One Nation Under Watch, But We Are Not Any Safer

A few weeks ago I went out of town on a weekend road trip with some friends that we've done for years, to shoot the breeze, unpack, and just shake off the drudgery of the city.

This last trip took us to a resort in the Rift Valley, and after breakfast, a last-minute swimming plan meant that we had to leave a few cars with low ground clearance behind, seeing as we were heading out into the rugged road terrain of the wilderness.

A few of the folks I was travelling with are licensed arms holders with their cars fitted with arm compartments. We drove the cars into a particular shopping complex en route to the swimming area. Not only did the guards not bother to search the cars, we ended up leaving behind the cars at the mall parking for the better part of the day and came to fetch them later in the evening.

This, just three weeks after the Dusit attacks, speaks into the precariousness of a country faced with an existential security crisis whose scope and problems are hard to understand, thanks to our security apparatus's fuzzy competency, poor security infrastructure, corruption, and age-old negligence.

I raised the issue of the lapse in security with a security official who happened to be part of the weekend trip and he wasn't amused. He complained that a particular security brief I had shared with the group was ill-advised and that wasn't meant for public consumption. According to him, it had been shared with a foreign diplomat who had in their own manoeuvring decided to release it to parties who aren't certified consumers of the brief, who in turn released it to the public sphere.

This official had most likely taken a leaf from police spokesman Charles Owino who, when interviewed by TV host Jeff Koinange about our security situation, Owino realistically admitted that our level of preparedness stood at 7 out of 10. Owino emphatically sympathized with the Kenyan situation going as far as admitting that they (the police) foil many attacks that Kenyans never even get to hear about.

During the interview, Owino was empathic that Kenyans have to give up a bit of their comforts if that would guarantee their security, a realism that would have been good were it not susceptible to exploitation by surveillance capitalism. That’s the challenge of the current security theatre; that the security apparatus has to be right 100% of the time while terrorists need to be right only once.

Since 2011, Kenya has faced 321 terror attacks; the equivalent of a new attack every 9 days, a fact that is linked to our military incursion into Somalia. In turn, this has been a period that has also seen walls go up, razors crown perimeter fences, and concrete barriers mounted on roads that were once free-flowing.

We almost take it for granted that our data is collected at all major gates and building entrances, and those who look Cushitic randomly stopped and frisked especially in Nairobi streets.

Kenyans of means have responded in kind, given that in recent years gun ownership among wealthy, mostly urban private citizens has climbed to an estimated 7,000. In addition, more than 700,000 guns are in the hands of private citizens in the isolated north-eastern corridor. I wish I’d say that all these adjustments have made it safer for us but I have a sneaky feeling that much as we’ve evolved in our response to terror we still remain quite exposed.

Recently while having coffee at Java Ridgeways, the gentleman seated next to me seemed to try a little too hard to hide the bulge on the right side of his belt; a bulge that I doubt the guards had noticed. Honestly, it’s hard to estimate how much of the bulging waists, barbed wires, ‘data books’ at entrances to buildings, sniffer dogs and concrete barriers have enhanced our safety.

No one has bothered to assure us of data safety, and the problem is there to show. For example, when I visited Narok last year — a place I’d never been to before and never since — a few days later started receiving promotional text messages from a local Narok supermarket I’d never heard of. We leave our private details everywhere around this city on a daily basis; a meaningless exercise that is supposed to, at least in theory, guarantee our safety.

This though doesn’t always mean an easy pass. Depending on context, class, gender, age, and race, bodies are policed differently, such as once when I happened to pass next to where a former president was seated. His security frisked me, padding up and down and trying to keep the menacing ordeal as long as possible. Meanwhile, a lady carrying a large handbag strolled past us walking barely 10 feet away from the then president. She might as well have been carrying an entire armoury, but young, male and black is a catch-all for potential threats, so my mere presence was deemed a greater potential security threat than hers.

One thing is increasingly obvious though. There has arisen a new security architecture mostly in the city that commodifies our fears, and develops surveillance products to monetise it. They promote an ever-expanding range of options for intrusive security measures pegged on lucrative public tenders.

The mixture of surveillance capitalism mixed with the reality of violent extremism has spelt a boon for shadowy securo-preneurs, and official corruption at security agencies. But there is no measurable change as to how my safety is improved every time I leave my house.

After the deadly January attacks at the Dusit Complex, I figured I might as well do a bit of reading on the terror group, with Haroun Marouf's book *Inside Al-Shabaab: The Secret History of Al-Qaeda's Most Powerful Ally* making for a primer on the topic. However, with a price tag of KSh 3,000, that's way pricier than what most Kenyans can splurge on a single book. Available literature on the terror group Al Shabaab, is still sketchy and disjointed, and for the most part, my reading is skewed towards tracts, news sites, Wikipedia and whatever else I can get at a lower cost.

The thing is, very few of us Kenyans know anything about the terror group beside it being a network mostly domiciled in Somalia and whose tentacles now stretch as far as Kakamega and Kampala. But perhaps to our satisfaction with simplistic answers and relatively frequent interaction with low-grade terrors of our own making ranging from rampant joblessness, vigilante justice, and broken down judicial system, we don't encounter as much shock at the ugliness of the heightened terror attacks. We forget so quickly. Despite rising walls, regular frisking at gates, and incessant demands for our data at rickety security desks, we haven't truly had a national moment to process what terror has come to mean to us individually and collectively.

The security theatre as currently structured isn't built to guarantee our safety. It preys on scared city folks who are not its clientele, its partners, allies, or staff.

Just like most other public procedures, it's driven by securo-crats who prey on a public that's largely ignorant or helpless towards its mechanisms and excesses.

Curiously as I drive through the city streets on any given day it's clear to me that the securitisation of the city is more of a response to threats of local burglary, social menace and absence of proper police systems than it is about terrorism. Let's face it, I have higher chances of getting mugged than being blown up, a fact that I'm well aware may spell out differently for people who look Cushitic or adjacent.

The local jobless rates, messy politics, poverty and mediocrity together have done more to aid the securitisation of this city, than the penetration of terror networks into small towns and the rise of local terror networks with links to Al Shabaab across the border.

The space I exist in right now means that once I step out of my house I've to contend with the notions and responses to terror as conceived by many agencies, including schools, clubs, gated estates, hospitals, supermarkets, malls, and even fellow private citizens.

Each of these entities is forced to institute measures subject to their culpability and capacity, effectively changing the nature of our city, its norms, our movement and sense of belonging. By the current trends, we might just end up like London where your average citizen is captured by at least 30 cameras on any given day, in a city where there exists one surveillance system for every 11 people.

The famous social critic Naomi Klein's bestseller *The Shock Doctrine* documents the rise of disaster capitalism that allows for devious regimes and well-connected non-state actors to use the aftermath of tragedy such as the Dusit Complex attack to push forward with unpopular policies. In Kenya's security theatre, disaster capitalism through the shocks of terrorism, and bloody images splattered on front-pages incessantly lays groundwork for surveillance capitalism under the guise of enhancing our security; in the end, we've become one nation under watch.

The Dark and Devious History of Tea: The Beverage That Floated Empires

No one knows when we, as the human race, decided that tea is worth drinking, though tea remains fabled as one of the world's oldest beverages. Its story of origin is scant – there is uncertain allusion to a strong beverage in a Chinese document from 59 B.C, and some architectural evidence pointing to a century earlier, traced to the Han Yangling Mausoleum in Xi'an in western China, which was built for the Jing Emperor Liu Qi, who died in 141 B.C.

But from its murky beginnings, this unassuming leafy bush would come to shape history as we know it. For millennia, tea has graced the tables of the mighty and the lowly, fuelling wars, building empires, and bonding societies in a relentless quest for that 'wondrous beverage' packed with caffeine and theanine.

There are four types of tea – black tea, green tea, white tea and oolong tea, originating from two varieties of the plant in the Camellia family: *Camellia sinensis*, a narrow-leaf variety originating in central China and Japan thriving in the cool, high mountain regions there, while the broad leaf variety, *Camellia assamica*, thrives best in the moist, tropical climates found in Northeast India and Yunnan provinces of China.

Turkey leads the global tea consumption at 6.96 million pounds with Ireland, United Kingdom and Russia coming in at second, third and fourth place respectively. Morocco is the highest tea consumer in Africa with annual consumption of about 2.5 million pounds followed by Egypt at 2.3 million pounds. As of 2017 China made about $1.45 billion dollars form tea exports while Kenya remains the largest global tea exporter, accounting for 25% of all tea exports worldwide.

Protected by the mountain mists, and given just enough humidity, the plant produces shiny, dark green leaves and small, tender, white blossoms. The final quality of tea depends on a lot of factors – the soil, climate, altitude, and expertise of the tea-pickers.

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Research shows that tea has not always been consumed as a beverage. It was used in burial rituals among Chinese royalty, as a mixture containing the buds, some roasted barley, salt, and or ginger. It would later adopt other uses including as dowry payment for aristocrats, around 640 A.D. A thousand years later in the 1600s the buds would land in the British Isles, sipping its way into daily culinary preferences as it provided relief and a 'high' for workers who often had to contend with the drudgery of manual labour. Tea would have remained just another drink in the periphery of the British civilization were it not for its accidental encounter with a powerful ally – sugar. Out of this marriage came global capitalism, royal tea culture, health fads and the darkest of all outcomes – slave plantations.

The tea craze reached British high society through Catherine of Braganza, a Portuguese aristocrat who married into the British monarchy, to Charles II. As an early celebrity endorser of tea, her wedding to Charles II helped the fad to take off among the British nobility, making it as native to British royalty as white weddings.

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Catherine of Braganza's enthusiasm for tea, as well as the expensive nature of the new invention, sugar, made tea a hallmark and fetish for the status-chasing elites.

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From the 1600s the fortune of tea as a global beverage seemed relentless. Its cultural phenomenon as a mark of status meant lots of people developed new literature on this ‘wondrous beverage’, key among them an English writer named Thomas Tryon, who counted Benjamin Franklin as one of his fans.

Tryon was an advocate for tea in moderation, and not conspicuous consumption as was the case with the aristocrats of the day. Tryon developed self-help books around tea, for which his enthusiasm was tempered by his conflicted relationship with sugar. On one hand, he hated the slavery of the sugar plantations in the West Indies, while still savouring the magical effects of the substance in his tea. Tryon, well aware that the cruelty of slavery drained into the cups of British royalty as an enchanting beverage, expressed a love-hate relationship with sugar and by extension tea.

Some of the same health and cultural claims about tea that people like Tryon were making, including mental clarity, esteem, and momentary high, and the perceived analgesics of sugar – were also being made about coffee. But coffee lost out in prestige because of its origins in the Arabian Peninsula, then a poor periphery of the British Empire and its imperial interests. With little capacity for industrial production, coffee was limited in reach and adoption.

Meanwhile tea, tied to the far more developed Far East commercial treadmills had an easier time rising to meet demand in the West. England engaged in trade with China, through the East India Company, and the Dutch East India Company, exporting spices, silks and other goods like opium in exchange for tea. The multiplicity of good fortunes; a huge demand back home, naval trade, existence of the huge trading firms British East India Company and Dutch East India Company, spurred the first impulses of modern capitalism.

Soon the Chinese rejected opiates owing to their addictive effects and the British realized that if they were going to keep pace with the tea craze back at home and not have to deal with the Chinese, they had to own tea plantations themselves.

Tea was such a lucrative trade, that, by the mid-19th century, the firm, through a Scottish botanist went on to steal tea seedlings and the secrets of tea production from China and used that to establish a tea empire in conquered India.

The British understood that getting their hands on the plant, and learning how to grow it, was not just good business, it was a cultural prestige, commercial coup and a strong geopolitical move.

Historian Sara Rose in her book *For All the Tea In China: How England Stole the World's Favorite Drink and Changed History* describes how Scottish botanist had written about the marvels of tea in his travel journals during a trip to China in 1845. His writings caught the attention of Victorian high society, who then tasked him to make a return visit and sneak out tea seedlings out of China and to learn the mechanics of tea production, which would then be planted in British-controlled India.

Fortune did not know it, but this would mark the beginning of the end of Chinese domination and a rise of imperial Britain, both countries' fates tied to a bunch of leaves dipped in hot water mixed with spoonfuls of sugar. As Sarah elaborates, (the aptly-named) Fortune never saw himself as part of a global conspiracy, but just as a humble botanist, even though he was about to commit what she calls "*the greatest single act of corporate espionage in history.*"

The impact of the espionage was incalculable; within decades, India surpassed China as the world's largest tea producer, China sunk never to recover until the 1970s, Britain rose and the global commerce moved to the West for the next 180 years.

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A new tea empire arose during that time, and true to Tryon's fears and disgust, a new kind of capitalism developed. It would be spurred on by bureaucratic, infrastructural, commercial and military capabilities, supporting slavery, colonialism and land expropriation aided by plunder through British institutions.

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That legacy implicit in our tea making cultures is still with us today. The great inequalities, between class divides and between nation-states that characterize the modern world can be traced to this global commerce's long and violent operations.

The tea empire in India evolved over centuries as a critical cog and a microcosm of the larger problematic capitalism with its oppressive social and political structures in places such as West Indies the Ottoman Empire and mid-1800s western India.

The centrality of slavery in the massive production of Tea Empire in India, the rise of 18th centuries tea merchants in South Asia and their centrality in the slave trade irked Tryon and his ilk. In tea, Tryon saw the dehumanizing excesses of global economies as well as the racist debauchery of the Euro-American enterprise in subjugating distant lands to feed the royal fetish for tea under the banner of violence and racism.

The British Empire's ability to modernize and industrialize rested on the power and reach of the two companies, their control of distant lands, naval superiority, and enslaved labour in India. Slavery, therefore, has always been an integral part of the sugar and tea economy; a core part of the Western world, and it took a violent struggle, most successfully in the 1790s in the French colony of Saint-Domingue (now Haiti) to break its yoke.

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Tea and sugar proved to be convenient alternatives to alcohol, a good addition to British culinary options, and good source of cheap calories for the masses. As the Industrial Revolution got underway, where the factory replaced the plough beginning in the mid-1700s, tea sweetened the transition away from hard farm labour giving the factory workers regular hits of caffeine.

The mercurial duo of tea and sugar made not just cultural sense as a classy drink but also spelt a boon for British government coffers. As the wheels of industrialization grew louder and churned faster, tea accounted for every tenth pound into the royal coffers, while sugar imports could sufficiently fund the then global British navy. Sugar made tea popular while tea made sugar valuable to the empire.

The tea-and-sugar revenues filled the British royal navy coffers enabling them to conquer distant lands around the globe in the 1800s at a terrible human cost, especially in Africa and the West Indies.

In America, of all the British sensibilities that the Americans adopted, tea drinking seems to be one of those that simply dissolved into the Atlantic Ocean, with minimal traces of tea culture making it on the journey west. The Charleston Tea Plantation in Wadmalaw Island just southwest of bustling Charleston, South Carolina, is the only lush, green landscape that holds on to legacy of tea in the whole of continental America.

The sprawling 127 acres of gleaming rows of green leaves unfolds in Waccamaw, one of the Sea Islands that dot the shoreline. The plantation is owned by the Bigelow Tea Co., in partnership with third-generation tea taster William Barclay Hall. It is what remains of the legacy of the Boston Tea Party or what was simply known as “the Destruction of the Tea in Boston till 1830s.”

That incident over 240 years ago on the evening of Dec. 16, 1773, involved the Sons of Liberty in Boston, disguised as Mohawks, stealing aboard three British merchant ships and tipping over more than 340 chests of quality East India Co. tea into the sea. This destruction of tea leaves as a protest against England’s unjust taxation policy sparked the Revolutionary War between Great Britain and its Thirteen Colonies culminating in the independence as the United States of America.

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On the other side of the world in the choppy seas of the Indian Ocean lies the archipelago of Sri Lanka. This tea paradise’s long relationship with beverage goes back to 1890 when Sir Thomas Lipton arrived on the island of Ceylon, now Sri Lanka, seeking to acquire real estate. 128 years later, the tea industry employs 1 million of the 22 million citizens.

A little further northwest of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) lies Myanmar (Burma), with its evolving generational politics of tea culture. Burma, as it is more popularly known internationally, is grappling with its tea-taking culture truncated across generational lines. Currently only middle-aged men keep the consumption of steaming *laphet yay*- Burmese tea alive. *Laphet yay* is the signature Burmese tea; black tea, evaporated milk and sweetened condensed milk. From Puta in the northerly region to Naypritaw in the central regions and in Yangon, tea consumption is more than regular past time; it’s a cultural moment for Burmese citizens. Word has it that the pro-democracy 8888 political uprising against the 1988 military rule might have started in a tea shop somewhere in the capital, Yangon.

The Indian subcontinent, one of the cradles of ancient tea, is home to Darjeeling, a boutique tea, referred to as the 'Champagne Of Teas'. According to Jeff Koehler, author of *Darjeeling – The Colorful History and Precarious Fate of the World's Greatest Tea*, Darjeeling remains India's internationally renowned tea thanks to its auction sales even though it makes up a mere 1% of the 2 billion pounds of tea that Indians consume annually. India produces just 8 million pounds of Darjeeling tea out of 87 tea estates in the Himalayas.

However, it is further south of the Equator in Kenya that the true nation-state building power of tea lies. Measuring just about 582,000 square kilometres, Kenya has about 198,000 hectares of tea plantations churning about 480, 000 tonnes of tea annually. Introduced in the country in 1903 by GWL Caine the crop would be commercialized 21 years later by Malcolm Fyers Bell. Currently, Kenya has surpassed India and even China- the ancient homeland of tea – in tea production. Small- scale production is managed through 66 factories handling about 500, 000 small-scale farmers on 100,000 hectares of tea. Most of it is auctioned in the city port of Mombasa and exported abroad for blending with other lower quality tea varieties.

Now as the fortunes of the Asian giant rise once again, China is becoming a fierce and aggressive player in the tea sector, yet it still has to compete with Kenya and India who are former British colonies.

So was Fortune history's beguiling economic spy, or a mere botanist who brought tea and its technologies west?

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Fortune never saw himself as a spy or a great player in global geopolitical games. It is as though his greatness (or villainy) lies accidently in him being a China and plant expert right at the point where the leaves that shaped the world lay halfway around the world from his Scottish neighbourhood. He was not a hero in his own eyes.

Nevertheless, by his small act, never has the fate of history been so drastically dependent on a bunch of leaves since Eve in the Garden of Eden, as when Fortune smuggled that humble seedling.

DEBT, AUSTERITY AND ECONOMIC HIT SQUADS: How China and the West hoodwinked Kenya

The Christian scriptures state that a good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children. This provides a key entry point into the question of intergenerational mobility of wealth, income and opportunity.

We've got to admit that meritocracy is often a myth. Hard work, single-minded focus, and determination are good but are not guarantees to success. The top predictor of a child's socio-economic class is not his personality, education, IQ, talent, or exposure: it is the parent's socio-economic status. Researchers Amy Traub and Tatjana Meschede once demonstrated that for African-Americans, and increasingly for non-white races around the globe, going to college doesn't close the wealth gap; neither do two-parent household set-ups, family spending cuts, or working full time. If a child is poor/middle class/rich, there is a high chance that the parents are poor/middle class /rich, respectively.

Poor people usually have roughly a 10 to 20 per cent chance of ever ending up rich in their lifetime. In fact, the common ratios tend to be between 7 and 15 per cent. In most societies, upper middle class people have a 20 per cent or so chance of ending up rich. In fact, nearly 60 per cent of all people live and die within the social class that they were in in their 20s.

Let's admit it: the rags-to-riches story tends to be anything but. Yes, there is always a tycoon who started on the streets and became a billionaire but that is the exception, not the rule. A huge proportion of those born into poverty will live and die poor. Contrary to what you keep hearing, education is great but it is not an equaliser; rich kids with low IQs graduate in higher numbers than poor kids with high IQs. It is family incomes, not merit, that primarily determines university enrolment, graduation, and future incomes.

The ability to generate a transformative kind of wealth within one's lifetime is possible but neither normal nor possible for the majority of the population; usually, it takes about three to four generations of industrious heirs to achieve it. That's the reason the good book instructs us that a good man leaves an inheritance for his children and his children's children. The forces at play are referred to as the principles of inherited (dis)advantages.

Ethnicity of capital

Intergenerational mobility tends to be stubbornly calcified, which is a key reason why the deity prioritises the need for one to leave an inheritance for one's progeny. Wealth is known to stay within certain families for between 500 and 800 years, as studies have demonstrated in Florence, England and ancient China. Capital is quite loyal to filial ties but most importantly, it manifests certain logic and sensibilities, including developing its nature from the demographic, geographic, intellectual, historical and political contexts within which it is employed. Notably, Amy Traub and Lara Sullivan's study of racial inequality has demonstrated that barring any historical disruptions, capital tends to remain familial, and by extension, stays ethnic.

It is the Euro-American/Christian/White capital in the West whose hegemony has driven modern civilisation since the Renaissance – that's the bane of global capitalism. This capital is decidedly white, decidedly male, decidedly Christian, decidedly elitist, and notably racist in its sensibilities, a persona it picked from its most famous brawling pioneers like Adam Smith, the rogue Commodore Vanderbilt, and the choleric John Rockefeller. Capitalism, as an initially Western logic, therefore, ought to be examined within the context of its interaction with global economic history, especially the rise of nation-states and slavery.

In *Workers of the World: Essays Toward a Global Labor History,* economic historians Kenneth Pomeranz and Marcel van der Linden have shown that, viewed from a global perspective, capitalism is notably discovered to have grown on the backs of slavery. The 18th century global oppressive structures that birthed racism and slavery were also central to the invention of the Industrial Revolution, especially the spectacular American capitalism.

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The American capitalistic experiment took shape in the 1820s just as one of its would-be patriarchs, Cornelius "Commodore" Vanderbilt, turned 26 and for the next 150 years it delivered a year-on-year wage rise, including surviving the infamous American Civil War of 1861-1865. However as the economy entered the 1960s, the rise of automation, women pouring into the workplace after the sexual revolution, the rise of immigration, and employers moving production abroad stalled this capitalist experiment.

The combination of technology and outsourcing production abroad gave American capital a velocity and agility that gave rise to the possibility of accelerated capital flight, as happened in the 1997 Asian financial crisis. In the 60s, Euro-American capital also learned that it could use debt as a tool for diplomacy and coercion on the global stage.

Of jackals and hit men

John Perkins, who authored the famous book *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*, begins his narration in Quito, Ecuador. He then journeys us through half a dozen countries, painting tragic pictures of once thriving metropoles turned into volatile and crumbling credit-opoles by the vultures from Washington. He writes:

> *"Despite the fact that the money is returned almost immediately to corporations that are members of the corporatocracy (the creditor), the recipient country is required to pay it all back, principal plus interest. If an economic hit man (EHM) is completely successful, the loans are so large that the debtor is forced to default on its payments after a few years. When this happens, then like the Mafia we demand our pound of flesh. This often*

includes one or more of the following: control over United Nations votes, the installation of military bases, or access to precious resources such as oil or the Panama Canal. Of course, the debtor still owes us the money—and another country is added to our global empire."

Weaponisation of sovereign debt as a tool for oppression emerges as an almost accidental discovery borne of the post-World War I world as the gold standard drew to a close, having dominated global commerce in late 19th and early 20th century. The increasing societal complexity occasioned by industrialist Henry Ford's assembly line, the World War I military economy and the stock market boom exposed the limited monetary policy options that the gold standard could avail to 20th century governments. Under the gold standard, Central Banks often could only respond to economic downturns with spending cuts and raising interest rates, hoping that labour wage and commodity prices would drop low enough for the economy to self-correct.

In 1946, the political economist John Maynard Keynes resolved that both the headquarters of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which he had helped found, shouldn't be on American soil. His reservations over the location of the two institutions got torpedoed, as Washington had already secured a dozen allies to sway the vote on the matter in its favour. His death six weeks later set the Bretton Woods institutions firmly on US soil, inevitably rendering the two organisations and their nearly one dozen financial arms as American appendages rather than the global institutions that Keynes has envisaged.

Two years earlier, at the Bretton Woods Conference of July 1944, Keynes's squabbles with US Treasury official Harry Dexter White had ended in surprising mutual agreement regarding the creation of new post-war institutions for regulating international flow of capital, prohibiting arbitrary currency alterations, stabilising exchange rates, and facilitating international financial cooperation.

Together they built a closely monitored international financial system with post-war reconstruction institutions for capital and currency regulations that replaced the uncoordinated system of the pre-1930s, actions that globally centered the US financial system, laying the groundwork for the rise of economic hit men and the debt tentacles.

By the time journalist Water Isaacson and historian Evans Thomas published their famous book *The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made* in 1986, the two institutions' debt arrangement with Kenya – predicated on structural adjustments – was already six years in the making and was creating negative economic effects in Nairobi. The "wise men" comprised six shadowy foreign policy wonks in Harry Truman's government beginning in 1945 just as the Cold War was reshaping the global hegemonies and reorienting geostrategic loyalties. The six, in typical wise men lore, brought forth hegemonic gifts, not in the strain of gold, myrrh, and frankincense but NATO the Marshall Plan and, alongside Dexter and Maynard, the World Bank. The modern-day pragmatic internationalism, non-partisanship, and America's aversion to ideology exemplified in catch-phrases such as "for the greater good" reflect some of the hallmarks of their beliefs. The legacy of the six men, namely, Dean Acheson, George Kenna, John McCloy, Robert Lovett, Averell Harriman, and Charles Bholen, played the handmaiden to capitalism's inherent need for eternal global expansion.

From Kenya, with love

Perkins-esque economic hitmanship in Kenya started in 1980 with a $55 million Structural Adjustment Credit (SAC) by the World Bank, which rose to a $130.9 million loan in 1983. The next six years dragged in three sectoral adjustment loans (SECAL): 1986 Agriculture ($60 million), 1988 Industry ($165.7 million), and 1989 Finance ($231.3 million) to complement the two previous structural adjustment programs (SAPs).

While Kenya didn't cede any particular strategic assets to the Western oligarchs, the 1971-1972 oil prices shocks had created the perfect opportunity for the West to rope in Kenya into its sphere, away from Soviet influence. SAPs constitute a raft of policy decisions, including market liberalisation, price decontrols, and budget cuts. SAC is the monetary incentive granted to a government to implement SAPs. Sectoral adjustment loans is a credit facility extended to a specific sector of the economy and pegged on the government agreeing to implement SAPs in that particular industry or sector.

These were followed by three more SECALs in the 1990s: 1991 Export Development ($149.1 million), 1991 Agriculture II ($75 million), and 1992 Education ($100 million). The disastrous 1996 SAC I ($126.8 million) drew the most anger from the Kenyan public, having been incorrectly tied to some of the economic tailspins unleashed by Kamlesh Pattni's Goldenberg scandal. SAPs' drastic economic impact skyrocketed interest on debt payment from 8.3 per cent between 1964 and 1969 to 23 per cent in 1995/96 and 25 per cent in 1997/98, the debt having grown by 362 per cent, from $36.7 billion in 1990 to $169 billion in 1998.

Curiously, the most famous studies on Kenyan SAPs by Ikiara (1990), Swamy (1994), and Ihonvbere (1996) on the effects of the economic hit jobs notoriously ignored the social effects that SAPs had unleashed. The neoliberal cuts in welfare spending, price decontrols, market liberalisation, and budget cuts strangled the health, education and social services sectors, which led to a significant decline in the quality of basic services available to ordinary wananchi. Three decades later, Kenya is yet to fully recover from the debilitating effects of SAPs.

Enter the Red Brigade

French political economist Eric Toussaint, in his report, "*Debt as an Instrument of the Colonial Conquest of Egypt*", aptly observed that "in the case of Egypt and Tunisia, the European powers used debt as their most powerful weapon for ensuring domination, leading to the total submission of previously independent states". China, a rising economic power throughout the 1990s and 2000s, would learn and perfect the West's weaponisation of debt through economic hitmanship.

As of 2007, the People's Republic of China had a massive financial muscle of $1.4 trillion in currency reserves and a $200 billion sovereign wealth fund, which grew to $3.44 trillion and $810 billion, respectively, by 2013. This financial war chest would come in handy in China's Belt and Road Initiative.

> *French political economist Eric Toussaint…aptly observed that "in the case of Egypt and Tunisia, the European powers used debt as their most powerful weapon for ensuring domination, leading to the total submission of previously independent states". China, a rising economic power throughout the 1990s and 2000s, would learn and perfect the West's weaponisation of debt through economic hitmanship.*

The Belt and Road Initiative encompasses an overland route through Eastern Europe as well as the ports of Quanzhou in eastern China, Kuala Lumpur, Colombo, Gwadar in the Middle East, Mombasa, Djibouti, the Suez Canal, Piraeus, and ends in Venice. In a typical Merchant of Venice fashion, Beijing lends money for unviable infrastructure projects that inevitably precipitate a default. And like Shakespeare's Tubal, it comes to claim its pound of flesh structured as 60-90-year port leases, as has happened to the port of Djibouti and Hambantota port in Sri Lanka.

In March of 2018, the think tank Centre for Global Development (CGD), in a report titled "*Examining the Debt Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative from a Policy Perspective*", determined that eight countries (Montenegro, Laos, Mongolia, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Mongolia, and Djibouti) were likely to default on their debt obligations to China. Tellingly, all these countries lie on the Belt and Road Initiative's route.

The IMF's Wenjie Chen and Roger Nord articulated this in their ominous report "*China and Africa: Crouching Lion, Retreating Dragon?*" that showed that in just a few years Beijing has become, by far, the largest source of (bilateral) loans, lending over $96 billion to sub-Saharan African countries (excluding South Africa).

Today, China controls 72 per cent of Kenya's bilateral debt or 10 per cent of its total debt. Interestingly, the nearly Sh450 billion Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) loan accounts for a majority of the credit facility that's maddeningly accompanied by exorbitant interest rates.

All this is happening against a backdrop of increasing economic hardship across the country. A June study estimated the number of starving Nairobi residents to be 900,000 out of a total population of 4 million, while in March 2018 Kenya got ranked as having one of the highest numbers of extremely poor people at – 6th in Africa and 8th in the world. Compound this with the World Bank's latest report that estimated the number of starving Kenyans to be 17.4 million and the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) figure of 16.4 million starving Kenyans out of an estimated population of 49 million people, and you have an economically strained population. The infrastructure binge hasn't translated to a notable rise in personal incomes for the struggling majority.

In 2013, Kenya owed China about $630 million, a figure that had risen to $5.57 billion (Sh.557 billion) by May 2018. Meanwhile, the country paid back Sh435.7 billion in the 2016/17 financial year, followed by another Sh870 billion, or over 60 per cent of its tax revenue, in the 2017/18 period – a figure that's expected to reach Sh1 trillion in the 2018/19 period.

Meanwhile, the best case scenario for revenue collection stands at Sh1.3 trillion. The Treasury has just revealed that the government expects to collect Sh2.3 trillion by 2022, an unrealistic and highly optimistic figure, given that the country will be borrowing at least a trillion shillings a year from 2019 through 2024 to compensate for falling revenues occasioned by capital flight and the collapse of over 2.2 million small and medium enterprises (SMEs) between 2012 and 2016 alone. The 2016 National Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) Survey found that half a million MSMEs die every year in Kenya due to high operating costs, declining incomes and losses incurred by business, which suggests that the Kenyan economy is not doing well at all.

A struggling economy and a debt estimate of between Sh9 trillion and Sh10 trillion by 2022 – equivalent to 120 per cent of the current 8.65 trillion GDP – is the more likely scenario. There's no doubt that servicing this debt will be a headache for the government and defaults aren't a far-fetched possibility.

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And China, just like it did in Djibouti, Zambia and Hambantota, will seek to extort a lease for strategic assets as a trade-off, key among them being the port of Mombasa that lies on the Silk Belt and Road route.

For a deeply religious country, we overlooked one of the core verses in Proverbs 13:22 about generational wealth. We have auctioned our children's and their children's coastal (and strategically important) inheritance for a worthless piece of rail. Future generations will pay dearly for this mistake.

EARTH AND RUST: The decline of a Kenyan town

I grew up in Kitale. The story of the deterioration of my hometown in the 1990s mirrored the tumultuous decline of just about every factory-dependent town in the country; it was subtle, gradual, almost imperceptible, and forever disguised as the typical wear and tear of urban spaces – but it was more than that. It was thievery, corruption, and disenfranchisement, shoving it down the path of visible decline; a depreciative spectacle masked by rural docility and the often-accepted rural poverty.

First came the increasing cases of theft. These were often acts of burglary that surprised us in their desperation as much as they exasperated the victims by their sheer banality. We had an outhouse in our compound measuring about 8 feet by 11 feet, where we stored farm equipment, tree seedlings, charcoal sacks – pretty much everything that was bulky and intended for outdoor use. At first the break-ins at this outhouse were infrequent, then they happened about once every few months.

The stories from neighborhood increased. In nearly all the incidences there were no guns used, often no attacks, not even violent break-ins – just missing farm tools, stolen livestock, and pilfered homes when the owners had briefly travelled out of town. Once in late 1996, a neighbour's clothes were stolen from the hanging line when she went to work, a theft that fascinated the neighborhood to no end. Who would do such a thing? Why – for heaven's sake? Then there were the stories of food stolen alongside a burning charcoal *jiko* as someone cooked outside the house, a story told with awkward hilarity.

John Kirimaiti, Wanugu, Wacucu and the elite cadre of fascinating gun-toting gangsters were the stuff of distant cities told with near-legend flair that we knew we'd never have to worry about. Our version of burglary was the smell of despondency with a tinge of crude survival, pain and hunger pangs, which drove able-bodied humans to steal anything they deemed to be of market value.

When we first moved to Kitale in the early 1990s we lived at Section Five, a row of patterned townhouses with hedged compounds of cypress, flowers, worldliness and tranquility. Nearby was Matano, consisting of dozens of two storied homes with large balconies, cream walls and wooden doors named in alphabetical order. Bondeni, where we would go ride the swings at the children's playground, was not far either.

My folks were somewhat too extraverted for the austere life of hedged picket fences in that neighborhood, so we moved to Section 21, a well tarmacked, more concrete-y neighborhood lying to the west of the town. The streetlights worked, the town matatus ran the transit service with an efficiency that we, for the longest time, took for granted. We moved again just when private landowners started buying property in Section 21 and setting up unplanned developments.

As Section 21 began to sprawl, it is perhaps not a coincidence that the locals transliterated its name to Tuwani (two-one-i), betraying its deterioration, imbuing it with a villagized name, vibe and life.

Our next neighborhood, Mitume, for the better part of the 1990s was a large piece of land with few houses and lot of grassy fields. Mitume (Kiswahili for apostles) a name likely derived from Christ The King Catholic church parish nearby, was far different from the organized suburb life of Section 21, though it offered a stronger sense of community. Mitume wasn't spared either as slowly, random developments popped up on what was once sprawling grassy fields.

Chipped paint, dirt, and dilapidation slowly ravaged the children play area at the swings at Bondeni estate that we had left behind. The swings grew rusty, then bare-boned and dangerous for kids to play on. Then they got vandalized and whatever remained of them was run into the ground by neglect, swallowed by the earth and rust. Beside it, where dusty paths met collapsing hedges, garbage strewed onto the road from what were once neat, well-ordered homes.

I attended a public school and so did most of our neighbors, and most of our parents were either in the informal sector or worked as civil servants. It's still intriguing how the elders seemed so unaware of just how vulnerable they were to downward mobility given their faithfulness in following every single news item on the radio. How come they didn't see what was coming?

Baba Silas, my friend's dad worked the Kenya Cooperative Creameries (KCC) and so did most of my friend's dads who worked in various parastatals, like Baba Wycliffe, Baba Jaredi and on and on. Somehow our parents' names were hallowed, so they were just ‘Baba nani’ and ‘Mama nani’. Baba Silas – I never got to know his name – carried himself with an air of officiousness, always in a leather jacket, with a slow walk; his neck seemed stiff as he walked, with a slight swagger and a polythene bag at hand. He always carried a polythene bag, I’m not sure why.

He’d lose his job during retrenchment as the parastatals got downsized and then collapsed in the mid-1990s. But I didn’t see him for a while, as we moved from Mitume estate to Lessos, where our parents had bought some land. Lessos estate is named after the Lessos farm in Eldoret, given that the Kalenjin owners who gave the place its name had moved to Kitale from Eldoret.

Set on a ridge overlooking a forest, you could always see the factories in Section 6 and Section 19 on the opposite ridge about four kilometres away, across from Lessos forest in the valley below.

From Lessos, the few remaining factories including a leather tanning factory, Kenya Seed, Western Seed and a dozen other factories let out a low dull hum that on a quiet afternoon reached all the way to our home. Slowly by slowly, the hum grew fainter as the firms collapsed until the sound was no more. But quickly, the silence as it was quickly replaced by the cacophony of human activity, especially a construction boom that hit the estate in the 2000s. The town’s population was rising, properties were becoming smaller and more sub-divided, and unplanned developments were everywhere.

As the hum of factories faded to whimpers, informal businesses in the neighborhoods rose sharply as retrenched workers desperately tried their hands in business, trying to secure an income for their families. Most of them collapsed within months or a few years after inception.

The 1997 elections carried with it a strange sense of camaraderie and hope in the town, partly because multi-party politics had expanded the democratic space and increased a sense of political freedom. Men (and they were mostly men) stood atop old Peugeots and Mazdas, flashing two-finger salutes and yelling in the air, drowning the silent scream of a town choking under the stranglehold of Structural Adjustment Programs.

In 1998 my mum sent me to call over a relative who lived about 40 kilometers away for a job opportunity at a local company – this was before cellphones were a thing. I must have been 10 years old. This relative had already unsuccessfully applied for the job dozens of times. I arrived late in the evening as he worked on his shamba, weeding his *sukuma wiki* and cassava.

''*Hii kazi bwana nimeapply, fare nimetumia mingi na mimi nimechoka, wacha tu nilime*.' (I've applied for this job many times and used so much fare; I'm tired, let me just farm). I was taken aback by the vulnerability on display, his frustration breaking through into an involuntary rant to a 10-year-old.

This time though, he got the three-month gig, which still only paid peanuts and barely provided him with meaningful cash. He'd leave for Kisumu afterwards, then Eldoret, then Nairobi and back to Kitale then Eldoret again.

I would run into Baba Silas in the late 1990s, a few years after he'd been fired from KCC. He looked haggard, tired, his trouser torn at the knees. He was working at a brick-making factory, and I ran into him taking a break under a makeshift grass thatched shade, eating the *mjengo* githeri at lunch time. His sagged chin reflected dignity under assault, he looked shaken to see me, and a bit sad.

Then came the early 2000s and the town broke into a palpable air of difficult-to-justify yet hard-to-dismiss optimism. When Narc luminaries came to Kitale stadium for what would be their only visit to the town before the 2002 elections, I sneaked from home to go watch the revolution happen. I was 13 years old.

"*Hii movement bwana*! It will last for at least 30 years," my relative would tell me matter-of-factly after the momentous event. His life certainly changed. He landed a better paying gig, then got married. His wedding, albeit later in life than was expected, reflected his changing fortunes, much more than anything. We often take for granted how the frequency of social functions such as weddings, birthday parties, cookouts, and get-togethers reflect a rising society.

He'd secure better fortunes across the country, marry, settle down, buy a plot of land, build his home and essentially hit all the markers of adulthood that had eluded him for most of his life, all in a span of eight years in the 2000s.

Unfortunately for Kitale, the town never got to deftly negotiate with the colonial state in ways that could secure it enough resources to help it fully recover. It didn't help that the town's patriarch, Kijana Wamalwa, would pass away a few months into the Narc wave.

Still Kitale continued to grow, the population growing exponentially in the 2000s. During the 2007 post-election violence, given its cosmopolitan makeup, Kitale provided a somewhat safe harbor for those kicked out of their homes in the outlying regions. The population soared but the infrastructure and the vitality of its urban life didn't. I see all that every time I go home.

SHOCK THERAPY: The Rise of Russian Oligarchs (and why Kenya could end up like the former Soviet Union)

When the Aramaic philosopher Jesus Christ declared that the poor will always be with us, I doubt that his Hebrew listeners had a word for austerity. But today Jeffrey Sachs and his friends at the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and all the other organisations that make up the Washington Consensus do, and they are committed to implementing it through Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs).

On March 7 this year, Kenya's Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Henry Rotich, announced that the government was broke. He withdrew that statement a day later after a meeting with IMF officials. Rotich, who was running a broke government that could no longer service its debt, was inevitably forced to sign off to stringent terms, key among them freezing all megaprojects and introducing an amendment to the Division of Revenue Act 2017 that will reduce the amount of cash made available to county governments.

Still addicted to debt pegged on key infrastructure projects, Rotich would hit the road again for a round of begging bowl diplomacy, heading straight to the IMF and World Bank offices. This time, well aware of the potential backlash at home, he assented to IMF demands to levy 16% VAT on fuel that would kick in in September, while rejecting other undisclosed terms for the Sh150 billion forex insurance programme. One wonders why we'd go seeking a forex boost just after the Central Bank of Kenya had announced that it had nearly six months' worth of foreign exchange reserves – enough to cushion shilling trading till February next year.

Before all this was set rolling, a small clause in the Statute Law Miscellaneous Amendment Bill 2018 removed the provision by which privatisation of state assets and parastatals would need National Assembly approval, leaving the privatisation function purely in the hands of the parastatal bureaucrats higher up. Twenty-three key state assets, including a critical port, may be up for sale to the highest bidder. These kinds of moves (mass retrenchment, increased taxes and massive privatisation) all have the hallmarks of the dreaded SAPs.

Sachs and SAPs

SAPs are the ultimate devil's piss: heavily criticised policy recommendations by the Washington Consensus to debt-laden states that are meant to help the latter raise revenue and repay loans. SAPs' raft of policy recommendations to fix national debt include liberalisation of the economy, minimising the role of the state, massive privatisation, currency devaluation, lax market regulation and elimination of subsidies.

However, to understand SAPs, one needs to take a look at its father, Jeffrey Sachs, the economics celebrity who graduated from Harvard with a PhD at the age of 26 and became a global icon on international finance and inflation by age 28.

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Sachs hit stratospheric fame when he walked into the economic blizzard that was then Bolivia, whose peso had been wrecked by a 24,000% inflation, in the 1980s. Within seven weeks, he'd reined in the hyperinflation, with the resultant fame turning him into an economic Jesus Christ.

Read also: DEBT AND TAXES: Kenya is living large on borrowed money

However, that would pretty much be the end of his miracle-working as his recommendations in Poland – his next stop – would prove tenuous and tough on the citizens, wiping out personal savings and spiking both commodity prices and unemployment. Since then, SAPs have failed so miserably across Latin America, Africa and South East Asia that the IMF and the World Bank abandoned them in the mid-1990s – at least in theory – with Mexico being the last victim.

The net effect across a dozen or so countries was the thinning of the middle class, the ripping apart of communities and the unleashing of economic chaos that is yet to be fully fixed. In fact, China and India – two of the top 10 fastest growing nations of the 1990s and 2000s – had flatly rejected SAPs.

SAPs and poverty

A generally accepted fact now, which would have been debatable three decades ago, is that SAPs cause poverty and suffering and sometimes create chaos that descends into violence in the countries where they are implemented. For example, Mexico saw the rise of the Zapatista Army of the National Liberation that protested SAP-style policies in 1994. Since the mid-1980s, when SAPs were first introduced, several other countries nearly went up in flames. Following is a list of a few.

January 1985, JAMAICA – Jamaicans hit the streets in protest after the government's decision to raise fuel prices as part of SAPs linked to a 1982 World Bank loan that was later renegotiated in November 1984.

January-February 1987, ZAMBIA – Riots hit the northern copper mining districts in response to a rise in food prices linked to a SAP announced in December 1986. The programme was eventually suspended.

October-November 1987, SUDAN – Crazy currency devaluation and price hikes resulting from IMF/World Bank demands lead to a 15,000-strong crowd demonstration in Khartoum.

April 1988, NIGERIA – Students in 33 universities hit the streets to protest against a fuel price increase demanded by an IMF-inspired SAP.

1989, BENIN – University of Cotonou students strike to protest suspension of student grants, paralysing the institution for 6 straight months. The government intended to stop paying them altogether in 1989 as part of SAP reforms.

April 1989, JORDAN – Riots over increase in food prices affects southern Jordan shortly after IMF-linked SAPs.

June-August 1999, ECUADOR – A broad coalition of local groups, political parties and civil society organisations, led by indigenous peasants, demand an end to austerity measures imposed by the IMF.

December 1993, RUSSIA – A coalition of parties and interest groups opposed to the neoliberal reform (SAP) measures of the Yeltsin government wins majority parliamentary seats as a result of a backlash against these measures.

Calamitous SAP recommendations have included privatisation of water systems in Tanzania, elimination of food subsidies in post-invasion Iraq, forced student fees in Ghana, lobbying for labour flexibility in Sri Lanka and denying Ecuadorians a much-needed $100-million loan facility on flimsy grounds. The legacy of coercive, painful and often disastrous recommendations in exchange for loan facilities is what's earned SAPs the telling moniker "shock therapy".

Gorbachev and Glasnost

Partly due to its size and complexity, the former Soviet Union still remains the ultimate specimen for the grandiose social engineering delusions that informed the mindset of SAPs' ambassadors around the globe. In the mid-1980s Mikhail Gorbachev set out to create a mixed socialist economy – an imitation of China's "socialism with market characteristics" that was set up by Deng Xiaoping a decade earlier.

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At that point, the Soviet Union was reeling from falling oil prices beginning in 1986 and an external debt crisis. Through a raft of policy decisions, Gorbachev effectively transferred the control of many Soviet enterprises from the government to the *nomenklatura* (employees and management in the provinces) and entrenched those moves into the constitution through the Law on State Enterprise. He followed that up with the Law of Cooperatives that created socialist cooperatives that ran as private entities and later on allowed farmers to farm and trade as individuals – a break from the collective farming model of yesteryears. Once the SAPs reforms were unleashed, there was no going back. In September 1990, the Soviet parliament granted Gorbachev emergency privatisation powers similar to Kenya's Miscellaneous Amendment Bill 2018.

Jeffrey Sachs would show up in Moscow from late December 1991 till his resignation in January 1994. Sachs, who was by then working hand-in-hand with the economic radical faction of Gorbachev's regime, would describe the situation in 1991 thus:

> *"Russia and the other republics bear the deep economic cancer of seven decades of communism: over-extended heavy industry; bloated, bureaucratic enterprises; a starved service sector; and the absence of market institutions, in law, finance, and administration. Now, on top of systemic disease, the republics face a financial crisis…Inflation has become hyperinflation. The foreign-exchange coffers are empty. The old administrative structures have collapsed…A deeper need for industrial retrenchment and restructuring will last for years, even decades, as the former Soviet Union scale back its old heavy industry…"*

Yeltsin and the rise of Russian oligarchs

Gorbachev would soon pave the way for Boris Yeltsin's presidency. In December 1991, in the months leading up to the dissolution of the USSR, Yeltsin put together an economic reform team led by Yegor Gaidar and Anatoly Chubais. By the time of the August Coup a few months later, SAPs, including drastic reforms to social safety nets, were steaming full-speed ahead. On January 2, 1992 Yeltsin, through his economic adviser Gaidar, was forced to declare an end to price controls amidst worsening food shortages tied to the mishandled reforms.

Between 1992 and 1994, market liberalisation, legal reforms, a push for Western aid and privatisation took on a much wider scale. These were engineered by the State Committee for State Property Management of the Russian Federation (SCSPMRF) under Chubais, a firm hand in the entire affair. The Committee adopted a new vehicle for turning over state assets into private hands (known as the voucher privatisation programme) as a means of quickly offloading the fast-crumbling state enterprises, a move that laid the groundwork for the rise of the Russian mafia and the wealthy and corrupt *nomenklatura*. In that three-year period, more than 15,000 Russian government firms were transferred to private hands even though they would, ironically, continue receiving government financial support for years.

The reforms to the decaying Soviet economy couldn't stem the regime's fiscal deficit, and as the 1996 election neared, the cash-strapped Yeltsin regime implemented the loan-for-shares scheme. The scheme, a brainchild of the elite banker Vladimir Potanin, involved leasing state enterprises through auctions for money lent by commercial banks to the government. The rigged system marred by factionalism, nepotism and shady deals raised a whole new pool of oligarchs.

Read also: HUNGER GAMES: Hard Times and Kenya's Looming Economic Crisis

The problems facing the Soviet economy cannot be entirely blamed on Boris Yeltsin though. By the time the Soviet Union started crumbling in 1991, Jeffrey Sachs's recommendations were running into headwinds and some of the assumptions, including securing large-scale Western assistance, were being downplayed by IMF's point man, John Odling Smee. Sachs's call for fiscal and monetary reforms failed to take into account the complexity of the Soviet bureaucracy and his call for reforms in social services failed to anticipate the rapid collapse of the healthcare sector. In the end, four classes of elites were created: the Communist Party patriarchs; the sleazy oligarchs trading in the smuggled goods; the *nomenklatura* (administrative) barons in the provinces as more enterprises got localised; and the younger relatives of these elites and a few educated and well-connected citizens.

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Yeltsin ruled Russia through his close allies known as the Semibankirschina (or seven bankers), a team of powerful, visible and influential oligarchs who controlled roughly 71% of all Russian finances by the year 2000. The seven bankers – Vladimir Vinogradov Boris Berezovsky, Mikhail Fridman, Pyotr Aven, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Vladimir Potanin, and Vitaly Malkin Alexander Smolensky, and Vladimir Gusinsky – shaped Yeltsin's regime.

Anatoly Chubais (aided by the Russian-American Prof. Andrei Shleifer) is known as the father of the neoliberal SAP reforms, having been the patriarch in charge during the era of Soviet reform efforts. Chubais and Gaidar led a process that was similar to former President Moi's "Dream Team" in the 1990s. What started out as a simple process of reforming the rapidly decaying Soviet economy descended into kleptocratic and opaque processes driven by mafia bosses, rising well-connected kids, Soviet political patriarchs, relatives of senior administrators and Western apparatchiks.

Enter Putin

Enter the oligarch purge by Vladimir Putin. Just like Yeltsin, Putin had his gang of seven, dubbed Ozero, with whom he had built dachas on Lake Ladoga's shoreline. In 1996, while Yeltsin met with his oligarchs, Putin took his Ozero gang (all natives of St. Petersburg) on a road trip to the Karelian Isthmus, a wealthy coastal suburb from where they reminisced the changing political fortunes of the country.

Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin was a consummate spy. He joined the Soviet government under Yuri Andopov in 1975, who during his tenure as the head of KGB, devised the plan to inject the espionage juggernaut with fresh blood. Putin has always had the uncanny fate of playing the outsider in just about anything he gets into. He was an outsider among the business elite in Ozero, a geographical outsider among the Moscow elites, an outsider even in the KGB where he was posted to Dresden, Germany's third largest city, as opposed to Moscow, which was the heart of communist idiosyncrasies. He was even an outsider to Michael

Gorbachev's reformist programmes (Perestroika, Glasnost and *uskoreniye),* having received his letter to relocate to Dresden in mid-1985 just as Gorbachev was ascending to power in Moscow.

Putin showed up in the Soviet Union in early 1990 having watched communism convulse in Eastern Europe and having first-hand experience of how "the Soviet was silent at home", a reference to the moment he called for back-up during an attack at the local communist offices in Dresden and received none. When he was back in the Soviet Union, he headed back to St Petersburg (then known as Leningrad) where he becomes the deputy mayor. It was only at the end of his tenure in 1996 that he was brought to Moscow to keep an eye and prepare dossiers on rogue oligarchs. Three years later, he becomes the Prime Minister after the sudden resignation of Boris Yeltsin.

Putin's "outsiderism" shielded him from building personal ties with the oligarchs, a position that gave him a dispassionate capacity to rein them in with the dossier he, by a twist of fate, had prepared. Unlike the insiders who'd experienced all the glories and pains of Soviet culture and life, Putin, based in Dresden, saw in the Soviet Union's fall a humiliating indictment of his predecessor's incompetence and the myopia of the Moscow elite.

Of the gang of seven under Yeltsin, only four would survive under Putin and, surprisingly, Putin would build his own team of oligarchs, including members of the Ozero, the most famous among them being Usmanov, Abramovich, Alekpetrov, Yeltsin-era Potanin, and Vitaly Malkin. (The US Treasury lists at least 96 oligarchs in Russia.)

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Kenya and its oligarchs

Nothing generates oligarchs better than corruption and privatisation, and Kenya, just like the Soviet Union in the 1990s, is no stranger to this phenomenon. In

August this year, Kenyan detectives announced that they were pursuing officials at the Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA), the Kenya Ports Authority (KPA), the Inland Container Depot (ICD) and the Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS) over a 100-billion-shillings tax evasion scam. Such multi-billion scams signal state capture by oligarchs, which tends to open up the economy to counterfeit and contraband goods imported through collusion with state officials.

The riskier dynamic in the privatisation process and the mega-corruption scandals reminiscent of the Soviet-era fire-sale and smuggling, is that they only benefit a few highly liquid and well-connected native elite, marauding White Capital, corrupt government officials and wealthy families. Keep in mind that Kenya has been ranked eighth globally and sixth in Africa among countries with the largest number of people living in extreme poverty, based on the World Poverty Clock report. The report indicates that 29 per cent (14.7 million) of Kenya’s 49,684,300 people are extremely poor as they consume less than $1.90 (Sh195) per day or Sh5,920 monthly.

A combination of mass privatisation of key state assets and austerity measures are known to destroy the social tunnels needed to usher people into a middle-class existence; they effectively create a country with unassailable oligarchs and a massive underclass.

All this isn’t new though; as a colonial state, Kenya is already defined by a plantation economy, primitive elites, layered overlapping traumas, high poverty levels, and broken systems. It is likely to get worse.

MAN ENOUGH: Journeying Through Millennial Masculinity

The problem with becoming a man is that no one really teaches you how to live it out, partly because everyone will do masculinity in their own unique ways. But most importantly masculinity is really about the humanity of men and like all personhood, it carries in it the glories of personal questions, angsts, fears, and the pitfalls of a fallen soul in a complex world where up is sometimes down and down is sometimes up.

Masculinity is about being human. It is a core aspect of the male identity. My own personal journey of identification has always been a constant fight to shed off the resultant outcomes of falsely understood masculinity as a medal granted after fulfilling a 'real man is' kind of to-do-list. It does not help that for the most part the social hyper masculine man has been treated as the ideal while we of the nerdy, bookish, sensitive type males are seen as less masculine. Falling for the trap that sees ideal manliness as a forceful, public demonstrative role has forced many of the younger males who don't fit the macho image to incessantly pursue ways to caricature a gendered identity. This in turn renders male identity to be posturized and performative rather than authentic and human.

It's honestly a murky struggle navigating a world which observes the role of manhood as a performance rather than a human identity. The maxim, 'a real man' lends credence to manliness as a status; a hierarchical symbol achieved through jumping through subjective, socially instigated loops is disingenuous in character and practice. I personally consider maleness in all its variations as a complex identarian facet with different idiosyncrasies, insecurities, shortcomings, and desires.

According to J.R. Macnamara, in, *Media and the Male Identity: The Making and Remaking of Men,* less than 20% of media profiles reflect positive themes in depicting men and manhood. Violent crimes, including murder, assault, and armed robberies account for over 55% of all media reporting of what we males are thought to do. He also opines that over 30% of all male sexuality discussions in the media tend to be in relation to paedophilia, moreover, male heterosexuality is seen as violent, aggressive and domineering.

Over six months, the study involved a detailed analysis of over 2,000 media articles and program segments and an extensive content analysis of mass media portrayals of men and male identity focusing on news, features, current affairs, talk shows and lifestyle media.

By volume, 69 per cent of mass media reporting and commentary on our identity as males was unfavourable, compared with just 12 per cent favourable and 19 per cent neutral or balanced. Some of the recurring themes in the media content portrayed men as violent, sexually abusive, unable to be trusted with children, 'deadbeat dads', and commitment phobic and in need of 're-construction'.

"*We are predominantly reported or portrayed in mass media as villains, aggressors, perverts and philanderers, with more than 75 per cent of all mass media representations of men and male identity showing men in on one of these four ways,*" Dr Macnamara says.

These perceptions and archetypes of manhood that are repeatedly endorsed by the media fraternity are incredibly damaging to the younger men whose concept of being a man is still forming. They live in a culture that continually treats them like defective girls according to Christina Hoff Sommers. This is a culture that equates masculine gender with propensity to violence, corruption, and other social ills. I empathise with men who are younger than me because the slant reporting and onslaught adds psychic violence to the neglect.

So acceptable has it become to view our male identity as a modern day pathology that even though fatherhood, we are often told, is important, few fathers tend to be home. Even then you'd think that fatherlessness is solely about derelict dads. It isn't. Father absence is primarily about a culture that has little regard for the male parent and the role they play in children's lives.

This modern society has no qualms publishing titles like *'Are fathers necessary?* right on the front page of global dailies, and '*The End of Men*'. This same society is influenced by gushing, well-resourced militant and hostile attitudes in academia, media fraternity and the public sphere more broadly, which are filled with manufactured performative rage, misplaced resentment and sentiments that share in a collective hatred for anything male or masculine.

As young Kenyans, it's even harder to centre our male identity within the global paradigm that views African masculinities through the lenses of fetishism on a good day and pathology every other day and twice on Sunday. It has become acceptable to ignore any male struggle denying it human empathy and identification because men, we are forever reminded have historically oppressed women. What is preferred is to ignore or downplay the role that reinforced trauma has done to African masculinity through the triple axis of slave trade, colonial racism and modern day criminalisation of blackness, and male blackness in particular.

These traumas for the most part accompanied by the muddled-and murky-gender power dynamics and relational confusion thanks to the “hook-up” culture and its societal wreckages have left my generation of men grappling with listlessness. I see this quandary all the time; the pressure to demonstrate material capacity within the gendered mating dance; the irony that in the dating market patriarchal men still rule the roost. Surprisingly male desirability is still tied to patriarchal ideals and pretensions, top among them displaying alpha tendencies, and hyper-maleness both in personality, phenotypically, and socioeconomic capacity.

Being countercultural as a man means getting comfortable with not having to embrace these popular, pre-packaged male identities and making peace with the fact that the alpha/beta males theory after all only applies to wolves, peacock, and maybe in the crab patriarchy, but not humans.

That, my masculinity is informed by my personality, history, worldview, messiness, pain and relief, answers (or lack thereof) and a litany of endless variables has meant that I’ve had to learn to be comfortable in who I am as a millennial man in a world that wants to mass produce men within a fetishized hyper-masculine ideal. Eff it! Sounds like my attitude and honestly, it’s the relieving end-point in my journey of trying to be a millennial man or often just a man.

Looking at my father’s generation their role(s) largely imploded into one bucket, that of providers. However, the changing relational dynamics has meant that this role within modern coupling has been split three-ways to accommodate the distinct aspects of functional responsibility for males; economic providers, good fathers, and active lovers/mates.

As an African man in a fast-changing social environment where gendered spectrums get widened by the day, I’m keenly aware of the stark portrayal of masculinity as a problem to be fixed; as a pathology; a flawed notion in its entirety, suspect and prone to incivility and violence. This is such a disempowering legacy and it exasperates me daily on how it’s politically correct to talk about men in animalistic precambrian references. Truth is, every time we, young men feel emasculated and disempowered we are likely to react with passivity or perversion; an outcome that further entrenches the belief in the inherent evil(ness) of masculinity. The perversion often takes the form of gambling, alcoholism, porn, lewdness, and sometimes-outright violence.

Contra intuitively we seem to regard femininities as inherently good, that's why we tell men to get in touch with their feminine side; a call word for becoming good in a rather twisted view of virtue, identity and vice. Thanks to this incessant demonization, by now, it's becoming manifestly clear that more and more young men-tired of the vilification-are opting out of any meaningful economic or social contribution to society.

These are the reasons as to why I am often skeptical of these programs seeking to mentor young men. Most of them fall for the misconstrued idea that it is we the young males, rather than our environment which is the problem. It is of little use to encourage young men to be healthily masculine and noble in a culture that continually treats masculinity, in all its forms as bothersome, defective and unnecessary.

Growing up in a rural working class community, my upbringing and economic opportunities though markedly fewer, still count as a lot compared to the massive underclass of millennial men that I see around me. There also exists this massive contrast between the economic capacity expected of males as sold by advertisements and mass media vis-à-vis my economic fortune and that of the many males my age. Between commercialised manliness and the everyday lived experience of your average man, there exists this wide chasm filled with despair and depression among those who don't see themselves fitting into the popular archetype of the wealthy male. Then there are also those who see in themselves the need to play capitalist racketeering to shore up their masculine desirability within the romance market and greater society.

My fortunes look a bit better compared to the boys I used to mentor in Gaza, Kayole a few years back-some of whom got felled by the dreaded Flying Squad. In them, I saw providence having placed me a little above their lot-which ties them to the perennial tag of suspects. The irony within Kenyan masculinities is that while criminal masculinities is top heavy, made up of who's who in the politics, trade, academia and civil society, the actual criminalised masculinity is made up of faceless, often nameless teenage boys in slums – pinned down by economic racism, negative ethnicity, and classism – who linger awaiting the anti-crime police units to snuff their lives under any pretext.

Meanwhile, with my university education, relative exposure, a bit of socioeconomic wiggle room and social stratification I exist in the eye of that quandary, while playing the role of a temporary arbiter with my fate tied to whether I effect an upward or downward mobility.

No doubt that the successive generational trauma tied to black masculine pains and tragedies often goes unacknowledged and sometimes derided. I have had to unshackle myself from the toxic strain of manhood that comes with the stiff stoicism manifested by our father's generation. I talk about my mental health when I need to and I reject the idea that women are more emotionally attuned and expressive. I see emotional expression not as a feminine ideal to grasp for, but as a mere human instinct.

I have alongside friends and acquaintances explored the complexities of PTSD as a natural mental and emotional reality. Depression, especially in men my age-late twenties-often goes unnoticed, and rarely acknowledged. We have no problem getting in touch with the humanity of our male identity and the occasional need for remedies in moments when mental stress reflects through too much or too little sleep, physical pain and stress, irritability, and even unprovoked aggressiveness.

There exists 3.6 billion masculinities out in the world, and any attempt to tie any man down to clustered and cloistered stratifications masquerading as manliness whether through media portrayal, functional roles or fetishized notions is violence. As a man I am free to explore, live, interact and interpret my male identity based on who I am and view myself, disregarding all the 'a real man does/is…' sensibilities that populate popular conversations about the male gender.

I see being a man as being true to self, embracing it as such and flatly rejecting any populist social constructions that seek to replace character with achievement as the standard for manliness; a prospect that has many young men killing their souls in pursuit of insane wealth and power. Thankfully more young men are becoming accepting of their own versions of maleness and stubbornly deflecting the pressure that comes with materialism as the standard for masculine desirability especially in the marriage eco-system.

Living up to your values as a millennial man means standing up to-not toxic masculinity, first and foremost-but demonisation of manliness. Gendered identity is about context and the context we live in-much as male privilege remains a popular epithet-it only seems to work for upper class men. These powerful men are the manufactured native elite that not only does the bidding of the foreign white man but has an insatiable desire to be like them.

To further complicate modern African male identities, the economic deprivation, thanks to the current mafia state upheld by the three criminal dynasties and the rising impetuous 'hustler dynasty', limits opportunities to a select few. Accepting that I still live in a largely poor, largely rural, largely young, largely uneducated society where few males get to achieve their dreams is a tragic spectacle especially in a still largely hypergamous nation.

Maybe we are the generation of men that will finally demand the humanization of manliness, and put an end to the demonization of masculinity-though this will be hard because it pays bills in some quarters. We'll have to acknowledge the successive traumas inflicted on our African manliness and end the misperceptions that have riddled the African male identity in all its forms and fashions. At the end of the day, there's no such thing as a real man, there is just every man existing in his own contradictions, aches, triumphs and complexities the best way he knows how.

The Revolution Shall Not Be Instagrammed

I was born in March of 1989, just two years before the term millennial was coined by William Strauss and Neil Howe in 1991, three years before Bill Clinton, the neoliberal icon, took over the most powerful presidency on earth and right on the throes of agitation for a multiparty democracy in Kenya.

I was shipped off to boarding school at 11 years which meant I became a young, distant observer to the events and transitions of life both at the family, and national level including the rise of rural modernity in the early 2000s, inspired by the power of the motorbike, the money transfer platform MPESA, and the changing political dynamics.

One midmorning in late August 1996, then a lower primary school kid at Kitale Union Primary School, I had my premature induction into the murky world of Kenyan politics via the hordes of retrenched industrial workers huddled in small groups, whispering, biting their lower lips, most of them looking over their shoulders.

Kitale town, then, was simply a one-main-street, end-of-the-rail town taped together by two dozen (mostly Indian owned) shops, several colonial era schools, the selfless public housing and the imposing structures of the traditional mainline churches like AIC, Roman Catholic, and PCEA. In the subsequent years, after the massive retrenchment, the once promising town sunk into a decaying ghost as the basic economic sustenance of the town; the parastatals like KCC (Kenya Co-operative Creameries), NCPB (National Cereals and Produce Board), Kenya Seed and the large scale ADC (Agricultural Development Complexes) were downsized, collapsed or privatized thanks to the infamous Structural Adjustment program(SAP).

In one major swoop, the corporations that held the town together had been massively shaken, irrevocably altering the socioeconomic soul of the town. World Bank, IMF and other catchphrases that either I cannot recall or could not comprehend then, peppered their conversations. But what set the narrative on a new lane was a conversation one evening between my mom and my uncle, Barnabas. On and on, they would list the names of friends and family who had lost their sustenance due to the economic and political mess. Then, my uncle offhandedly said, *'huyu jamaa ameharibu maneno'* in reference to a certain powerful politician. My then young, blissful, unthinking mind parroted back.' *Huyo ni mbaya.'* Their reaction was swift and unnerving. Even as a kid, the angst in their adult eyes was something they could not for a moment hide from me.

My then young mind could not wrap itself around the complex issues and the layers of emotions that defined the perils of the time. It must have been flinching for them to hear the spirit of the time parroted by a young soul and stripped of the euphemisms, artificiality and colloquiallity of adult conversation. What was however clear, was that I had mentioned something that for reasons I could not understand then I was not supposed to have uttered.

The 2003 euphoria found me, then a spry young 14 years old high school student, in the throes of what would have this country ranked as having one of the most optimistic citizenry in the world. The Kibaki regime, coming in at the tail end of the Moi regime to upstage Moi's choice of a young-barely known-son of the first president, was a political earthquake unlikely to be recreated ever again.

Unfortunately, this high noon of political bliss would fizzle out fast, as the coalition would soon run into organizational trouble just after the demise of the then Vice President, Kijana Wamalwa who till then remained the most powerful politician from my hometown, Kitale. Kibaki would dishonour the NARC MoU as he increasingly retreated to his ethnic corner and darkened his legacy by resuscitating the Mt. Kenya Mafia. These MKM who had been torpedoed by Njonjo in 1978 when he gave Moi the presidency found a new lease of life in Kibaki post-2003 presidency.

Their primitive accumulation of wealth, ethnic superiority complex and contempt for anyone not from the slopes of Mt. Kenya is a terrible legacy that should have never been allowed to return into our national discourse. Unfortunately, ideological privilege combined with a siege mentality of their supporters had allowed them to establish a mal-adaptive ethno-supremacist regime. By the time the 2005 referendum came around, they had established an us-vs-them narrative and *Uthamakism* made its way back into our lexicon and corridors of power.

I have always been clear that *Uthamakism* is a monarchical structure that operates as gangland style territorialism primarily through state capture, ethnic bigotry, as well as tentacle and skewed economic interests. At this point, their self-interest is so intertwined with the state's interests that it is virtually impossible to oust them. This *Uthamakism* is the Kenyan version of deep state that will always be more than willing to subvert democracy when it goes against their interests, biases, and preferences.

Even the next major political event in Kenya-the 2010 Constitution inauguration-could not pack enough patriotic punch to inspire a deeply frayed nation whose conscience had further been burdened by the 2007 skirmishes that intensely tore apart the illusion of the island of peace long peddled through the 90s.

I left campus in 2012 and joined the job market right at the tail end of the

Kibakinomics economic upswing. The boom-a combination of higher education boom, real estate, banking, telecoms, money transfer and the revolutionary motorbikes- had for a moment set this nation on a path to seeming prosperity. In retrospect it did not occur to me just how bad the labor market was, given that I would land my first job 4 months after leaving campus. My fellow millennials have fared-and continue to fare-worse than I could imagine. Like everyone else in my generation, thanks to a confluence of forces-some decades in the making, we (millennials) are now facing the scariest financial future of any generation and just like my peers, I am finding it increasingly difficult not to be scared about the future, anxious about the present, and angry at the failings of the older generations.

I am 29 years old, a middle millennial if you will-and for the last five years since I left campus- a period in which I have been a staffer in a modern, centre-right church, ran a couple of creative gigs, written two books, and reinvented myself as a public scholar and a commercial writer-the labour market has continued to worsen to a full blown crisis.

In those six years, I've been waiting to start adulting, just like my father did, yet unlike him as I stare at the proverbial third floor I am increasingly aware of the power of societal outcomes to shape personal fortune especially as regards the five markers of adulting. As a millennial I have well-founded respect for context even as I weigh myself against him, who at my current age, 29 years, bore me as his 3rd child, besides having just bought a plot of land and had already risen to the rank of an acting head teacher.

Millennials, unless otherwise stated, is a term that refers to anyone born between 1982 and 2004 and if editorials are anything to go by, then we are considered a disappointment. We have all heard the narrative, millennials are entitled, tech savvy, easily bored, flighty and have failed in the five common markers of adulting – finishing school, getting a job, marrying, raising a family and saving for the future. Honestly in these five benchmarks I have got a mixed score and occasionally I've marinated in private shame thanks to the pervasive myth of personal effort alone in shaping life outcomes as peddled by the prosperity gospel on the religious side and the secularist positive thinking movement on the other hand.

The millennial bashing script often reads like capitalism's disappointment that we did not turn into the reckless consumer cluster that they anticipated we will be when they branded us in 1991. The millennial narrative-for the most part-ignores the existential pain of being young in a flailing society, and the attendant youthful anxiety, grief, struggle and fears while amplifying the trivial and dehumanizing aspects of generational clustering such as tastes, habits and preferences.

Unfortunately these generalizations, just like those of any other generational group fails to account for wide variations in individual and group-wide dynamics. Being a millennial also means having to constantly remind Gen X and Boomers that contrary to clichés about us, a vast majority of our peers have not gone to university, do not get paying gigs regularly, and cannot depend on our folks. Only a tiny minority fit these peddled stereotypes.

What defines us is not Java Cafe, Instagram, or any sense of entitlement. It’s UNCERTAINTY.

What is a Generation?

The assumption inherent in my reflections here is that a generation is mostly defined by biological comradeship built on small age variations. However in ‘the problem of generations’ sociologist Karl Mannheim, in 1927, pointed out that a generation is something like a social class: an objective, structuring social fact. If the objective aspects of class were economic, those of generations were biological. However mere biological coincidences are not enough to form a generation. A certain age cluster born around the same time only becomes a generation when they develop an actual peer bond thanks to a specific political, moral, spiritual, economic, geographical or social event that knits them together into largely observable mind-sets and worldviews.

Within such contextualization, I would then say that the Kenyan Gen X (45-60) only acted as a generation between 1990-2002 when the SAPS united them in sedative leisure of booze, longing for emigration abroad, sex and despondency. However such a short span of generation formation (whose effects were mitigated by the helicopter nation-state parenting of Kenya by the United States through Bretton Woods institutions) wasn’t enough to forment a generational bond. By the year 2000 as the economic boom kicked in, the 90s kids went separate ways and their process of generation formation got torpedoed. That is why many of them, drunken with hyper-individualism and failure to think generationally, are busy screwing the economy through privatization and the neoliberal onslaught.

For we millennials, our ‘generation formation’, is taking place in the crucible of a flailing global finance at the end of capitalism as we’ve known it, a period that has us trapped in eternal adultescence in which we are no longer kids and neither do we fully possess the social markers of adulthood. And the circumstances we live in are direr than most people realize. All around us the social safety nets-education, housing, and health care-have now become financially unattainable even as the paths to respectable financial existence are becoming expensive, illegal or hoarded.

For we millennials, there are many living in poverty and struggle even as more are at risk of falling into despair. This is why nations invent welfare plans and firm-up their social safety nets. In healthy, functional societies, quality, affordable public social services such as water, sanitation, security, healthcare, and education are considered human rights not mere market products. They are supposed to be the paths that can help kids, irrespective of their circumstance of birth to transcend family status and become upwardly mobile.

The first inkling that we are living in the ‘new 90s’ defined by stagnating economy, stunted growth and rampant corruption would come a few months after I quit my first job as a church staffer, at the tail end of 2014. Most of the vacancy applications that I sent out would go unresponded to even without a mere ‘well received’ feedback. And the statistics were there to back me up-albeit 3 years later. According to a December 2017 job report, 53% of those polled were unemployed, with 86% of the unemployed being between 18-34 years. The job market is depressing and despite all this talk about the internet revolution and gigs, if nothing changes, my generation will walk into our 40 and 50s with a career consisting of a long list of unrelated low-skilled, low-wage, short-term, temp jobs, living financially insecure lives and not qualified for any job particular. It is no longer strange to hear of those who have not landed a job, three even five years, after leaving campus.

Around the same period, that the report was released I ran a viral Twitter thread dubbed #UnemploymetDisasterKe that garnered 736k impressions within 9 days. Employers would write to me in private about how they no longer advertise the vacancies because of the massive deluge of CVs that would come in. One employer mentioned how he got 2045 CVs for 15 positions while another mentioned receiving 711 CVs for 7 clerical positions. It's a numbers game and there just aren't enough quality jobs for millennials out here.

When it comes to schooling, currently, barely 10% of those who finish high school are able to join tertiary institutions. This means roughly half a million Kenyans wind up in the job market, young, inexperienced and not properly schooled. Meanwhile, an estimated 900 000 Kenyans turn 18 years every year. Tragically, the current fascist regime is well invested in destroying the already bust education economy, a mess reflected in the fact that university enrolment has dropped by a third in 2018.

Meanwhile, at the workplaces around the country, the scourge of managerialism that treats supervisory and management skills as superior and thus better remunerated than technical skills has dis-incentivized millennials from joining - Technical, Vocational and Education and Training (TVET) institutions in favour of the funneled University education.

Quality education, one of the most viable social safety nets for the poor, has been yanked and compromised, privatized and priced out of reach of many in the society. This generation not only has to deal with a failing labour market, they are in turn walking into the future as largely uneducated-in a society in which education is a strong predictor of good incomes.

To be a millennial in this country is to be acquainted with lack, plagued by economic insecurity, and to be eternally haunted by the prospects of poverty and as Michael Hobbes, a millennial writer opines, becoming poor is not an event. It is a process. Like a plane crash, poverty is rarely caused by one thing going wrong. Usually, it is a series of misfortunes—a job loss, then a car accident, then an eviction—that interact and compound.

One aspect of millennial life that we rarely look into is just how much it matters what accidental advantages one accumulates at birth i.e. postcode lottery. The underlying force is the ever ignored role of inherited (dis)advantages in which, being born into a stable, well-to-do family avails certain nutritional, economic, financial, and academic advantages that gives you a leg up in the race of life. It is the nature of life dynamics that in a tough economy with dwindling opportunities, children born into abundance or as Warren Buffet calls them 'the lucky sperm club' have a surer head start than ever.

Add the current rigged economy, unbelievable corruption and the floundering nation-state, and there's no doubt that we are walking into a period where, while there still exists accelerating advantages for the upper class millennials, the middle class millennials have a tricky dance with fate and risk downward mobility, while the poor millennials have to face the reality of compounding disadvantages.

To have an undergraduate degree in this country, at this point, means to be among the 700, 000 degreed Kenyans while a Master's degree puts you further up in the apex of society given that as of 2014 only 40,173 students enrolled in master's programmes and 4,394 in PhD courses. Even then a degree does not protect you from the context of entry into adult life, given that it matters in what kind of a public environment you turn into adulthood. Turning into a young adult in the middle of a boom like the 99-2010 upswing avails massive job and investment opportunities, which comes with the potential for saving and accumulation of economic and professional advantages in yours 20s and 30s that often compounds over a lifetime. Conversely, turning into adulthood in post-2012 Kenya-like I did-has meant that the advantages I gained as the son of rural, professional parents in a nominally catholic family at birth were neutralized by the downward swing in the labour market at the throes of adulthood.

The reason, we millennials seem stuck in some sort of extended adolescence is because we are trying to succeed within a system that no longer has all the pipelines that ushered youths into adulthood. The rungs needed to finance an education, get a respectable job with a decent salary, then raise a family have been yanked away, the rules have changed, and now we are left playing a game that is virtually designed to make us lose.

Not only are most of my peers jobless or underemployed, we are getting jobs later, we start earning less money, we are not able to save thanks to sky-high bills, we accumulate more loans from shylocks to stay afloat, buying a home is only possible for a tiny, negligible minority of millennials and unless the current system gives way, few of us millennials will survive the onslaught. Meanwhile, the current regime has added over $20 billion debt burden on our society within 5 years, in the absence of a major crisis like civil war or natural disaster – and with little to show for it, turning us into a multi-decade Creditopolis.

What are our options then? We millennials have legitimate and genuine grievance and methods of expressing displeasure but we have not conjoined the two with an ideology like our peers who run the revolutionary *sang* culture among Chinese millennials, the *Corbyn populism* among the UK millennials, *Geracao a Rasca* among the Portuguese millennials, *Juvetud Sin Futuro* in Spain and a whole host of other millennial ideological movements around the world who are framing their struggle as class-based and generational.

There are three illusions that prevent many Kenyan millennials from organizing: one, is, this is temporary, we'll ride it out: two, I'll prosper and leave all other millennial strugglers behind: three, I'm the only one caught in this mess, so it's my private shame. Truth is, study after study show you are wrong on the first count, have minimal chances of achieving the second, and you would be surprised how many of us are out here stuck in the third.

Given the skewed, nepotistic, violent, and predatory nature of the current system, the only option left for us Kenyan millennials is to imitate our peers around the world and set in motion a MILLENIAL REVOLUTION otherwise we are toast. And it's the least we are ENTITLED to.