training College in Kiambu. On January 29th 2008 *Linnet, Mr. M* and a few students were leaving the school to the Showground in Nakuru when youth from Kalenjin tribe came to loot the school. *Mrs. K* and her daughter who were left behind were raped one after another until well wishers took them to Ravine Hospital where they were treated for two days. Also the Red Cross workers at the Show ground were informed by people, and then they went for them from Ravine hospital to the one located at the Showground. She said, *Mrs. K* and her daughter were most affected and refused to return to the same school up to date, instead they are still suffering in the camp waiting for the government to resettle them.”

This story indicates that, the master narrative of the disputed presidential election results and the ineptitude of the government to respond to their plight is to blame for this violence and suffering. Unfortunately, it seems *Mrs. K* and her daughter will take long before they can overcome the trauma of rape. Her daughter also refused to go back to school – this shows the magnitude of the trauma on her social life. Maybe she has been asking; how do my former friends and colleagues look at me after that ordeal? Both need counseling services to overcome the trauma so that they pick up their lives again. This is another sign of bodies that have been overwhelmed by trauma. When a body is overwhelmed by trauma, it needs counseling services – that is what *Mrs. K* and her daughter need.

Similarly, another story is told by a man (A *Mr. Bernard Orinda*) who lost 11 relatives and is still bitter and demanding justice. The key themes in this story are: the disputed presidential election results, politicians who stirred people's emotions, and the killings. But the way he lost his family members through violence is traumatizing to say the least. He lost 2 wives and 9 children burnt alive in the orgy of violence that hit Naivasha (one of the towns in Kenya where violence hit fever pitch high) in revenge attacks that followed the mayhem in the Rift Valley over the disputed presidential election results. He said, “and although the grass has grown on their graves and my new marriage has brought forth a baby girl, I am still a bitter man – almost two years down the line.” To express his bitterness and anger over what he went through, he continued to say,

“I stayed in Naivasha for 30 years and at no time did I feel like I did not belong there until the politicians stirred emotions. I propose tough action – it will not only be a deterrent but a first

step to building tribe-less country. I was innocent; I am not learned so I was not in contention for any job. I voted because I was over 18 and the law allows it. That's all. I did not contest any seat. I sat waiting for the outcome of the results, but what I got was the killing of my family and anguish that has trailed me all along. I want the (international Criminal Court (ICC) to arrest the leaders; I am more than willing to testify. But I would also like to look at the leaders who instigated the violence in the eye and ask them questions. He continued: "I want the suspects to tell me why they killed my whole family. I want the whole world to see the people who took our country backwards after the elections." His story was also covered in the Daily Nation, November 6, 2009.

Looking at this story, as Bernard cited from the beginning, he is still looking for justice while he still needs healing and reconciliation from his past experience. He has expressed serious symptoms of trauma that need to be addressed. The pain with which he told the story shows the socio-economic ramifications of the violence on his family life – even though he has remarried. His story still remains the same – he is still grieving the loss of his family members. He sounds socially devastated and heart-broken. His words represent the state of his body – an overwhelmed one.

The violence that swept through Kenya did not respect age or one's status. In the interviews that we conducted during the conflict resolutions workshops we held in Kenya, a Mr. Daniel N. (not his real name) in our Kisumu workshop narrated to us how neighborhood youth caused destruction, hopelessness, looted their family property as he watched helpless. His story also shows that he is still nursing the trauma of his experience then. By the time he gave this interview, he was pursuing his law degree at Nairobi University-Parklands Campus. His story still blames the main narrative of this piece; the disputed presidential election results. He said,

"Our sad journey as a family begun the very moment the presidential elections were announced. Our family got puzzled and anxious since there had been rumors in the estate that if the Prime minister did not win, then there was to be bloodshed. When the outcome results were announced Kikuyu, Kisii and Kamba who were living in Luo land were killed, their properties destroyed and looted. Our neighbor called my father alerting him to assemble any important official document and keep them with him as some youths were on the way to burn down properties. My mother and sister who had gone to my grand mother's home in Kakamega started calling to hear from my father who was left at home in Kisumu. Not long that my father called to alert us that youths were already close the homestead's gate. They entered and burnt the car that was parked in front yard, and then they proceeded to loot everything in the house and dismantled anything they could find in their way. There was a state of hopelessness for losing everything that we worked for in the last twenty years. We could not believe that our very own youth in the neighborhood whom we talked with and worked with could turn around and be so inhuman. One of the youth who was part of burning our car, was our neighbor's matatu driver and a friend. Our situation was worsened when we tried to get a hold of thirty five thousand (35,000) given to Internally Displaced Persons(IDPs), but we were turned down and told that we were not genuine internally displaced persons. One would ask, how can we cultivate a culture of peace after all these traumatic experiences?"

The level of material loss expressed by Daniel's story and the negative response his family received when they went for help beckons one to ask the right question that he asked. To cultivate

that “culture of peace” as he called it, requires one to overcome trauma first. The story positions Daniel as someone who is traumatized and still wondering why that happened to his family and no one cares, even they were denied the 35k designated for the internally displaced persons. Daniel needs to cultivate new hope in his life. His is a story of hopelessness and despair as the key themes.

Conversely, some of the victims of the violence had lived stable and comfortable lives. Janet, a 36 yr old woman, Pharmacist in Nairobi, told a protest story in her interview. She was perturbed by the divisions, killings and retaliation and insecurity in the country. All these precipitated the violence. She tacitly said;

“I am in my office. I am working. I am carrying on with my life. It is my own personal protest. I am protesting against my country's destruction for the sake of a few people's desire to be in power. The killing and retaliation going on is not right. And the saddest part of it all is that our country is now divided. I guess you would consider me a middle-upper class Kenyan, and for people like me, our problem at the moment is the inconvenience. We are not hungry. We are safe in our houses. But I still worry about security, my staff, their safety, people's attitudes, the economy. I am fed up with everything. And I am not alone. There are a lot of us who are fed up with this. Yes, we all know that a great wrong has been done but we just want our lives back to normal.”

Janet expresses deep frustrations that have come after the violence. These frustrations are symptoms of stress and trauma going on in her life. Her statement, “I am fed up with everything” expresses a body that is overwhelmed and needs help. She has told the story as she feels. The genesis of her frustration is the destruction of the country for the sake of power for a few people (politicians).

A man (John) who owned a business in one of the slum areas in Nairobi expresses how the violence affected him and his business. He said;

“I had a shop in Kibera and had many loyal customers. I lost my house and business worth Ksh50,000. So many others have also lost businesses and hope. We have families that depend on us. We don't know what to do next. How can we just go on?”

His is an expression of hopelessness and frustration. Losing his business meant that his life have crumbled – he can't take care of his family and that is why he is saying, “how can we just go on? I read that his question and frustration is pointed to the perpetrators of the violence – chaining the narrative to the government, politicians, and the electoral commission.

When the victims in the IDP camps were told by the government to go back to their former homes, in the interview, Joyce asked; “How can we leave the camps and go home? What if we are killed when we go back? Who will provide for our families? This might appear small to the government but not to us who have felt the pain of the violence and lost everything.” The fear of the violence that was meted out on Joyce exhibits itself in her statements here. She also comes through as one who is still traumatized. A teacher (Eddie) echoes similar words and his experience. He said, “I spent the night with my two children in the tea plantation as my house was being looted. The images are still fresh in my mind. I cannot perform my duties effectively.” That is an expression of trauma coming through in his last statement: “I cannot perform my duties effectively.” One of the atrocities that characterized the violence was looting.

People lost their properties that had taken many years of savings and hard work. A businessman (Mr. Keino) who owned an electronics shop in Nakuru town when we interviewed him said, “looters took almost my entire supply of television sets, DVD players and bicycles. They don’t care about politics; this is an excuse they are using to take our things.” To him, the looters got a window to steal via the violence, they don’t care much about the political issues that people are concerned with – that is, change for a better government. Losing his business stock was a serious economic draw-back to him.

Statistics of human suffering that were coming from the media houses during and after the violence were devastating and traumatic from the social front. Newscasters reported, “Over 1000 people have been killed in post-election violence and another 300,000 internally displaced. Of the 300,000 displaced people in camps, about 100,000 are children. The remaining majority are women who fled with babies.” Looking at such statistics, I can rightly say that most of those who bore the social brunt of the violence were women and children. And as I write this paper, media reports indicate that quite a good number of them are still living in IDP camps where conditions of living are very poor – no water, food, security and hygiene. In fact, many women have been reported to have been raped in these camps because there is no security and many others have contracted HIV/AIDS virus as a result of rape. Trauma and frustration for these people speaks of their state.

Mildred (not her real name) a high school teacher in Nakuru in her interview narrated in a poetic manner how she is struggling to love her sister once more. Here by the word “her sister” she meant the general women population in Kenya. Her words express hope, signs of trauma and social effects of the violence with anticipation that the former way of life could be rekindled. She said,

“I want to remember how to love you my sister. Even when gory scenes on TV show ethnic groups slaughtering one another and tribesmen urge revenge. My sister, I want to remember the countless moments we sat and laughed while watching comedies, eating popcorn and lamenting over husbands and children. I am struggling to remember. I have to remember the fact that you – a woman of the earth, corroborate the pain that is felt in that delivery room when bringing forth children sired by fathers of different tribes. When all the sanity, reason and logic has evaporated the hardened hearts of men, I want to recall, my sister, the love which you and I share even if we have never set eyes on each other – that very same love that is so much needed to save this humanity that is dangerously edging towards oblivion. We sat in crowded sweaty rooms for years, whispered, deliberated, discussed and debated the woman’s Herculean task of dancing on through the stresses and hardships of life even when the devil of hatred sat heavily on our backs.

Remember the many incidences when we removed our lesos, headscarves and sweaters to spread out at the back of a bus just to urge you to push out life that had burst out at the wrong place? Remember how we chased away all the men and shielded you even when we did not know your name? Yes, I want to remember that and most of all, I want to remember how we cried with you as you gnawed and pushed and how we hoped with you to the end up until that very first shrill that signified the beginning of life – the birth of hope. I want to remember how to love you now because, if we forget this love, my sister, my mother, my daughter, my friend, then what hope is there tomorrow when the offspring from our wombs know nothing but hate? “

Her poetic story as she told it at the workshop made many women who were present shed their tears – it was a story with a transporting power. I saw many women shed tears as she narrated this story. It was a story with a strong emotional appeal. It was so captivating and reminding them of the need to love one another once more – reminiscent of the just witnessed violence in the country and more so in Nakuru where it was very severe. It was a wake-up call from her for all women to rise up to the occasion of loving each other and doing those things they normally do together. As a man, I felt the import of her story transporting me so powerfully to the need for love for one another. It was a message for all of us to denounce violence and replace it with love, sanity, reason and logic.

One of the young men in one of the workshops in Nairobi, a Mr. Ogola (25 yr old) from Kibera slums gave a testimony of how he threw stones at the police during the violence. His was an attempt to fight back an “evil system.” He said the police used guns and tear gas to disperse people – but that did not deter Ogola and his friends from fighting back. In fact, during such exchanges, many young people were killed by the police. He said,

“ I threw stones at the police. Many, many actually. In return they fired shots into the air as some started approaching us and then others began tear-gassing us. I was not frightened. What frightens me is that I'll die of hunger. We should be allowed to express our feelings as citizens. We don't need the police to come and invade our lives. I don't know a lot about guns but I think the ones they have are AK-47s. The ones who don't have guns, have shields. Some of them have batons. All we have is stones.

They have power. No one even listens to us.(*angry*) The government is ignoring us poor and unemployed.”

His is a story of frustration and despair and yet with some determination to do whatever it takes to fight back the “evil system” (government) – and the violence created the opportune time. He feels that the government doesn't care about the poor and the unemployed like him – chaining out the blame game on the government.

By way of addressing the effects of the violence, some of the people told stories of reconciliation and peace. Their argument was that since the two government principals (President Mwai Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga) have signed an agreement to share power, there is no need to keep on blaming each other. Therefore, they introduced the counter-narrative of moving forward, for peace and reconciliation. I think this narrative came through because a majority of the people who attended our workshops came from churches. One senior clergyman from Eldoret said, “Finally! It is such a relief! Now we can get back to our lives. We can put all this behind us, let's forgive and forget. Don't prosecute those who perpetrated violence during this time. It's a time to move forward. Peace! Reconciliation!” To him, the only hope to heal the wounds of violence and trauma, and for the country to move on, forgiveness and forgetting were important. That to me was easily said than done. Those who bore the brunt of the violence and still traumatized would have a different story to tell. But I think it was a good call for healing and reconciliation. This is taking a religious perspective to violence as opposed to the earlier perspective which was more political and economic.

Another counter-narrative tried to blame the church for not taking a stand during the elections which caused the violence - the blame-game again. One lady whose husband was killed during

the violence in Molo said, “The church has failed completely. It has done nothing. Why does the church not stand up?” Yes, she had the right to blame the church, but my question is; who is the church? The church is the body of believers and for that reason, if the church failed to make its stand during the elections, then each one of us who call ourselves Christians are the ones who failed. I belief for healing and reconciliation to take place, the blame-game should stop and people begin addressing the issues of moving forward and forgiving one another. Many people kept on pushing the blame-game even in the workshops – blaming the electoral process, the courts, the church, the opposition, and the government – thus taking a religious, judicial and political slant to the violence. I must admit that when people were expressing their opinions on these matters, their emotions were very high and charged. One businessman (Moses) from Eldoret stood up and asked this question and went ahead to make the some statements in one of our sessions: “Why are we forgotten? The electoral process must be fixed. The courts are corrupt. The church is silent. The church is partisan. It’s the opposition. It’s the government.” Those were highly emotional statements. And I could tell that Moses was in trauma and bitter. Counseling services have been desperately needed for the affected victims either directly or indirectly. People like Moses had suffered physical and emotional wounds that will take long to heal unless urgent counseling services are offered to them. The only solution is for those who caused the violence to ask for forgiveness and compensate those who suffered and similarly the affected to forgive them so that they could pick up their lives once more and continue to co-exist. Without forgiveness, the trauma wounds would take long to heal – that’s my appeal.

All the stories covered in this section indicate the social and economic pain the victims suffered during the December 2007 disputed presidential election results. Most of the storytellers were traumatized by the events of the violence. The master narrative - the disputed presidential election results as the cause of the violence carried the day. The counter-narratives were attempts to bring about healing, reconciliation and peace – but it was like the storytellers wanted the core matters of the violence be dwelt with first. However, a state of hope and calm emerged when the two political principals in the dispute – the president and the prime minister agreed to share political power. That is when sanity was restored and violence stopped. But those who bore the brunt of the violence – mostly women and children continue to suffer in the internally displaced peoples’ (IDP) camps.

4.0 BRIEF DISCUSSION

It is important to remember that the December 2007 disputed presidential election results culminating in the immediate swearing in of the incumbent president as head of state sparked the violence country-wide. Over 1000 people were killed in the post-election violence and another 300,000 internally displaced – majority being women and children. Many people lost properties, businesses, and loved ones. It is the common man who suffered fighting to have the politician secure his or her political power. A majority of those who suffered as the stories in this paper show came from poor backgrounds. There was no testimony or story of a rich man or women who suffered. It is the businesses and families of the poor that suffered.

Some of the key questions that were raised were: why are we forgotten? Why were our votes stolen? Why did the Chairman of the Electoral Commission of Kenya announce flawed presidential election results? Why was the church silent? How can we cultivate a culture of peace

after all these traumatic experiences? Why did they kill my whole family? Why is the government doing nothing to help us move out of the IDP camps? How are the traumatized victims assisted? These questions call for serious study of the causes of violence in Kenya. Apart from the flawed presidential election results, there seemed to have been other deep underlying issues that people were waiting to get something to spark them. One of those issues I identified in my literature review is land. Violence was rampant and severe in the rich agricultural region of the Rift Valley. This is an area where different ethnic groups have settled since the British colonizers left after independence in 1963. But there are ethnic groups who claim that those lands belong to them. The land issues need to be addressed first. The country seemed to be polarized along ethnic lines – which to me, is a big deterrent for development. Politically, people need to be educated on their political rights and not be misused by politicians for their own advantage. I call for a more comprehensive study of the causes of violence in Kenya and deliberate attempt to assist those who were traumatized by the violence be made. Otherwise, it is just a matter of time for another event to trigger similar feelings/emotions and people go at each other again. But the voices of the people have spoken loud and clear. The government, the judicial system, the church and the Electoral Commission of Kenya should address the issues raised by these traumatized and overwhelmed bodies.

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