



Memo to Uhuru Kenyatta: Finish up and Go

By David Ndi



December 30 ought to be a memorable day on Kenya's political calendar. On this day in 2002, Mwai Kibaki took office as the first democratically elected President of Kenya. When it is remembered, though, it is not for the inauguration of Kibaki, but for Moi's humiliation. The only account we have of the chaotic event is that of Lee Njiru, Moi's communications chief. According to Njiru, as soon as Uhuru Kenyatta conceded defeat on the afternoon of the 29th, the Kibaki people insisted on an immediate handover. The inauguration was scheduled for the following day without any consultations. At 3 p.m. on that day, Moi got tired of waiting and decided to go down to Uhuru park to get it over and done with. This is how he ended up in the chaotic situation, being jeered at and pelted with mud, bottles and whatever else people could lay their hands on. Kibaki's description of Moi's tenure as "years of misrule and ineptitude" did not suggest that there was any intention to treat Moi kindly.

Shortly after assuming power, the NARC administration replaced Moi's face on the currency with Jomo Kenyatta's. It was ill-advised. By then, the NARC dream had dissolved into a toxic nightmare. The Kibaki men — later to emerge as the Anglo-Leasing cabal — had walked out of Bomas and gone off to write the Wako/Kilifi draft constitution. Seen through the prism of the NARC fallout, this was not just further humiliation of Moi; it symbolised the resurgence of Kikuyu restorationism — the thing Kikuyu supremacists metaphorise as *gūcookia rūūi mūkarō*, literally, returning the river to its course, meaning the return of power to where it belongs. For some reason, the Kibaki men seemed to have conflated Moi's humiliation with the redemption of Jomo Kenyatta. They were mistaken. The

rejection of Uhuru Kenyatta in the presidential bid in Central Kenya was, in part, antipathy towards his father's rule which had already cost him the Gatundu parliamentary seat in 1997. *Kāi tūgūthīnjīra hiti keerī?* (are we to slaughter our goat for hyenas a second time?), people would ask.

A decade later the humiliation was invoked in conversations that would have seemed completely unrelated — the constitutional debate on the features Kenyan currency should have. It is these sentiments that informed the constitutional provision that outlaws portraits of individuals on the currency. So there was considerable disquiet in many quarters recently when new notes revealed a disingenuous way of keeping Kenyatta's image on the currency — his statue prominently in the foreground of the Kenyatta International Conference Centre. There are many arresting images of the KICC that do not feature the statue. The State will no doubt seek, and may find defense in legal interpretation, but it is not lost on anyone that the intention is to defeat the spirit of the Constitution. The timing is awful.

I was at a social gathering in Kiambu recently where the dismay and disillusionment with Uhuru Kenyatta hovered over the otherwise succulent goat ribs and aged single malts like the smell of stale beer. The question was raised as to how the gathering would like their sentiments conveyed to Kenyatta. The "session chairman" distilled the sentiments aired into a four-point message: *Andū menā thīna mūno* (the people are suffering a lot); *Ee toro ta Njoramū* (he slumbers like the biblical Joram); *Nītūmenyete nī mūkoroku ta ithe* (we have learned he is as greedy as his father); *Nī gūtee* (we wasted our votes).

Seemingly unaware of these undercurrents in his backyard, or perhaps all too aware of them, Kenyatta recently appeared at a public gathering where — forgetting that he is the president of all Kenyans — he unleashed a diatribe in Kikuyu, repeatedly addressing the gathering as "*andū aitū*" ("our people"), and assuring them that he was on top of things. I gather that the outburst was triggered by his deputy arriving at the meeting fashionably late. We witnessed the same thing happen at Kenneth Matiba's funeral service in Murang'a when Kenyatta came out guns blazing. But his outburst at the Akorino event is of far greater significance.

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The Uhuru-Ruto political pact was sold to the Kikuyu as a peace treaty that would shield the Kikuyu diaspora in the Rift Valley from politically motivated violence — a homegrown solution for which the Kikuyu sacrificed justice for the victims of the 2007/8 post-election violence. The Akorino community has a large presence in the Rift Valley epicenters of political violence. With their distinctive white turbans, this insular, exclusively Kikuyu sect, is a vulnerable, easy target. During Ruto's trial at the International Criminal Court, evidence was adduced that the Akorino were specifically targeted using the euphemism "plucking mushrooms." Ruto was personally implicated in the incitement and his defiant arrival at the Akorino meeting would have been unsettling for both Kenyatta and the Akorino — it was as if he had showed up to remind them that they have a deal, and that choices have consequences. Kenyatta, who is not given to introspection or self-restraint, let rip.

The Kenyatta-Ruto succession is the third chapter in the Kikuyu-Kalenjin land-for-power pact which began with the co-option of KADU into the Government, bringing Moi into the centre of power at the expense of Oginga Odinga. In 1967 Moi was elevated to the vice-presidency at the expense of more capable leaders — notably Tom Mboya. Prof. Anyang Nyong'o recalls asking Lee Kwan Yew for his thoughts on how Singapore's and Kenya's development trajectories diverged, to which Lee Kwan

Yew quipped that we had killed Mboya. The deal with Moi facilitated the migration of the Kikuyu peasantry into the Rift Valley, which in turn enabled Kenyatta and other wealthy Kikuyu notables to acquire for themselves the migrants' more valuable ancestral lands in central Kenya.

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Then came the Kenyatta succession intrigues that can be said to have begun with Mboya's assassination and the Gatundu oathing ceremonies that sought to ensure that "*biki biki itigakira Chania* (the motorcycle outriders will never cross the Chania River, meaning that power would remain in Kiambu). The machinations ranged from an attempt at constitutional change to preclude the Vice President from assuming power in the event of the president's death (that elicited Charles Njonjo's decree purporting to criminalise imagining the death of the president) to the more sinister *Ngoroko* affair, a hit squad embedded in the anti-stock theft police unit suspected to have been meant to assassinate or otherwise incapacitate Moi when Kenyatta died. The scheme was predicated on Kenyatta dying in Nakuru, his favourite retreat, in which case the schemers would have been the first to know. But Kenyatta died at the Coast.

It is now clear that, for whatever reason, Kenyatta and the interest groups he represents have decided that it is not in their interest that he be succeeded by William Ruto. What is unclear is whether there is a Plan B because Plan A, a corruption takedown, is not working. There is only one way to make it work and that is to convict Ruto for corruption. But such is the obsession with neutralising him that they just could not resist the opportunity to weaponise the change of currency notes for a financial takedown. It is believed that a sizeable chunk of William Ruto's seemingly inexhaustible political war chest is hoarded in cash that he may not be able to convert to the new currency, in effect rendering the stash valueless.

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Article 262 (34) of the Constitution — the transitional provision relating to the currency change — states that "Nothing in Article 231 (4) affects the validity of coins and notes issued before the effective date." Conflating the currency change mandated by the Constitution with this purported war on money laundering has left Ruto's takedown hostage to the interpretation of this provision by the courts. But even the presumption that repudiating the cash hoards will cripple Ruto financially, and that crippling him financially will neutralise him politically, is wishful thinking. Uhuru Kenyatta's anti-Ruto schemes are evidently as hare-brained as his father's acolytes' ill-fated anti-Moi schemes. And like Moi before him, the longer he survives this onslaught, and the more Uhuru Kenyatta reverts to type — ethnic chauvinism, contempt, dynastic privilege and arrogance of power — the stronger Ruto becomes.

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In their “handshake” memorandum, titled “Building Bridges to a New Kenyan Nation,” Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga promised to lead the nation in correcting the sins of their fathers:

We are grateful for our fathers, we stand on their shoulders. Yet we can also see that the promise of our nation has not been met as fully as it should have been; we know there are different measures our founding fathers should have taken as they forged this young nation. H.E. President Uhuru Kenyatta and H.E. Raila Odinga are the two leaders who symbolise the many ways in which the country has gone full circle in its divisions. Intent on not witnessing the country suffer similar future cycles of the same tribulations it has since 1963, they are determined to offer the leadership that prevents future generations inheriting dangerous divisions and offer them a path to a bright future for all.

We have seen none of this. What we see instead is the same shameless politics of self-preservation, cynical ethnic mobilisation, arrogance of power and that quintessential Kenyatta disease — greed.

It has recently emerged that Uhuru Kenyatta is exerting pressure on the government to prioritise the upgrading of the Nairobi Eastern by-pass specifically to benefit the Northlands satellite city project on one of the family’s expansive, dubiously acquired, land holdings. Last week, the official State House twitter handle [@StateHouseKenya](#) was promoting Stawi, the lending platform fronted by the Commercial Bank of Africa, the Kenyatta family bank featured in this column some weeks ago. The Central Bank Governor — who is now doubling up as CBA’s chief marketing officer — lied to the public that Stawi will provide cheap credit to small businesses at an interest rate of 9 per cent per year, while in truth, the cost of the loans as measured by the annual percentage rate (APR) averages 35 per cent, and is no different from other digital lenders in the market. Corruption could not be more egregious.

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Yet some Kenyans continue to cling to the hope that he is fighting corruption. Uhuru is not fighting corruption. He is fighting Ruto. And he no longer bothers to hide the fact that he is using state power, his office and public resources to further his private business interests. Much of what we are seeing from him suggests that he may be under the impression that the “Kenya” in Kenyatta is proprietary. One of the sins of the fathers is the personality cult that Uhuru Kenyatta is hell-bent on perpetuating by retaining his father’s image on our currency, against the letter and spirit of the constitution he has sworn to defend. But all is not lost. By showing us the middle finger, Uhuru Kenyatta has ensured that there will come a time to do unto Kenyatta what was done to Moi. And when the music starts, it will not stop at the currency — streets, airports and universities will be fair game.

Having floundered on providing the promised leadership — no surprises there — the handshake is now clinging onto the hope of constitutional amendments to either exclude or neutralise Ruto, a scheme reminiscent of the 1966 Limuru KANU Conference constitutional amendments that replaced the deputy party leader’s position with eight regional vice presidents, in effect ending Odinga Odinga’s chances of succeeding Kenyatta. This constitutional amendment scheme is now a poisoned chalice. We say in Gikuyu, *mbūri igūthinjwo ndionagio kahiū* (one does not approach a goat for slaughter with the knife in full view).

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I have stated many times, and I will restate here again that the leadership that Uhuru and Raila promised behoves them to play the role of honest statesmen who would midwife political reforms leading up to a free and fair election, followed by retirement for both of them. But they have eschewed statesmanship for skulduggery and political intrigue, lending credence to suspicions that the handshake is nothing more than a Kenyatta self-preservation scheme to which Raila Odinga has been enticed with a share of the spoils and a reinstatement of the Odinga clan to the pantheon of Kenya's ruling dynasties. It is time to end this nonsense.

With nothing but political blunders and policy failures behind him, there is only one thing left that Uhuru Kenyatta can do for Kenya, and that is this:

Mr Uhuru Kenyatta please do us and yourself a big favour; you have neither the mandate nor the wherewithal to shape our political destiny. Just finish up and go.

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