



Betrayal in Wuhan City: Is the Love Affair Between Uhuru and the Kikuyus Over?

By Dauti Kahura



Last week, my friend Njuguna called to tell me he wanted us to meet. I went to their home in Gitaru, not too far from the Nairobi-Nakuru highway and 15 km from the Nairobi city centre. The family was going to have a Skype call with their kid sister, who is now marooned in Wuhan city in Hubei Province, central China.

Six years ago, after Nyambura finished her high school studies, the family put together their resources to send her to China to study medicine, something she had always dreamed of doing. Last December, she graduated from university as a physician and even found a temporary job at a local hospital. Last November, she told her eldest brother Njuguna that she wanted to gain some experience and earn some money before coming home.

Then the coronavirus explosion happened and her life was turned topsy-turvy.

Nyambura told her family that COVID-19 was possibly detected in mid-November in Wuhan, but when it could not be kept under wraps for too long by the Chinese authorities - as they figured out how to control and manage it - the authorities were forced to report the first infection cases after Christmas 2019.

Now, talking to her family from some street corner in Wuhan city, Nyambura was sobbing on Skype,

beseeking her family to save her life and not abandon her. On seeing her home and family, she broke down and wept uncontrollably. She thought of how she would have been safe and sound at home among her family, among people she would feel secure with, in her country, where she would mingle and walk freely without fear of being beaten, insulted and harassed for being a foreigner.

She asked her family to send her money for food. After the Chinese authorities went rogue on Africans about a fortnight ago, she was tossed out of her apartment and thrown out of the hospital where she was working as a registrar. She was now living on the streets; a fully trained doctor, homeless, penniless, and cowering under the brutalities of a racist regime that her government was scared of confronting.

“The unkempt kids that live and scrounge on the streets of Nairobi are 100 times better than me here in Wuhan,” said a tearful Nyambura. “They are scrounging at home in the full knowledge that nobody will beat them, they scrounge among their people and even though the street boys and girls can be rogue, the people can never disown them, or even beat them recklessly, no one would ever allow that.” In China, said Nyambura, the blacks were being treated like stray cats.

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Describing the current situation in China, Nyambura said the country had become a nightmare for Africans, for Kenyans, for anybody with black pigmentation. But she could not believe the extent to which the Kenyan government feared the Chinese, the extent to which the Kenyan government was ready to abandon and disown its people. “At least the Nigerian embassy has registered its displeasure with the Chinese authorities, stood with its people and asked the Nigerian representatives to collect the names of all the Nigerians in Wuhan for safe evacuation. Right now to be a Kenyan in Wuhan, or indeed elsewhere in China, is akin to abandonment, to statelessness, to be entirely on your own, to have been sacrificed,” said the physician.

“Why is Sarah Serem [the Kenyan ambassador to China] lying? Why?” sobbed Nyambura to her family. “She’s been telling you that the people who have been thrown out of their houses, who are being kicked around and beaten up and button-holed are illegal migrants, Kenyans who supposedly are without papers...these are outright lies. Am I illegal in China? Am I not in the streets? Don’t I have all the papers? Why is she lying to Kenyans?”

But assuming the Kenyans in China are indeed illegally here, posed Nyambura, “doesn’t an ‘illegal’ Kenyan have rights? Doesn’t she have a life worthy of being protected? Doesn’t she require representation from her government? A Kenyan in a foreign country, whether illegal or legal is a Kenyan. Civilized and thinking governments first don’t stop to ask whether their people stuck in some foreign country are illegal or legal. They move in to evacuate and protect them...they can later on, if it’s really necessary, deal with the issues of how and why they went to that county in the first place after they are finally home safe.”

Diplomats are people who are employed by their respective governments to officially lie on their behalf. “But what [Ambassador] Macharia Kamau [the Principal Secretary in the Foreign Affairs Ministry] and Serem are doing is denying our existence, calling us all manner of names, pandering to Chinese authorities’ whims. It is the worst thing a government can do to its people,” said a crying Nyambura. “To think that we have a responsible government...to believe that the government cared for its people...we’ve all along been cheated and fooled...it’s been a con-game through and through,”

trailed off the physician.

The family asked her why the Chinese authorities suddenly found it fit to openly discriminate and harass the Africans. “You know when coronavirus first manifested itself, for some unexplained reason, it did not affect and infect Africans, or more correctly, black people, in China. As the Chinese were getting ravaged by the deadly disease, black people went about their business, unperturbed, apparently, oblivious of the malaise. It, therefore, seems to me, to their chagrin, the Chinese were really irked by this state of affairs. They thought, ‘Why is it that we the Chinese (who believe they are superior to the black race) are dying off, yet these blacks seems to be immune?’ they wondered.”

After the conversation, which lasted something like 45 minutes, Nyambura’s family was distraught, fraught with fear and foreboding. As is wont with many families, they bent their heads and fervently prayed for their sister and imploring the Lord God to “ring her life with the mighty blood of Jesus”.

The Njuguna family not only voted for Uhuru Kenyatta three times, it vigorously campaigned for him and the Jubilee Party. I know this because Njuguna and I have known each other for quite some time now. But thinking about the predicament of his youngest sister thousands of kilometres away has made him question his choices. “What kind of government do we have?” (He was not asking me, he was thinking aloud.) “What does Macharia mean when he says hiring a plane is not like hiring a matatu? When Serem disowns Kenyans in China. What’s going on in her head?”

In 2017, we had many arguments and conversations regarding that year’s presidential elections on August 8. I was sceptical about Uhuru’s re-election and he was cocksure that his fortunes, and that of his family, would rise. “How?” I kept on asking him. His response: “The Chinese are building a highway outside our village. It’s going to change our fortunes.”

Two years into President Uhuru Kenyatta’s second term, the project has not only stalled, but Njuguna does not want to hear anything to do with Uhuru or the Chinese.

When the Chinese started constructing the section on Gitaru, there was a huge uproar among Gitaru villagers. The villagers accused the Chinese of not employing any of their kith and kin. “The Chinese were doing everything, including the simplest of tasks, like dredging the tunnels, driving the trucks and even using the theodolite,” Njuguna recalled. “The local people went to complain to the local administration and the Chinese were asked to be considerate.”

“Do you know why the road has stopped?” asked Njuguna. “It is because Uhuru’s government has delayed paying the property owners their dues to allow the Chinese contractor to expand the road by building drainage that needs to build first. The people are so angry they don’t want to hear about Uhuru and his Jubilee Party government.”

“The Kikuyu people are bewitched,” mused Njuguna. “How do you explain the fact that one family has been able to control the thinking of an entire group for so long?”

I asked him whether he had been bewitched during the 2013 and 2017 elections. He said yes. “How else can I explain my total conviction in Uhuru’s presidency without wanting to brook any contrary opinion? My sister being stuck in China is the last straw that broke the camel’s back. We are through with Uhuru...”

Even I was taken aback by his brazen candour. “The Kenyatta family has been the millstone around the Kikuyu’s necks. Do you know why our people are loiterers around the country? Do you know why our people are impoverished? Because the Kenyatta family grabbed all the prime lands in the

ancestral Kikuyuland. I've told you about our pieces of land in Naivasha and Nakuru? He has now given a Danish company huge tracts of land in Naivasha to build a beer factory," he complained.

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"I'm done with Uhuru... I'm really done with him. I regret why I voted for him, why I campaigned for him... it is a mistake I hope never to repeat again," grumbled Njuguna. "Uhuru can find money for musicians, find money for politicians, dead and alive, but he cannot find money to evacuate Kenyans suffering in a faraway country for no fault of theirs. Once again, for the umpteenth time, President Uhuru has thrown the Kikuyus under the bus," growled Njuguna.

In the lead-up to the 2017 presidential elections, Njuguna and I had had many heated discussions on who Kenyans should elect as president. That time he told me, "*Uhuru ni gaitu ga guicirira...mukuigwa uguo...*" Uhuru is ours by birth and blood...you can lump it if you don't like it.

"*Iguthua ndogoria, itikinyagira nyeki,*" said my friend, a matatu driver to me. Translated metaphorically, it means a limping shepherd leads his flock astray. Literally it means, a leader who lacks foresight cannot lead his people to greener pastures. Essentially, he becomes a burden to his people.

My friend was in a mood to speak his mind "in these times of coronavirus, where our world has been thrown into utter confusion". He was taking his matatu to the garage for service in Kawangware, so he asked me if I could I accompany him.

"If I didn't take care of this matatu, regularly making sure it's well-serviced, it's clean, that generally it is in a good condition, would I really feed my family? Would I claim to be a right thinking human being who cares about the welfare of his people? I wouldn't, because it would keep on breaking down, and I would lose face with my loyal customers and my business would be wobbly. That is what Uhuru's leadership has become. I will tell you this, many Kikuyus voted for him believing that he would lead us to greener pastures, that he would care for our interests, that he would not let us suffer, that he would remember he is where he is because of the sacrifices of the people, many of them strugglers and poor.

"But look what happened? Kikuyus hitched their wagon on a fading horse, a wild horse that didn't, in the first place, know where it was headed and how it was heading wherever it was heading. Yet we Kikuyus couldn't stop to ask these important questions because we were consumed by ethnic jingoism. We were all in a tribally induced trance...now we're all paying for it. I've thought about these things: cooked up presidential elections, tribal voting, about Uhuru, politicians, why people are suffering, and now coronavirus and I can tell you we're living in apocalyptic times.

"I've listened to Uhuru in his addresses to the nation - the man lost the plot a long time ago. He is so disconnected from the people, I wonder whether he truly listens to himself. But I'm told these people [politicians] never stop playing games with us, the electorate. 'My fellow Kenyans'...when did we become his fellow Kenyans? Do you know there are Kenyans who are starving, because they don't have food to feed their children?"

My matatu driver friend said that in some parts of Kiambu County, where he grew up and still lives, he knows of families that have been rendered jobless. Even with their meagre incomes, at least they

could afford to buy food. “Now that meagre pay is not forthcoming. How do you expect these people to survive? Still, the president talks of ‘my fellow Kenyans’. *No muhaka ticiria uhoro wa muturire witu wa hau kabere.*” We must seriously think of how lives will be in the future.

“For me, I already have”, said the driver. “I’ve thought long and hard and I’ve come to the conclusion that I’ll never again participate in electoral politics. What’s the point? Uhuru and his band of politicians can spend millions of shillings cheating our mothers with branded lesos [kitenge-like wrapping cloth, popular with women], caps and T-Shirts, yet he cannot find money to buy the same women masks. In his first address to the nation during these coronavirus times, the president said he had allocated so many millions to money paid to old people. That money is in the government portals – just like the stadia were built in the portals. I can tell you, the last time that money was paid to the retirees was way back, six months ago.

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Coronavirus, said the matatu driver, had exposed President Uhuru’s administration: “It doesn’t know what it’s doing. Every time Uhuru takes to the podium to address the nation, he repeats the same things that he said the last time, hence, the speeches have become boring and repetitive. Or regurgitates what Muthai Kagwe [the Cabinet Secretary for Health] has been saying. It’s threats, warnings and blaming the youth, the poor and those who cannot afford to self-distance, quarantine, and even self-isolate, because for them it is a matter of life and death.”

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My friend said the president had relegated everything concerning coronavirus to Mutahi. “Where is his leadership? It is missing, because I cannot see it. It looks like his spin doctors have told him to be occasionally holding press conferences to be seen to be on top of things. So he has become a talking head, talking to himself. Meanwhile, Mutahi’s major preoccupation in his numerous press conferences is to constantly frighten us with numbers, issue threats and condemn the poor and the less privileged.”

If there is one thing coronavirus ought to teach us, said my friend, is that we Kenyans need to think long and hard about the future of the country: “What do we want for ourselves? What kind of leaders do we desire? How do we right the political wrongs we’ve made? Talking specifically to my fellow Kikuyus: How do we unchain ourselves from the Kenyatta family servitude? This will be critical if the Kikuyu people in the coming years hope to be part of the struggle to liberate the country from the shackles of predatory politics.”

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