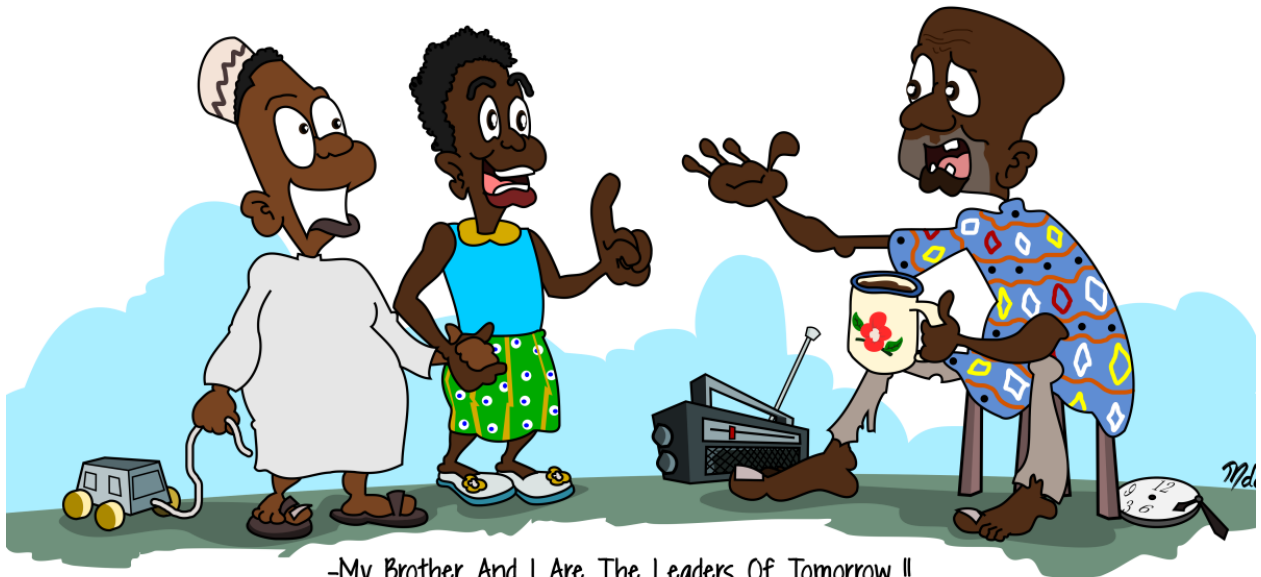


The Man Who Sold a Country



-My Brother And I Are The Leaders Of Tomorrow !!
- Kids, I Also Grew Up Being Told That I'm The Leader Of Tomorrow,
Now My Teeth Have Almost All Fallen Off, I've Got A Bald Head, And I'm
Still Waiting For That Tomorrow That I was Promised

...and the people who let it happen (simply, us).

By Owaahh

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About a month after President Uhuru Kenyatta launched his flagship project, the new railway line, I joined a group of fellow merry makers on a trip to Diani. It was my first time on the new train, and it was symbolic for me because I had unknowingly joined the last ride of the Lunatic Express. That last ride was a literal party train, and because the train was slow, it was more chaotic than a night out in Nairobi.

The first thing anyone told me about the new railway wasn't that there would be about six security checks between the gate and the train. It was that you couldn't carry alcohol onto the train, and their bar only opens once you get to Mtito Andei. It was a surprise to me because just four months earlier, **I had walked into a train** that had a bottle of terrible whiskey with my name on it, and there had been a full party in the third class carriage. It also didn't make sense, to me as a libertarian, why a government and its proxy would have such oddly specific rules about what adults choose to do with time they have little else to do with.

At the second check, I noticed a pile of matchboxes at the feet of two Chinese men supervising the security guards. Then one of them bent, took three of the matchboxes, and stuffed them in his pocket. I hadn't seen any signboard saying you couldn't go in with a matchbox, which meant this was actually theft. As was almost everything else about this railway, and the governments that built it. Theft, not just by the two Chinese men and their helpers who were only there for a salary, but by everyone involved in this project. Even us, we were robbing ourselves of the simple choice of carrying perfectly legal things onto a train we had bought tickets to board.

After what felt like unnecessary checks, I was on the train. But I had come all this way with white rum in a clear water bottle. No one had noticed, through six thorough security checks that involved humans and canines, that I was carrying contraband. It didn't hit me that this was actually a security loophole until the next day. It turns out that the entire experience here was just built on recklessness, and we were all paying for an experience that belongs in a primary school more than for a service where you have to prove you are an adult before you even buy tickets. After the rush was gone, I noticed something else. There were no dustbins. I can't remember seeing any throughout the station, or on the train, during the entire ride that day. It looks like a small oversight until you consider everything we now know about Uhuru Kenyatta's flagship project. It belongs in the trash can, but someone ate the money for that too. And we are paying for it, and the thing it should have designated to the dumpsite of ideas.

Like it though, the Lunatic Express was a mess from the beginning. It was a railway that wasn't meant to be, crossing a country that didn't exist even as an idea yet. It built a country by force, and killed, stole, and raped everyone and everything it could find. The new railway was meant to herald the start of something similar, but maybe more positive. It was defended as the legacy of our time, and not the cartel idea it was. It's not just about the railway or dustbins or even the Prohibition-like rules, but about almost every decision the people we have given this country to run have taken in the past six years.

If Kenya was married to Uhuru Kenyatta, and everything he represents as a man and a president, it would be the spouse who hurts, who is emotionally abused, physically abused, threatened with death, distracted with relatives and reckless debts and robbed during the day. It would be the spouse who's told she's being taxed because she's growing too fat, and that because cows don't run on fuel, the price of milk shouldn't go up. Even when it is pretty much run by the President's family, which is legendary in its single-minded pursuit to treat Kenya as a jar that never runs out.

But the beginning of this story should have been about the fact that the most prominent art piece in the entire project is not its architecture, but a Chinese man who visited what's now Kenya more than seven centuries ago. It's signs are foreign, it's English bad, it's Kiswahili worse, its terms completely ridiculous. But the men who signed us up believed they were doing their job, and perhaps this is where this story begins. That everything happening to us now is deserved because when we should have done better, we actively didn't. In fact, we ran to the other side of the room. We gave an interviewee a job he didn't want, and then hoped for the best.

There are a few things that are clear about Uhuru Kenyatta as a human being. He is indecisive, inexperienced, impulsive, reckless, and he has a well-developed persecution complex. He asked us "Mnataka Nifanye" as if he was a panel beater in Muthurwa on a Monday morning, or a shoe shiner in Eldoret wishing he ran the country for a day. That question was an insult. He has scratched his ass in public while threatening the judiciary, which sounds like multitasking at an advanced level. He has fled when he should have been here answering questions, and he has built around him a bubble around which Kenya is fine. And will be fine. And debts and illegal taxes exist on paper and don't actually affect the people who live here.

We can only love if we know fear, and it is clear now that Uhuru Kenyatta, and the entire political class he heads, does not love or fear us. He, and it, have never learnt to fear us. Not the power of the people. Not our suffering. Not our fears. It simply does not give a fuck. No one does. Even we really don't. Our politicians are employees who only do the job because it pays the bills and nothing more. They have no plan, no direction, no convictions, and no unrealistic belief that this cow they suck from will survive for long.

If you think about it, we don't know Uhuru Kenyatta. We don't know who he is as an individual, or what he stands for. We don't even know the truth about his college education, or even about his lost years, or his personal life. We know the truth, at least in bars and in our homes, but not as part of the national story. We talk about his marriage loudly in bars, and joke about his heavy drinking as we drink heavily to forget just how much shit we are in. To forget that as we order the next round, he could be selling a part of the country and we would still have to pay for it somehow.

The man in charge of this country has never had to fight or beg for thing in his life. Everything he, and even his Hustler partner, has has been handed to them. It has not been handed by the delicate balance we common folk try to maintain so that we make a living without harming each other. As a Kenyatta, especially one born after the war, Uhuru has lived a sheltered and privileged life. His elder step brother was already a man when the war began, and he eventually joined the gulags as an interrogator, with

blessings from the old man. His sister was the first female mayor of Nairobi until her dad got her another job (she was voted out by the Murang'a cabal, for a man who proceeded to begin Kenya's unending story of collapsing banks), and his mother, also born into privilege, has decided that her legacy will be the wealth of her family. She, and the family she heads, only want this country for what it's worth.

There's no difference between Uhuru Kenyatta the man and Uhuru Kenyatta the presidency. In the Kenyatta clan, these came as a package. He has never had to be a human being with no family name, no family wealth, no connections, no privilege, no empty fridge, no fridge at all, no electricity, no random bullets flying around. That reality, which most of us have lived, is as foreign to him as his lack of self-awareness of it is to us. **He lost his first job interview for a public interview in 1997** not because his ideas didn't make sense, but because he had that Kenyatta name. His rival brilliantly kidnapped himself to remind the electorate that if the old dynasty got one foot back into power, it would never let go.

In this clan from Ichaweri, we are an idea. We don't exist. Jomo the man made sure of that, by dragging a family that was suspicious of his heritage into his own looting spree. Jomo the man believed he was a king, and acted like one, and refused to build a nation. He maintained the state as it had been, only changing the skin color of office holders. He made it illegal to be broke, and gifted himself more than handsomely for simple things like travelling to resettle landless people. He, like his son after him, actually became an adult in office. And this is our problem. Or at least one of many. In fact, even after producing two of our presidents, the first female mayor of Nairobi, and owning a large chunk of the country and its future, we don't know enough about the entire Kenyatta Clan. We wouldn't even know if the houses we rent or the things we buy somehow make them money. Right now, on a laptop and online and with a word processor begging me to stop, I could be making Ichaweri money and I would never know. If the Kenyatta Clan are not to be our eternal dynasty, the relatives who have our country's name in their name to remind us they own us and not the other way round, then something must give.

There is only one biography on Uhuru Kenyatta, and very few articles that actually question the man's thinking. There's no knowledge about the man an overwhelming majority of this country decided should run this ship (this is sarcasm, if you hadn't noticed). And he has not only failed, he has reminded us that the entire political class is a self-serving mess. It is putting on a show to keep us distracted, in a time when we have TVs and Netflix for exactly that. We need to eat. We need to take our kids to school. We need to not fear dying in Nairobi because we are young men and women. We need to go home and know we won't be touched

inappropriately, and then get home, or into the bus, or into the cab, and find we are being touched inappropriately by the government.

At some point, this stupidity needs to stop. Just because it's happening almost everywhere in Black Africa does not mean it's normal. We are law-abiding, tax-paying, living citizens. Before we are black or Kenyan, we are living human beings. And even if you believe in an afterlife, somewhere inside you you must entertain the fact that this is it. That there's nothing beyond this. No better life. That if this one doesn't work, there's no doing it again. That the same way you have broken up with people who treated you badly, you must see this country, and the man who runs it, as your abuser.

A daily threat to your mental and physical health. That every day of silence and servitude is an act of consent.

China is not the problem. And this is a surprise coming from me because I have written quite a bit on Chinese racism and economic conquest. China is an empire on a journey others have taken before. It is following the natural progression of history, to win at home, and then seek others to rule and take your excess and give you raw materials. In fact, if you had forgotten, that is exactly how we became a country. That empire fell too, and now it's on its knees, blinded by its own inability to cope with its loss of power. China will fall too, someday. We will never be an empire, that's clear, and even the point of being a functional country exists more on paper than it does in our lives.

If Zambia and Sri Lanka don't suffice as examples about what it means to mortgage a country, then nothing ever will. In the next decade, many other nations will have to bow to China's predatory debt conquest. Black people will remain at the bottom of every racial hierarchy that exists because, to rephrase a Katt Williams joke, we are willing to let the driver get lost even when we know he's lost. We are more worried about losing face or being rude than about the physical and mental anguish that will follow when it crashes.

When you think about it, none of Kenya's top three politicians experienced the '90s the way almost everyone did. Uhuru Kenyatta was still rich, and doing things we know nothing about, until he was forced into an election he lost. Losing turned out to have been the plan all along, because the rebel son would eventually become the greatest defender of the family kitty. William Ruto was far from selling chicken, and when you read any story on his rise, you realise he began making money when no one else in the country was.

At the time, the country was being robbed dry by the president, and a 25-year-old from Mombasa, and a spy chief from Limuru. And anyone else who could. Ruto was a small cog in a wheel we have never broken, that only

exists to serve itself. Raila Odinga was finally an MP, in the same Parliament as his father, and the darkness of the '80s must have begun fading. Anyone else you could mention for the 2022 elections, which are meant to be the harbinger of a better Kenya, at least among eternal optimists, made it in these years. Or just before. They do not know suffering, and they do not care. They don't need to. We don't ask it of them. If this was a nation, then there would be love and fear. Not our well-deserved apathy. Not our desire to maintain status quo even when it's clear we are losing our money and our minds.

To love this country is to die a slow death, because if it wasn't China this time, it would be someone else. If it wasn't Uhuru Kenyatta, someone would still have sold the country. Signed on the dotted line in pages written in Mandarin with diabolically-terrible English translations, as if our initial conqueror's language is not one of the things that connects us now. As if we need to learn the language of our new conquerors while handing them the keys to the city, the freedom of future generations, and our endless loyalty to funding a corrupt and thieving political class through taxes, debt, and the meh.

If you leave the house today, everyone you meet will tell you just how bad things are getting. If you are a realist, you should probably tell them that if this was a story, we wouldn't even be anywhere near the climax. That things will get worse because on paper, we owe money we didn't need to borrow, that a select few wasted and stole, and that we, our kids, and any one who makes the mistake of becoming a Kenyan citizen, will pay for. That Kenya today is not the result of some random chance. Or even weather. Or a thief. It is us walking in the dark towards our worst possible present and future. Seeing just how far down any rabbit hole we can go in a lifetime. Elections are an impossible choice when your political class is made up of actors and actresses who fake fights publicly and then take bribes through glory holes in the toilet. Who kill Sharon Otieno and somehow the story becomes about a big man eating sukuma wiki and sleeping in a cell.

The man who sold this country didn't do it because he actually cared about the job he wanted. He did it for almost every other reason, and in 2013 he realised it, momentarily, and tried to back out. He had shown us his perspective when years before, he switched from the opposition like he had been playing in a friendly match in the village all along. When he stood in front of cameras and blamed the Devil and his clergy of demons, we should have seen the resignation into the most important job we have. The one job we have to actually be something other than a short-lived idea in the sands of time.

To be a young woman in this country is to be forgotten, to be harrassed, molested, and misused. It is to die because you refused to have an abortion, or because you had one. To be a young man in this country is to be broke, hurt, silenced, and just waiting to be arrested for literally anything in the book, past or present. To be alive, young, ambitious, and hungry in Kenya today is to set yourself up for lifelong mental health complications. To have the optimism of youth is to be stupid, because by the times things get even remotely better, bones will hurt and we will still owe someone else money for things we didn't actually need. Then we will tell our kids that actually, our prime years were not as bad as the history books say. We were alive, at least, and we still worshipped a deity who needed money whose source he didn't care about, and we survived.

To be a human being in this country is to forget how to be alive. It is to be robbed of your childhood long before two people meet and agree to engage in sexual congress. It is to wake up one morning, as a sleepy child fresh out of the uterus, owing money, trying not to get killed, and hoping you don't have to learn that you, and the government, killed your mother. There's simply no childhood in Kenya, and so there's no adulthood. Everything feels violated, and us with it.

We have convinced ourselves that this is normal, that in any story there are twists and turns. But it's not true. A story is essentially a series of decisions, and ours are unfortunate and reckless ones that one learns about during a vicious hangover. But what can we do, we all ask? Tell us what to do, everyone who cares enough to point out that this is an abusive relationship is told. We have resigned to a fate worse than being an adult in a 2 year old's body. Where we do not trust our own instincts and reactions because we have been told that no matter what happens, no matter what kind of starvation we suffer, we will somehow survive long enough to die a disappointing death. Like **Alex Madaga**, who died in an ambulance because Kenya is held together by capitalism and nothing else. That the only thing that must survive is the state, by all means. Preferably run by someone from the mountain, his qualifications for the job notwithstanding.

We are not even like this in our daily lives. Matatu drivers get beaten all the time for driving badly or doing stupid shit on the road. We walk out of restaurants that give us bad service. We fight each other in bars over disrespect. We fight each other in church over money. We burn thieves publicly even when they've stolen a chicken to feed their families. In our daily lives, we denounce mediocrity. But with the state, we accept it in its most rotten form. Who are we really, that we can let a minority run this country aground while just sitting quiet in the back seat, talking among ourselves.

My point is, there's a difference between the Kenya on the ground and the one that we have agreed is a country. We are not bringing ourselves to the story of the nation, and we have not only accepted mediocre rule for far too long, we have actually defended the very same political class that continuously gives us reason not to. It might never end, actually. It is a real possibility that when the nation called Kenya eventually dies, as it will inevitably, the story of its people will not exist. It will not only not have been told, it will not have been lived. Not by its people, its animals, its land, its laws, or even its own hallucinations about itself. We are a nation actively committing suicide, and the sad part of it is that we are not only in the room, we are the ones tying the rope around our own necks.

We can process any trauma so seamlessly that no one would ever know we weren't okay. Even we don't. Everything that's happening to us is as strange as it would be if it was happening to anyone else, but we are eternal optimists. We are competitive with our neighbors even when they actually aren't. When their wars are far greater than their regional fight with a nation called Kenya. We use it to tell us ourselves we are better than everyone else around us, as if the economy is the beginning of the human experience, because it helps us sleep at night. We get angry, we work hard, we get paid, we pay taxes, we pay more than we should for everything, we budget for corruption, we teach our kids to live with our trauma, and then we die.

That's how this story ends, where we all die and then this idea of a country dies, or dies before. But we are in this story now, we are in the paragraphs, either as loud commentators or as subservient slaves. I am actually not as worried about our debt to China as I am about our psyche as a nation. We are broken, and we don't know it. As individuals and as a collective. We carry trauma that has nothing to do with our personal experience, and we see our experience through it. We refuse to learn, even when we accept knowledge as a vital part of our experience. We refuse to be afraid of the fact that the one thing that connects us is shortlived, and what will remain is not Kenya as a country, but its people. We are brave and strong, but we are also willing to let the car crash because it's bad manners to tell the driver he's drunk, and driving us into a ditch. We were raised well, and authority can never be questioned, even when it's actively doing the wrong thing.

If you are even a half-interested student of history, then you already know how this story goes. Soon, we will be distracted with shenanigans that do not bring our cost of living down or fix our economy or society. There will be **a lot of God in our** lives, and fake political and social contests, and Ezekiel Mutua, and downright bullshit. There will be handouts to anyone competent enough to host a Harambee, and an underlying hope that someday, maybe soon, things will improve by themselves. They won't.

Like his father, Uhuru Kenyatta is the least experienced president we have had. In fact, the only thing his father has on him was age and prison, although he almost caught up on the latter. Otherwise, the two of them were untried and untested for the job of their presidency. They hadn't even had to run their own households, or struggle to fight for a position. Everything was handed to them like ripe bananas from a farm, ready to be peeled, eaten, and forgotten. Used to simply satisfy whatever hunger they felt that day. The two presidents between them had that experience, although they processed it in different ways. One used his experience to build a legacy of corruption and every possible crime possible of an individual and a government. He also got worried he wouldn't survive, so he actively sought and taught others how to, and they are now in charge of the nation.

The other one did the same, but he was an academic who had spent nearly a decade fighting off IMF and trying to balance the books in a country running on fumes and autocracy. He decided to go the senile way, choosing not to seek longterm prosperity as to act as if his decisions were independent of the constructs of time and space.

Kenya did not have a Lunatic Express. It is the Lunatic Express. We are a slow, rickety, rusty, badly run and maintained train. The space between cabins is small, but we are in silos with the only common thing being that we are all on the train. We have gone off the rails several times, and killed people while at it, but somehow we still run. Until the day we won't. We are the train that follows. Promised it would be faster, cheaper, and more comfortable. But on the train ride you kinda miss the adventures of the old mess, rickety as it was. Then you realise it is just a well-painted version of the old train. Your work here is to pay for tickets.

We have normalised nonsense, and our own misery, and this needs to stop. We are the adults now, sadly.

Cartoon by Bwana Mdogo.

*Owaahh, 2018.
One story is good,
till Another
is told.*