

A Summation of the *Kenyan Politics: The 2007 Election and Its Aftermath* Forum

By Jessica Ann Mitchell

On February 8, 2008, the African Initiative, African Student's Union, and Pan-African Community of Central New York collaboratively presented a forum on *Kenyan Politics: The 2007 Election and Its Aftermath*. Since the end of December 2007, Kenya has been under a world wide microscope. There were reports that stated in bold letters, “**VIOLENCE IN KENYA, ETHNIC CLEANSING IN KENYA, FAULTY POLLS IN KENYA.**” If one depended solely on the western media to gain knowledge of the situation, one would think that Kenya's current situation was an all of a sudden occurrence. Furthermore, the western media has turned Kenya's problems into another example of how ignorant, primitive, and evil Africans are. Thank fully, the three groups priorly mentioned felt it necessary to call into the picture true understanding of Kenya's current situation.

Dr. Micere Mugo, was the first speaker of the day. Her role served a very important purpose in that she outlined Kenya's historical past in order to show a relationship between the past and the present. Among her first statements, Dr. Mugo recalled the 1884-1885 Berlin Conference at which Africa was carved up by European imperialist powers. She went on to state that these false borders have inspired an emphasis on differences. Thus, we must learn to defy these borders. She warned, “Until we address imperialism, we have not really addressed the root of the problem in Kenya.” Dr. Mugo then recalled the efforts of Kwame Nkrumah to unite Africa despite of these false borders. Nkrumah believed that the freedom of Africa depended on the unification of Africa. Thus, Dr. Mugo asserts that the reason why Africa is having some of the problems it is having today is because African leaders did not remap Africa. They never made a united Africa like Nkrumah suggested. In addition to a physical remapping Africa by African people, there also needs to be a mental remapping. Dr. Mugo recalled the words of Aime Cesaire, a leading figure of the Negritude Movement, who believed that their needs to be a psychological remapping of those who were colonized. This means that their minds need to undergo a change in which mental liberation from the psychological enslavement which colonialism placed on their minds is obtained.

Dr. Mugo recalled that during colonialism, the practice of divide and rule was used against Africans. She also noted the horrendous measures taken place against Africans in Kenya when they fought for their liberation during the Mau Mau revolt. This included the concentration camps in which thousands of Kenyans were placed. She also recalled witnessing Africans being shot down in the streets.

In 1963, Kenya finally became independent. According to Dr. Mugo, Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first president, never succeeded in building a nation because he promoted ethnicity differences. He also supported a group of capitalist elites who were his cronies. Many were also members of his ethnic group. Thus, Kenya continued to maintain a capitalistic environment. Dr. Mugo further notes that Kenyatta put Daniel arap Moi in place to be his successor. It was under his presidency that Dr. Mugo refers to, “The time that capitalism went mad.” Moi was an advocate of capitalism. Instead of bringing prosperity to Kenya, impoverishment flourished during his presidency. Thus, Moi imposed a repression of intellectuals and artists in order to prevent them from speaking out against his presidency. Intellectuals and artists were jailed, exiled, and tortured including Dr. Micere Mugo herself. In 1994-1998, there was also an attempted ethnic cleansing of Kikuyus and Luos from the Rift Valley.

In the conclusion on her speech, Dr. Mugo expressed serious concerns about both sides. It is her belief that both sides are guilty. They both are capitalists that fatten their pockets by allotting an access of money to their own salaries in the mist of a troubled society. They also both participated in a division of powership that was never sanctioned by the people of Kenya.

Father Cleophas Oseso, of Holy Family Church, spoke of the immediate actions taken both government and Kenyans after the announcement of the voting results. He recalled how almost

immediately after the announcement road blocks were set up in which one had to identify themselves. Father Cleophas Oseso, who was in Kenya at the time, encountered 30 to 40 different road blocks. All of which refusing to let him pass. They even refused to be bribed by him. He was only able to return home after a man secretly gave directions to an alternative route with no road blocks. Father Oseso also recalled the heightened tensions between different ethnic groups in Kenya, especially between the Kissi, Luo, and Kikuyu. He also noted that people are very skeptical about having the issue resolved in the courts because prior to elections Kibaki appointed 4 new judges.

In conclusion, Father Oseso ended with an African proverb that speaks to the problems that occur when trying to resolve an issue through violence. “To end a conflict one does not bring a knife that cuts but rather an eagle that soars.”

Professor Faith Maina Gichane, of the School of Education at SUNY Oswego was the third speaker. Professor Gichane, in her speech, gave an overview of the two political parties involved. She also provided an explanation for how the voting was rigged. The Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) is the party of Raila Odinga. While, Odinga challenges the re-election of Kibaki, his party also participated in the rigging of votes. The spread anti-Kikuyu sentiments was the overall tone of their campaign. The Kikuyu were villainized as an “enemy to be vanished.” The Kikuyu were portrayed as selfish bigots. The lies and propaganda, spread by the ODM, included a campaign call to eliminate slum dwellers. There was also a call for wealth distribution. Professor Gichane stated that the ODM elevated emotions and ethnic tensions. Opponents were discredited in order to create an illusion of winning. PNU agents were rejected at polling areas within ODM strongholds. It is very apparent that voting was rigged by the ODM because in some areas there was a 115% voter turn out. Thus, there was cheating on both sides. In the conclusion of her presentation, Professor Gichane asks: Should there be a repeat election? Power Share? Truth and Reconciliation Commission? Redistribution of Wealth? What do you think?

Professor Charles Onyango Oduke, of the Philosophy Dept. of Le Moyne College, was the fourth speaker. He asserted that the violence erupting in Kenya is a revolt. The people grew tired of a dominant minority against 42 other ethnic groups in Kenya. Professor Oduke explained that humans are symbolic animals. He stated, “Symbols speak more to us than words. The vote was a symbol of fairness, equality...” In order to secure this fairness, there were some people advocating for changes in the Kenyan Constitution. They wanted to put a mechanism in place to settle voting disputes over a 2 to 3 week period. After this period of time, the winning candidate would be sworn in as president. This would prevent events like swearing in a president only 20 mins after the first voting results were first publicly announced, which is what happened in Kenya on December 30, 2007.

Dr. Horace Campbell, of the departments of Political Science and African American Studies at Syracuse University, was the fifth speaker and also served as the moderator of the forum. Dr. Campbell was in Kenya at the time of the electoral voting as an observer. Dr. Campbell exclaimed that Kenya has shown that Western Liberal forms of democracy cannot work for Africa. He referred to the Goldenberg scandal during which billions of dollars were stolen by the Kenyan government under the Daniel arap Moi presidency. Dr. Campbell also talked specifically of the Kamukunji constituency located in Nairobi, Kenya. In Kamukunji is place embedded in absolute poverty with raw sewage running in the streets. He focused on the humanity of the situation and the people. He stated that all the women in Kamukunji want is to feel safe, have health facilities, and clean water.

Afterwards, members of the audience spoke and expressed their concerns, many of them being Kenyans themselves. One audience member stated, “It means nothing to me to be a Kenyan.” These words were stated to acknowledge the false borders set up by the 1884-1885 Berlin Conference. This particular audience member believed that Kenyan is an artificial description in the first place and that ethnic differences must not be put to the wayside in order to uphold artificialness. Another audience member agreed, but she added that with this embrace of ethnicity must come an understanding and acceptance of other ethnic groups. Panel members responded by stating that acknowledging one's self

as a Kenyan promotes solidarity and the ability to live and work together for the betterment of everyone's lives. One audience member wanted to stress the importance of recognizing that neither presidential candidate was concerned about the welfare of the masses. To express his point, he used a African proverb spoken by the elders, “ When 2 Elephants Fight, The Grass Suffers.”

The forum on *Kenyan Politics: The 2007 Election and Its Aftermath*, lasted from 2:30 pm until 6:00pm with a reception afterwards. The forum proved to be informative and truthful about the happenings in Kenya. It promoted dialogue amongst the Pan-African community and allowed for feelings and thoughts to be expressed from all perspectives. The forum promoted overall understanding; it is from this understanding that Africans on the continent and throughout the Diaspora will hopefully solve problems through solidarity.