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You And Your Neighbour

Preface

‘Whispers,’ the late Wahome Mutahi as we used to call him or rather he called himself, had the gift to translate a complex subject and create a humorous scenario that would make the reader to understand it very clearly that he or she can narrate it to other people without distorting the message therein.

The scenarios created in this book are what we experience in our everyday life. Relatives and neighbours are still fighting one another over land inheritance and boundaries. Land grabbing happens always and the citizens seem helpless because it is done with impunity. In politics we do not tolerate other peoples’ opinions even when they are members of our political party. In our religious and other civil society institutions, we are divided along ethnic and political lines. We are divided between personalities rather than issues and policies. Women are still being degraded and considered as lesser beings. Our traditions, despite many years of development and human rights promotion still look down on them. Our obligation to be mindful of other peoples’ welfare and thus confirm to be our sister’s or brother’s keeper does not hold any more.

The book is speaking to us today and the points for discussions are varied as they were then. As the reader will observe the issues we discussed in 1997 and 1998 are still alive ten years later. We have not edited these stories lest we distort the message that ‘whispers’ wanted to pass to the Kenyans and exhort them to peacefully coexist.

Though our general elections have always been characterised by ethnic clashes we had considered ourselves to have matured democratically and therefore never expected any clashes in 2007.

The 2005 referendum had made us feel that we could conclude an election with a crisis like what was witnessed after the announcement of the results of the 2007 Presidential elections. Since as different communities we had a clashes free referendum we assumed that we could experience the same in the 2007 General Elections.

We even reasoned that our communities have now been moulded into one state. We thought we had buried ethnic (tribal) feelings and prejudices but this was only wishful thinking. The Ndun'gu inquiry and the New Land Policy initiatives had given us some hope. However it seemed no action was being taken..

We had thought that we had become cohesive although we knew very well that tribalism was still being practiced even in sacred places. Since there is some intermarriage and we may have participated in some socio-cultural and development activities we thought we had become good neighbours. Nepotism is the rule of the day. Some people felt that their children and relatives were better than the others.

These scenarios shall assist us to revisit our values and virtues as a nation, if we have any! Let us remember that our patriotism is proven by our love for our country and one another. It is high time we practiced the golden rule: Do unto others what you would want then to do unto you.

The Ecumenical Centre for justice and Peace believes that the core of civil society is peaceful coexistence. It believes that the much more important question is not 'Who is my neighbour?' but 'Where is my neighbour?'

This manual is an effort to prompt discussion on the issues of conflict resolution and agreement. The book is dedicated to all those who believe that “Blessed are the peace makers.....”

We would like to express gratitude to the researchers of this manual and the late Wahome Mutahi in particular for his efforts to compile this work; the participants of our civic education workshops where ideas for this book were discussed for the first time; Hanns Siedel Foundation for sponsoring the workshops and printing the book.

Rev. Jephthah K. Gathaka
Executive Director
Ecumenical Centre for Justice and Peace (ECJP)

Is Blood Thicker Than Water?

The neighbours had gathered and were watching from a distance. Some of them were holding their breath as Chetu chopped down the tree. Every time he struck the tree with the axe, he looked up at the tree as if he was saying a prayer. Members of his family stood a short distance away.

His brother ‘Yangu’ was watching from across the fence, his face full of anger. With him were the immediate members of his family. They, too, were looking at the tree Chetu was cutting anxiously.

It was as if the members of the two families were watching a battle scene and were ready to join in at any time.

The area assistant chief was also there, dressed in his full uniform and watching the scene with keen interest. Chetu continued to chop the tree and when it fell, it was met with two different reactions. Chetu and his family sighed with relief while Yangu and members of his family frowned.

Yangu shouted, “The tree’s branches have touched my fence! I must be compensated for the loss. This is a violation of my land. It has happened before and I am not going to allow it again.”

The assistant chief joined members of the two families who were now gathered near the head of the tree. “Peace, peace” he said, trying to calm those present. “You Chetu and Yangu are brothers and that is one reason why you should not fight over a trivial matter.”

“It is not a trivial matter,” protested Yangu. “His tree has fallen on my fence. This is yet another provocation. For how long shall I suffer in the hands of my brother? First, he takes the best part of the land and then he provokes me all the time.



I will not let him get away with this today.”

Chetu responded, “Bwana assistant chief, I did not give myself the part of the land which has arrow roots, the one that my brother imagines is the best. It was apportioned to me by the elders of the clan.”

“Whom you bribed!” protested Chetu.

The assistant chief responded, “You people really surprise me. This matter was settled long ago and yet you still fight so much that one brother cannot cut down a tree near the fence without the whole village coming here to witness what could turn out to be war.”

Choyo, Yangu’s wife said, “It is all the fault of the clan elders. Why did they have to give the Chetu family all the portion that has arrow roots. Who said that our family does not have teeth to eat arrow roots?

“But the strip that has arrow roots is so small that it was not enough for two families. When the clan cast a vote, it went to the Chetu family, “ said the chief.

“Even members of the neighbouring clan who were witnesses agreed with that decision,” said Chetu.

Yangu protested, “That clan, too, was in your pocket. If any one of them dares come in to this compound of mine, I shall cut them down like stalks of sisal. Who do they think they are to interfere with our land. Who does not know that their rich sons are making the members of our clan poor by buying out all the land that is available?”

Mrs Chetu came in and said, “Those who are selling the land are not being forced to. Those who are buying are simply coming in and buying what is being offered for sale.”

Chochea, a neighbour interjected. “I disagree, If those who have money did not tempt those who have land, they would have no land to buy. That is why our land is also going to foreigners!”

“Foreigners?” Asked the chief”

“Yes, foreigners,” said Chochea, with confidence. “People who are not members of our tribe leave alone our clan. Haven’t we seen them come and buy out our land and leave us landless. Bwana assistant chief, why do you and your land board allow that?”

The assistant chief replied without hesitation. “Because it is a case of willing seller and willing buyer. If you wish to sell me that shirt of yours and I have money, there is nothing wrong with that.”

“I disagree,” said Chochea, “Why can’t those foreigners buy land where they come from? Why must they come here?”

“Because they are not foreigners. They are Kenyans. You, too, can buy land where they come from because you too are a Kenyan,” said Chetu.

Yangu who was still looking very aggrieved said, “You

people want me to forget that Chetu's tree has fallen on my fence. You want me to forget about it the way you also wish me and my school committee to forget that the school playing field has been grabbed by one of our leaders."

"Could he be the same one who grabbed the road leading to our church?" Enquired Mama Birika while looking at the assistant chief.

The assistant chief responded, "Those two pieces of land were not grabbed. They were legally given to the man you are talking about. He has all the necessary documents for them."

"It does not matter," protested Chetu. "Whether he has papers or not it does not matter. What matters is that the plots belong to the public. They are meant for public use and an individual has no business taking them."

The assistant chief spoke with authority and said "We are tired of this bickering between Chetu and his brother Yangu. I would suggest that their clan settle this matter once and for all."

"I shall hear nothing of it!" asserted Yangu with anger. "All those elders are corrupt. This matter will have to be settled in court. My family must have its share of arrowroots. "

"You may go to court if you wish Yangu," said the assistant chief, "but for now, I would like to see you and your brother in my office to settle the matter of this tree." The crowd dispersed as the two brothers followed the chief.

CONSIDER

1. Cite other examples in which close members of a family have become hostile to each other in your area. What are the other causes of hostilities apart from land disputes?

2. From the story, what do you gather to be avenues for reconciliation between hostile parties?
3. After reading the story, why do you think that some of the known methods of reconciliation fail?
4. From the example of Chetu and Yangu, what do you think is the result of their hostilities to relations between members of the same clan, different clans and to their region?
5. The system of willing seller, willing buyer gives the tribes and individuals who are economically better to exploit the poor. Do you agree? Give your reasons.
6. Why do you think there are increasing incidents of land grabbing and what could be done?
7. What effects do you think land grabbing has on peace?

Why all this bad news?

Baba Gazeti was driving to work as Mama Gazeti read the daily newspaper. Dada Maarifa, their neighbour, was sitting behind lost in her own thoughts.

Mama Gazeti threw the newspaper on the dashboard in anger and said, “I will stop reading newspapers. They have nothing else to do except to make us angry.

“What is it that the newspaper has that has annoyed you so much?” enquired Baba Gazeti.

“Everything as usual,” said Mama Gazeti. “It is the usual of robberies, beating their wives, politicians insulting each other, people being reminded that they come from different tribes...”

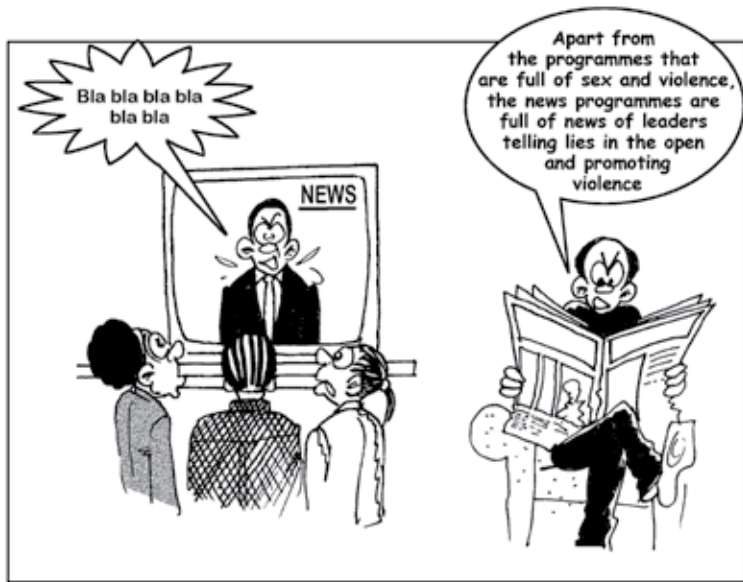
“I hope there are no such news, in my favourite sports pages,” said Baba Gazeti trying to move his wife away from the subject.

“Even there we are not spared,” said Mama Gazeti in disgust.

“There we have enough stories and pictures of football riots over the weekend. One referee broke his leg.”

Dada Maarifa said, “We cannot blame newspapers for reporting what happened. It is just that we are living in a country where those things are happening. Even if the newspapers or us pretended that those things have not happened, there would be no difference. Things would continue as they are.”

“I agree,” said Baba Gazeti. “However, I am concerned about our children watching TV. Apart from the programmes that are full of sex and violence, the news programmes are full of news of leaders telling lies in the open and promoting violence.”



“Any parent would be concerned” said, Mama Gazeti. “Our children are indeed picking bad models from those leaders.”

Dada Maarifa clicked her tongue in annoyance and then said, “I think some of those bad incidents reported in the newspapers are as a result of the words and actions of leaders. How can you tell your children not to riot in schools when adults are seen on television throwing stones during political meetings. We cannot drink wine in public and ask our children to drink water.”

Mama Gazeti shook her head and retorted, “Since we cannot keep our children away from newspapers and radios, that is why these incidents should not be reported. We should keep them away from bad examples.”

“Allow me to disagree,” said Baba Gazeti, “The problem does not lie with the messengers who bring us bad news. It lies with those who do what the messenger reports. We have to look for solutions to these problems”

“As I have already said, violence, disagreements and generally lack of peace in this country is caused by leaders. If they could preach peace, there would be peace,” said Dada Maarifa.

“Mama watoto, you are now going to tell me that the next time we quarrel we should blame our chief or our D.O,” said Baba Gazeti. They all burst out in laughter.

Mama Gazeti was the first to speak and said, “My point is that those who are in leadership at all levels should set examples be it in home, churches, offices and so on. Once they do so, that is a big step towards stopping what we are seeing in the country at present.”

Baba Gazeti responded, “That is easier said than done because the mzee in the house traditionally does not want to listen to the wife. In the offices, the boss is the boss so he has to harass. In the location, the chief is the chief so he has to use his authority. So on and so on until we have come to believe that some tribes must sit on others because they are bigger, better economically or have produced more national leaders than others.”

“Finally,” said Dada Maarifa in desperation, “it becomes the survival for the fittest”.

As she was saying so, a Matatu swerved dangerously in front of Baba Gazeti’s car and its driver made an angry gesture while shouting obscenities.

“See, mama,” said Baba Gazeti, “even if you don’t read newspapers, you will still encounter incidents of violence. Now, what did I do to make that fellow drive the way he did?”

Dada Maarifa replied, “He just wants to relieve his tensions. Matatu people have tensions because of their hard work. Finally, they have to relieve it on someone else. You just happened to be near.”

“What will the world become if we all make a habit of relieving our tensions on other people. The world will become uninhabitable,” said Mama Gazeti.

“I could not agree with you more. It is quite true but at the same time, I am surprised that even educated people relieve their tensions by engaging themselves in such criminal activities as mob justice,” said Baba Gazeti.

Dada Maarifa reacted by saying, “In some cases, it is not tensions in individual that leads them to what you call mob justice. I call it mob injustice although it is caused by frustrations. People are so frustrated by the police failure in arresting criminals that they turn to violence.”

“There are reports of it in the newspaper today. There is even a picture of a young boy who was burned with a tyre on suspicion of theft,” reported Mama Gazeti. She continued, “Personally, I see no difference between what Dada Maarifa calls mob injustice and police injustice. I mean, what do you call an incident in which the police kills a suspect?”

Baba Gazeti said, “I disagree with taking life under any circumstances. I am not a person who goes by the belief that an eye for an eye.

“How then do we control crime?” asked his wife

Dada Maarifa responded, “One way is to reduce poverty in the country. So long as the gap between the rich and the poor remains big, there will be crime.

At that point, they came to a traffic jam and a parking boy extended his dirty hand towards the car.

“See what I mean?” asked Maarifa as she gestured towards the parking boy.

CONSIDER

1. After reading the story, name some causes of violence in the country. What other causes can you name from your own experience?
2. We should not blame those who cause violence. We should blame the causes that make people violent. Do you agree? Give your reasons
4. What do you think is the role of role models? How do you think they have succeeded in providing examples and what are the effects of their behaviour in society?
5. Peace begins at home. Discuss this in relation to peace and reconciliation in such places as the home, church, co-operative society and such other organisations.
6. Examine the traditional set up of your community. Propose ways of bringing up the young in it which could be used today to counter such influences as the violence portrayed on television
7. Life today is full of tensions that could cause violence. What are some of the causes of those tensions and how could they be defused?

What is your tribe?

John Kabila looked behind his back for the second time. He then looked right and left. After that he said, almost in a whisper, to his friend Dada Siri across the table in the hotel where they were, “Walls have ears you know. One must be careful when speaking”.

Dada Siri looked at him in disbelief and said, “You are not telling me anything against the law. We are just discussing things about our country. The police surely cannot be bothered by what we are saying.”

“The police may not be here but what we are saying could reach them second hand through other people and that is what I am scared of” said Bwana Kabila still speaking in a low volume.

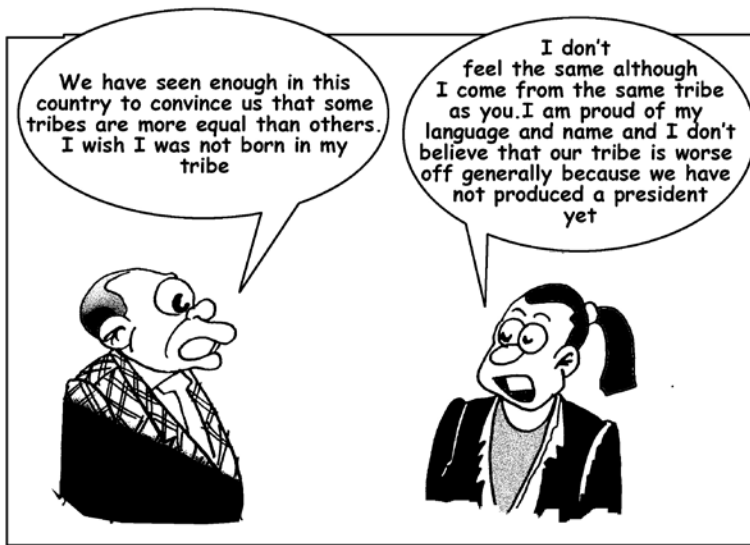
“I don’t understand you,” said Dada Siri. “I still don’t understand the source of your fears.”

Bwana Kabila was quick to respond and said. “It is just that you cannot afford to say certain things when members of some tribes are near. You just cannot trust them. They think that they own the Government.”

Dada Siri laughed and then said, “I did not know that even people like you who are learned and have lived in the city for so long think like that. Really, why would you fear a person from another tribe? I thought we were all Kenyans!”

Bwana Kabila responded angrily, “We were Kenyans some time back but today we are just tribes whether you like it or not. Some three years ago, I was a Kenyan but now I belong to a tribe.”

“Surely you cannot change that fast,” protested Dada Siri. “Things don’t happen that way.”



“You talk as if you don’t live in Kenya,” responded Bwana Kabila. “It is not as if you have not been listening to what politicians have been saying. They have been threatening members of certain tribes with violence if they dare visit leave alone live in certain areas.”

“That is mere political talk,” cut in Dada Siri, “Politicians can say anything.”

“What do you mean? They have not been just talking. Don’t you know that some people have actually been killed in the past because of that political talk? Is it not true that some Kenyans were turned into refugees just because they belong to some tribes. Members of my tribe were victims.”

Dada Siri nodded and said, “It is true that is what happened but is it good enough reason for you to start thinking in terms of tribe. You will be behaving like one of those politicians who spread messages of war if you do so!”

Bwana Kabila protested, “Do I have a choice? I have been forced to be suspicious of people from certain tribes

because members of my tribe have been victimised. I am sure other people feel the same particularly of those tribes who are being told that they will be victimised because they support certain parties.”

At that moment, Binti Taifa entered the hotel. She was a good friend of Dada Siri and immediately joined the two. The moment she was introduced, Bwana Kabila excused himself to leave although he had not finished his meal.

Dada Siri immediately realised what the problem was and said, “Bwana Kabila, you have no reason to fear Binti Taifa here. She is a trusted friend although she is not from our tribe.”

Binti Taifa thought that she had intruded into a private conversation and said she would leave the two to go on with their business.

“No, no!” protested Dada Siri, “You don’t have to sit elsewhere. As a matter of fact it is good that you are here.” She then looked at Bwana Kabila who by then looked embarrassed. She sought to reassure him and said, “Dada Taifa here does not belong to any tribe!”

Bwana Kabila looked baffled and asked, “What do you mean?”

“Exactly that!” replied Dada Siri, “Okay, she was born at a certain place and has a name which says she belongs to a certain tribe but she does not belong to a tribe. She is just like me.”

Both Dada Siri and Binti Siri laughed but Bwana Kabila was not amused. He said, “It is not a secret that people from Binti Taifa’s tribe are ruling today and they think that the country belongs to them. It is not a secret that they are eating and would like to eat for ever.”

Binti Taifa reacted immediately and said, “Who? Do I

look as if I have been eating? Look, I am just a mere clerk and I live on what I earn. It is barely enough to see me through the month. You might even be better off than I am.”

Bwana Kabila replied,, “Alright, you may not have eaten but members of your tribe have been eating. Perhaps your chance has not come.”

“Nonsense!” protested Binti Taifa - “That is the talk of the country but it is a lie. I agree that there are some people who have enriched themselves because our man is in power. But to say that a whole tribe has eaten is the biggest lie that I have heard in this country.”

Dada Siri laughed and then said. “Some members of other tribes are saying that it is time they also ate. They are saying that the big seat in state house should move from tribe to tribe.”

“I agree,” said Bwana Kabila. “That is how things should be. Unfortunately some of us were born in the wrong tribe.”

Binti Taifa disagreed and said, “That is not true. There is no wrong tribe. At the same time, no one chooses to be born in a certain tribe. We have to be born somewhere and there is nothing we can do about it.”

“I don’t think so,” said Bwana Kabila. “We have seen enough in this country to convince us that some tribes are more equal than others. I wish I was not born in my tribe.”

Dada Siri responded,, “I don’t feel the same although I come from the same tribe as you. I am proud of my language and name and I don’t believe that our tribe is worse off generally because we have not produced a president yet.”

Bwana Kabila reacted, “But just before Binti Taifa came we were in agreement that there have been tribal clashes in this country. We agreed that politicians have been war mongering against certain tribes. It certainly makes me feel hunted and

suspicious of members of some tribes.”

“I was not part of your earlier discussion,” cut in Binti Taifa, “however, I agree with Bwana Kabila on that. Politicians have divided us on tribes. They have made us aware of our differences where there have been none.”

“Whether it is the work of politicians or not,” replied Bwana Kabila, “I just can’t trust some members of certain tribes. They themselves don’t trust us. Why should I trust them?”

There was a brief silence then Dada Siri said, “That is unfortunate but I will say this. I will say that the problem will end one day.”

“Quite true. Quite true,” agreed Binti Taifa.

“When Jesus Christ comes back to earth,” said Bwana Kabila cynically.

Dada Siri responded, “Not that long although it is not something that can be done overnight. It will happen when those who get into positions of power understand that they are not justified to favour their relatives and members of their tribes.”

“So you agree with me that the whole problem has been brought about by this business of ‘eating’ and therefore that people are being isolated in terms of tribe by those who want to ‘eat?’” said Bwana Kabila enthusiastically.

“It is so,” agreed Binti Taifa. “It all has to do with sharing the national cake. It is all a matter of the stomach. It is not a matter of you being born on the slopes of the mountain and me being born in the desert.”

Dada Siri spoke and said, “It is not unique to us. It has happened elsewhere with dire consequences in Rwanda for instance.”

“But that was a case of short people cutting up tall people,” pointed out Bwana Kabila.

Dada Siri and Binti Taifa laughed then the latter said, "It was nothing like that. It was all a matter of the national cake and God help us that we don't get there." "You mean we can get there?" asked Bwana Kabila in horror.

"Yes we can!" responded Binti Taifa, "If we don't heal the divisions early enough."

"God help us!" said Bwana Kabila still horrified. "Before we ask Him for help, let us help ourselves by fighting the forces that divide us," said Binti Taifa as she picked up her bag about to leave. The other two rose each lost in thoughts about what they had been discussing.

CONSIDER

1. Have you ever felt like Bwana Kabila? If so why? If no, why?
2. What effects do you think there are to the nation when people behave like Bwana Kabila?
3. Describe the word "tribe" in your dialect
4. There is nothing wrong in being born in a certain tribe. Do you agree? Give your reasons.
5. Do you think that there is a difference in being proud of one's tribe and being a tribalist? Give your reasons.
6. From the story, what do you think are the causes of tribalism?
7. Name five ways in which tribalism could be eliminated in Kenya.
8. What are the similarities if any, between racism and tribalism? What are the differences?
9. Discuss ways in which different "tribes" can form a nation/state with no tribal biases.

Which is your faction?

The small market of Vita was full of talk about the events of the day. The topic of the day were events at the local church in the morning and it was occupying the discussion at Bwana Porojo's tea kiosk.

“Can any one imagine,” said Bwana Porojo with concern, “that a real pastor could carry a club in his cassock and dare use it on his rival?”

“But it happened,” said Mama Kanisa who was sitting with Bwana Roho and Kijana Mfuasi at one of the tables. “We saw with our own eyes one pastor hit another one with a club. Two old men then went into full war.”

“And the followers of the two camps supporting the rival pastors? Stones came from nowhere and two armies of the lord went into war,” said Bwana Roho. Then he looked at Kijana Mfuasi and asked him, “On which side were you? On the side of Pastor Mambavu or Pastor Hasira?”

Before Kijana Mfuasi could reply, Bwana Porojo said with a laugh, “On which other side than that of Pastor Hasira? Don't they belong to the same clan and political party?”

Kijana Mfuasi came to his own defence and said, “It is impossible not to take sides in these matters. In any case when you see stone fly, you have to take a stand.”

“A stone missed me by inches although I support neither camp,” said Mama Kanisa. “How can they say that they are fighting on behalf of God?”

“Tell me another,” said Bwana Roho. “It is just that both want to lead in the name of God. Pastor Mambavu thinks that he is the right leader of our church because he is older than

Pastor Hasira.”

“It is more than a matter of age difference,” said Bwana Porojo as he poured out another cup of tea for Mama Kanisa. “It is hunger for power.”

“And for what the congregation contributes on Sundays,” added Bwana Roho with a laugh.

Kijana Mfuasi who was also the youth leader of a political party in the area said, “Bwana Hasira is the right person whatever you say. Even our political party supports him.”

“For their own reason,” cut in Mama Roho. “He comes from an influential clan that influences voters in his area.”

“Can’t they discuss the matter instead of encouraging the throwing of stones after all they are for the same God” asked Bwana Roho.

Bwana Porojo responded, “Haven’t they tried that before with the bishop chairing the talks. They have failed.”

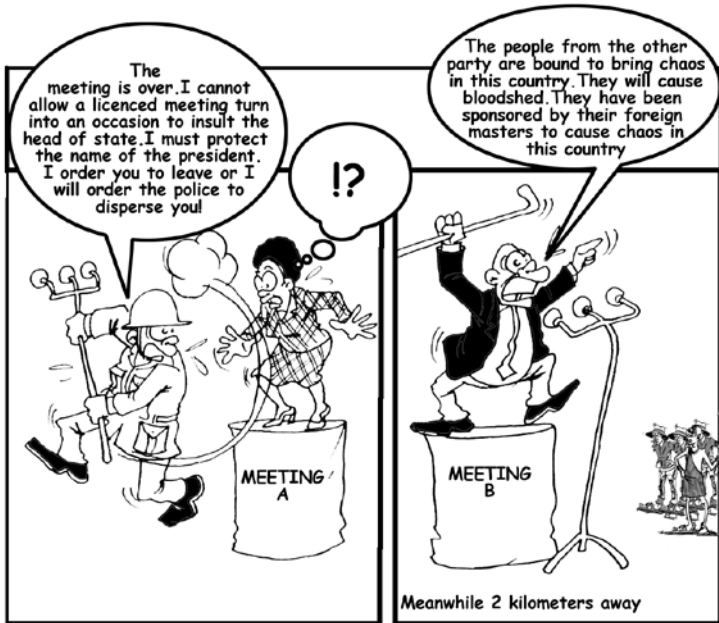
“For a simple reason,” said Mama Kanisa. “The bishop is biased. He supports Mambavu because they are of the same age.”

“It is true,” said Kijana Mfuasi. “The last time we tried to meet him as a delegation, he called us a mob and refused to listen to us. This is why this battle will be decided with stones.”

“The chief has locked the church and so none of the two can claim it is theirs,” said Bwana Porojo.

“But that does not solve the problem,” said Bwana Roho. “It will not be solved before the matter is resolved either through stones or talks. Come to think of it, they are not doing nothing unusual. They settled matters through fists in parliament the other day.”

“Oh yes,” enthused Kijana Mfuasi. “They thought it was a better way of reasoning because words had failed!”



Bwana Porojo replied, “It is not that words failed. It is that they have made it impossible for words to work. How can they make words work when they consider themselves enemies just because they belong to different parties.”

“There is nothing unusual there. Haven’t we been seeing even relatives refuse to speak to each other because they belong to different parties. Didn’t Mambo lose his lip to Ndomo’s mouth when they were arguing about their different parties just the other day?”

Mama Kanisa was lost in other thoughts and decided it was time to make them public. She said, “While we fight in our church, the members of the other sect fish in our basket. The very thought makes me shudder.”

Bwana Roho agreed and said. “And to think that their teachings will never take any soul to heaven certainly makes the devil celebrate. Ours is the true religion, or what do you think, Bwana Porojo?”

“I am not quite an expert on matters of hereafter but I think that sect has as much right to fish in what you call your basket. That is freedom. They have freedom to fish and the fish are free to enter in whatever net they choose,” replied Bwana Porojo.

“I hear that they worship the devil,” ventured Kijana Mfuasi.

“No wonder they drum at night” added Mama Kanisa. “God help that they don’t involve themselves in rituals that involve killing people.”

As the discussion was going on a political meeting was taking place in the neighbouring village of Funjo. Mama Kura was on the dais addressing the crowd.

“This Government must give an account of its actions for the last five years. We have seen corruption grow. We have seen unemployment grow. We have seen crime grow. The head of the Government who is the President is accountable for this. I beg all of you not to give him votes in the next elections. I ask you.”

At that moment, she was cut off by the District Officer, Bwana Tawala. He grabbed the microphone and announced, “The meeting is over. I cannot allow a licensed meeting turn into an occasion to insult the head of the state. I must protect the name of the President. I order you to leave or I will order the police to disperse you.”

There was shouting from the crowd as Mama Kura tried to talk to Bwana Tawala. “Bwana Tawala,” she protested, “This is a licensed meeting. I have done nothing wrong!

Bwana Tawala shouted back, “I have cancelled the meeting because you have insulted the President. How can you heap false accusations on him while I just listen. I can have you arrested for causing disaffection...”

“But Bwana Tawala! I was just speaking the truth...”

“Truth that is likely to cause disaffection!”

As the two were arguing, the police started dispersing the crowd.

Two kilometres away, another political meeting was going on. Bwana Mheshimiwa was speaking from a dais where there were also some administration officers.

“The people from the other party,,,” he said through the microphone, “are bound to bring chaos in this country. They will cause bloodshed. They have been sponsored by their foreign masters to cause chaos in this country.”

“That is why I urge all peace-loving people not to listen to them. They have nothing to offer except chaos. Look at their leader. He drinks from morning to evening. He is also a tribalist of the worst order...”

CONSIDER

1. From the story, what do you gather are the main causes of wrangles in churches and other associations? What are causes from your own experience?
2. After reading the story, why do you think reconciliation is sometimes difficult?
3. If you were told to reconcile the two fighting church groups in the story, what practical steps would you take?
4. What do you think has shaped the attitude of Mama Kanisa to the other sect?
5. Do you think Bwana Tawala is justified to stop the first political meeting? Give reasons for agreeing or disagreeing. Why do you think such things happen?
6. What do you understand by “constructive criticism”?
7. Why do you think the second political meeting was not stopped?

8. What do you think are the consequences of the utterances made at the second meeting and what is reported in the radio broadcast recorded above?
9. What can stop the kind of thing reported to have happened in parliament as reported in the story?
10. List possible causes and effects of intolerance as brought out in the story.

Your Brother's Keeper?

The Matatu travelling from Kangemi in Nairobi to town centre that morning was very crowded. It was steamy and music was blaring from two large speakers. It was impossible to be heard above the noise.

After a short while, a man who was holding a Bible managed to shout loud enough to be heard. He was one of the standing passengers and was demanding that the music be switched off .

He was joined by other speakers who were also demanding that the music be either stopped completely or be toned down. The protest of the passengers soon bore fruit and the matatu driver switched off the music while grumbling.

A short while later the man who was holding the Bible started preaching. He was shouting at the top of his voice, his neck muscles threatening to burst. He was promising everlasting fire to those who failed to repent instantly.

Soon there was grumbling in the matatu. Somebody out shouted the preacher and said that he was being a big nuisance as the music that had been put off.

“But he is preaching the word of God,” said another passenger. “Trying to stop him from preaching is going against the work of God and that is evil.”

Another passenger supported the first one and said, “Look here, suppose all the smokers in this matatu decided to smoke. All the non smokers would complain. This preacher is disturbing our peace the way smokers would if they decided to smoke.”

Yet another speaker spoke and said “If he does not shut up, I will start shouting the virtues of my political party at the top of my voice. I, too, have a right to shout if this man has the right to continue.”

The preacher kept quiet and soon only normal conversation could be heard in the matatu.

“You are stepping on me,” said one passenger to another. The other responded, “You are doing worse. You are leaning on my child. Why aren’t adults considerate about children in matatus.”

Three seats away from where the two passengers were, Ndugu Msafiri told Dada Mwenzake, “You hear people complaining about being stepped on and so on while it is they who choose to enter crowded matatus. If they didn’t do so, there would not be overcrowding in matatus.”

Dada Mwenzake replied, “It is all because of the problems of transport in this city. If there were more buses and matatus, we would not have to be carried like cabbages in these matatus.”

“I agree,” said Ndugu Msafiri, “however, we are also part of the problem. Because we agree to be carried this way, the matatu people feel encouraged to pack us in their vehicles until they almost burst. We have to learn to say no to this ...”

“You can say that because you are self-employed,” protested Dada Mwenzake. “Try to explain to your boss that you were late because you decided not to ride in a full matatu. You will be sacked.”

Ndugu Msafiri said he agreed with that statement and added, “We have to start somewhere. Just imagine if we had not protested against the music. It would still be assaulting our ears. We took action and so the music stopped. We have to

stop this overloading by refusing to get into full matatus when we can. We are the sufferers so we have to save ourselves.”

Dada Mwenzake said, “That is very true but how many people are willing to dare? I can bet you that at this moment, there are people who are suffering in a matatu with loud music because they are not bold enough to raise their voices against it.

“You are right,” responded Ndugu Msafiri, “we suffer in silence when...”

At that moment, the matatu was flagged down by the police and the tout shouted, “Every one standing down! Bend your heads so that the police don’t see you.” The standing passengers bent their heads as the tout went out to negotiate with the police.

Ndugu Msafiri whispered to Dada Mwenzake, “You see what I mean? We are like sheep. Even the man of the Bible has agreed to bend. Those who are supposed to lead us in saying no are the first to say yes.”

Dada Msafiri nodded her head in agreement and the matatu continued on its way to town centre. At Westlands, a passenger who wanted to alight said his pocket had been picked and so he could not raise his fare.

The conductor told the driver to keep the vehicle stationary until the man had paid. In the meantime, he was calling the passenger a con man and threatening him with dire consequences if he did not produce his money instantly.

The passenger soon turned his pockets inside out in desperation. Some passengers were now complaining that they were being delayed and demanding that the man pay up and stop wasting their time.

The conductor was also getting worked up and held the passenger by the scuff of his neck. He slapped him, threw

him out of the matatu warning him never to try his con tricks again.

As the matatu started off for town, some passengers were congratulating the conductor while others were condemning him. Dada Mwenzake said. “I can see your point better now. None of us raised a finger when that passenger was being molested when it was in our power to help. Even you who has been talking about such things.”

“I did not say that I am not part of the problem. I am indeed part of it because I am aware that I should do something but instead just watched. I am as guilty as the next person,” confessed Ndugu Msafiri.

The two got off the matatu when it came to its destination in town and they meandered round a huge garbage collection.

Dada Mwenzake held her nose as she spoke and said: “This city will sink under the weight of garbage one of these days. Why do we have councillors and a mayor for that matter if they cannot manage garbage collection in the city? This is a great shame. Remember we also pay service charge.”

“Why should we complain and we are the ones who elect the councillors? We are also the ones who pay the service charge without complaining,” replied Ndugu Msafiri.

“I think we have all given up because there is nothing we can do,” said Dada Mwenzake. “When they want our votes, they claim that they will not rest until the city is clean. Wait until they get into power and it is another story. As of service charge, there is nothing we can do but pay it.”

“Perhaps we elect the wrong people and after they get into power, we don’t ask them any questions,” responded Ndugu Msafiri. “We pretend that all is well when it is within our powers to demand action from them. For instance, what is so difficult in a delegation

going to a councillor and telling him in no uncertain terms that he will not get votes if garbage is not collected in his ward?”

“That is easier said than done,” replied Dada Mwenzake. “People say that they are too busy to chase a councillor who is also too busy to be found.”

“Unless we become less busy, we shall not get any action from the people in City Hall. We have to get busy with such actions as refusing to pay service charge. We have to say no...”

“Now you are becoming dangerous,” Dada Mwenzake protested. “That kind of talk comes out of mouths of politicians who don’t care about their utterances.”

“No! No!” Ndugu Msafiri protested in return. “It is a practical solution to a real problem. We stop paying service charge and some sense will get into the heads of those in City Hall. I mean if business people along this street refused to pay the charges until this road is repaired, there would be some action.”

“Perhaps,” said Dada Mwenzake

CONSIDER

1. If it does not affect me, then it does not matter. Is this a fair statement on the attitude of Kenyans when things go wrong? Explain your answer.
2. Give other examples where protest by the affected people would bring action as in the matatu.
3. Do you think the preacher was in his rights to preach in the matatu? Explain your answer
4. What does the fact of the preacher agreeing to bend when he should have led by refusing to do so say about opinion

leaders and role models in society? Give other examples of behaviour similar to that of the preacher.

5. Why do you think that Kenyans don't protest and don't take action when they should to demand for their rights?
6. Suggest organisations that could be formed by Kenyans to demand services where there are none and to better those that still exist. Suggest ways in which they could demand for those services.

The Lesser Beings?

As usual the group was gathered at teacher Odhiambo's kiosk to listen to the evening radio broadcast. The news that was on the air at that moment caught the attention of all.

The broadcaster was saying: "Angry villagers from Nyalenda sub-location in Kisumu town yesterday stripped naked five middle aged women accusing them of dressing indecently. The villagers accosted the mini-clad women, who were going to church, and demanded to know why they were dressed in a manner likely to attract rapists and also expose young girls to immorality."

Some of those gathered laughed then Msema Yote said, "They surely deserved it. It will teach them a lesson or two about dressing. If some of those women are allowed to dress the way they like, they will go naked one of these days."

"I agree totally," said Mama Leso. "They have no sense of shame. They wear skirts that are the size of thumbnails in broad day light and expect the world to clap."

"Nonsense," responded Ndugu Macho sounding annoyed. "Even if they went about dressed in nothing, what gives anybody a right to embarrass them? I mean, what right does anybody have to molest another just because they are dressed the way they are?"

"They were not molested. They were just disciplined. It is the duty of citizens to discipline others when they go wrong." Said Mama Leso.

Ndugu Macho replied, "Mama Leso, just put yourself in the position of those girls or even better, imagine that they were

your daughters. You certainly would not have said that if they were your daughters.”

Mama Leso kept quiet and then Msema Yote said, “I wonder what would happen if five men walked naked or half naked. Would they receive such treatment?”

“Certainly not! They would not be touched. Nobody touches men even when they err!” said Mama Leso.

“That is precisely the point!” responded Ndugu Macho. “Those girls were molested because they were not men.”

Mama Leso shook her head and said, “Why did I not think of it that way?”

“Because we assume many times that there is nothing wrong with assaulting women and abusing them. We beat them like drums just because...”

“What is wrong with beating your wife?” cut in Msema Yote. “It is part of African traditions to put some discipline in our women. They also don’t feel very loved when we deny them a slap here and there.”

“Nonsense,” protested Mama Leso. “There is no woman who enjoys being beaten up. Saying that women think being beaten is a sign of love is foolishness!”

“Just as it is foolishness to think of our daughters in terms of cows in the name of dowry,” added Ndugu Macho.

“Now you are going too far,” protested Msema Yote. “Whether you like it or not, we shall not give our daughters free of charge.”

“I agree with you,” said Mama Leso. “When I was married, my father got goats from the father of my husband. I and my husband must also get goats for our daughter. It is a matter of I give you and you give me.”

“I am not saying that giving dowry or taking it as such is

bad. What I am saying is that it is wrong to think of our daughter as goods to be sold in the market place,” responded Ndugu Macho.

Mama Leso said she agreed with that and added with a chuckle, “Like Baba Mlavi who demanded that he be paid a whole pick up for his daughter and she went only up to Form Two.”

The group laughed then Msema Yote said, “At least he is better than Mzee Moja who married off his underage daughter.”

“What could he have done?” asked Mama Leso. “He has ten children and his income as a watchman is small. At least he used the dowry he got to educate his three sons. The sons could not bring him dowry but now that they are being educated, they will help him when they get jobs.”

Ndugu Macho shook his head and said. “That is what many people think and that is why girls who should today be in school are just house girls. Why can’t parents educate girls and let the boys become house boys?”

“Impossible! Impossible!” Protested Msema Yote. “You educate girls and the next thing you know is that they are married! ‘You go ahead and educate your girls but for me, boys come first!’”

As they were talking Pastor Dada Kileo approached from a distance. Msema Yote said in a low voice, “That is the one who has made us stop going to church. How dare they ordain a woman priest? Women never came near sacrifices to our God before the white man came.”

When Pastor Dada Kileo entered, they changed the topic.

CONSIDER

1. Give other examples of how women are treated like the five girls in the story.
2. Do you agree that it is right to “discipline” such women?
3. Do you think that rape is caused by scantily dressed women? Explain why cases of rape happen and the steps that should be taken to reduce them.
4. Give causes of wife beating and how to cure it.
5. ‘Dowry is a an evil.’ Discuss and explain your answer.
6. What makes parents favour boys in education? What are the results?
7. Why do you think that generally men have negative attitudes towards women? What can be done?
8. Apart from the acts of discrimination against women raised in the story, what others do you see in your community?