



**PETER KIMANI** A SLICE AND DICE OF POLITICS, CULTURE & SOCIETY

Contact the author by email  
[peterkimani@gmail.com](mailto:peterkimani@gmail.com)

**When eight-year-olds can enunciate the word with clarity, it's a safe bet that our values are getting entrenched**

# Flying into maandamano storm in Kisumu reveals modest side of lake city

## UPSIDE DOWN

Flew off to Kisumu city on Tuesday morning to get a first-hand feel of *maandamano*. Well, it's always good to fact-check politicians, especially after Kisumu Governor Anyang' Nyong'o expressed his ambivalence about staging *maandamano* in the lakeside city and opting to stage the anti-government protests in Nairobi.

Protests are becoming so firmly entrenched in our life, even the youngest man in my house posed early that morning: *Bado kuna maandamano?*

When eight-year-olds can enunciate the word *maandamano* with clarity and understand, even very remotely, what that means then it's a safe bet that our democratic values are getting entrenched.

I checked in at the airport on time. I even had time for a hearty breakfast, before heading off. We landed in Kisumu just fine. There was a tremble in the air in that brief lull as passengers brace to grab their luggage and descend, usually a chaotic scene from well-heeled individuals. But no one moved. My colleague whispered: there is decorum here, we wait for those ahead to disembark.

I was thoroughly impressed by the lakeside style: decorum must be woven into the fabric of a city inhabited by sophisticated folks. Kisumu Dala, announced the tiny airport billboard and I instantly felt at home.

Our airport pick-up, Dennis arrived soon after. He's a young man with a shock of hair shaven on the sides, so that the afro looked like a halo. Dennis was relaxed: he stepped out in shorts and sandals and spoke calmly as he described how he had navigated the city to avoid some parts of the city that he described as 'boiling'.

"Huko kumechemka," he quipped every time we pointed in a direction where young men had erected barriers to extort levies from passing motorists. "They are just doing it for fun," he assured. "And they are getting a few shillings in the process."

I guess this is how Kenyans are feeling right now, as government corners and shakes down citizens to pay more and more taxes, even when they can ill afford it, so some will make efforts to dodge.

Dennis dodges the first 'road-block', but he isn't lucky on the second occasion, when we encounter, at very close range, a stone democrat. He held a shapeless rock that mirrored his face. I'm not articulating his ugliness, but the stony expression on his face.

### Stone democrat

Dennis got away with a warning, after protesting he was a local boy. "Even ask Brian," he shouted. "He knows me..." The stone democrat glanced at the car. "Na hao wageni?" he pursued.

"They are all going to car wash..." Dennis responded as we cut through the marshes where cars were being washed. We did not pause to get our feet washed, although that would have calmed our nerves as Dennis took the *vichorochoro* to escape the stone democrats' dragnet.

This detour took about half an hour, in place of the direct 10-minute drive from the airport, taking us through the backroads of the city, through hamlets where folks have been subsisting on rain-fed agriculture for eons.

This was a rare view of Kisumu: modest dwellings and bad roads aren't the sort of vistas you encounter when the county promotes its business opportunities and prospects. And since those opportunities aren't available to all, youths have barricaded roads and created a business opportunity of their own. This is the political economy of maandamano.

"*Utaona vile kale kumechemka*," Dennis pointed to another crowd that had assembled in another street corner. The lines had been drawn. Police were on their side and so were the youths. "The youths can't enter the city," Dennis said. "They only stick to Kondale."



Children play at the Waterfront in Karen, Nairobi, during the recent Eid festivities. [Ems Ogina Standard]

Using drones to fight 'chang'aa' is a novelty that should extend to its distillation

Police in Kiambu and Murang'a counties are using drones to map out pathways used by brewers of the illicit *chang'aa* and they reportedly had great success, earlier in the week. Police success, of course, is not measured by the number of arrests (the brewers tend to have great sprinting skills) and can run at supersonic speeds, usually barefoot, before jumping into rivers and remaining submerged for days on end.

Rivers, of course, are vital arteries in *chang'aa* business: when the molasses and other *takaraka* are thrown in the making of the drink, the mix is brought to a boil and the vapour is piped into a container submerged in the river. This is let to cool and the vapour liquified.

This is pure chemistry and it's remarkable to hear more science is being deployed to *chang'aa* business by using drones to locate those who make it. But police response is a little strange; if the intent is to scuttle the process of *chang'aa* production. Would it not make more sense to arrest the producers, instead of dismantling their cooking pots and pouring out their product? And when you pour out the brews, isn't that akin to destroying evidence?

Well, not many things make sense in this land anymore. I don't understand why police deploy so much energy to stamping out the production of *chang'aa* when less efforts is needed to sanitise the drink and allow its production in a hygienic environment, regulated by the government.

I believe that's what Ugandans did with their Waragi, or Tanzania's Konyagi (it's a corruption of cognac). But this sort of thinking would be considered extreme by Christian extremists who would rather push their compatriots to an early grave through enforced fasting, than confronting the realities of our time.

**This ain't no way to treat our retired leader, just give Prezko UK a break!**

If you ran a company and retired upon reaching retirement age, and your successor spends the rest of his time blaming you for running the firm to the ground, what would you do?

And what if the same employer declines to pay your pension, apparently because you aren't supposed to

participate in politics in retirement—even though the same firm has sponsored a faction to dethrone you from party leadership? And what's one to do if the same firm that won't release your pension has sponsored camps to kick you out of power, and the self-same firm sponsors goons to invade your farm, carting away live-

stock and trash the place? And who do you turn to if police have instructions not to intervene in your hour of need?

I hear Trade Minister Moses Kuria is organising *maandamano* outside Ichaweri, Prezzo UK's rural home in Gatundu, to retaliate his alleged sponsorship of goons to participate

in *maandamano* elsewhere. I suspect Prezzo UK might be linked to my mission of Kisumu, where I arrived earlier in the week to participate in *maandamano*. Kuria isn't the only person making this allegation: Kimani Ichur gwah (no relation to this writer), appears to utter "Kenya'ta" every time he opens

his mouth to speak. And I suspected he would allege Kenya'ta had sent him to Citizen TV when he threatened to walk out, even though he had invited himself there. If this is how Kenya Kwanza are treating a former Head of State, then how would they treat the rest of us? Just give Prezzo UK a break!