

## POLITICS

# INVISIBLE CITIZENS: Branding Kenya for foreign investors and tourists

8 min read.

Kenya's historical preoccupation with being an attractive destination for foreigners and their money has come at the expense of catering to the needs and aspirations of its citizens. By WANDIA NJOYA

Published 1 year ago on August 16, 2018

By **Wandia Njoya** 



8 min read.

[Download PDF](#) [Print Article](#)

In March 2008, Kenya was reeling from the shock of [post-election violence](#). Over 1,000 people were dead, hundreds of thousands were displaced, women were traumatised by rape and some were even pregnant from those rapes, and some men were victims of genital mutilation in the name of circumcision.

When the weapons were down and the burning had stopped after the [February 2008 accord](#), the priority of the leaders would have been to heal the country, seek justice and reparations, and restructure the whole society to uproot the endemic inequality and tribalism that were at the root of the political crisis. But in the midst of such trauma and need for healing and reconciliation, what did President Mwai Kibaki do? He set up [Brand Kenya](#).

The gazette notice establishing Brand Kenya paid lip service to promoting patriotism, but its main interest was not really whether Kenya was a country Kenyans would be proud of. Its primary preoccupation was that Kenya remained a country in which foreigners could invest or relax.

The government's target audience was not the people of Kenya but foreigners. The focus on business was roughly similar to George W. Bush's call on American citizens to express their patriotism after 9/11 by going shopping, except for a small difference. Unlike Bush whose appeal was to his fellow Americans, the Kibaki-Raila coalition sought to appeal to foreigners to invest or spend their money in Kenya.

The establishment of Brand Kenya is just one of the more egregious examples of Kenya's history of governments more preoccupied with pleasing foreigners than with serving its own citizens. Every time Kenyans are in distress, the main worry of the government is whether the investors will notice anything, and how soon we can cover up our human weaknesses so as not to scare them away.

## Hegemony

This idea of Kenya as a country for investors and tourists is normalised through social institutions like the media and education. Indeed, a few weeks before, on January 7, 2008, at the height of the chaos, Peter Kiragu would express concern about Kenya's image in an article in the *Star*, making no mention about the injustice and horror that Kenyans were experiencing.

The establishment of Brand Kenya is just one of the more egregious examples of Kenya's history of governments more preoccupied with pleasing foreigners than with serving its own citizens. Every time Kenyans are in distress, the main worry of the government is whether the investors will notice anything, and how soon we can cover up our human weaknesses so as not to scare them away.

Kiragu complained: "The 2007 elections have painted a bad image of Kenya, far from one which was created after the 2002 elections." He expressed hope that foreigners would not think of us as a typical African country that cannot conduct elections properly, and concluded the article with this shockingly insensitive declaration: "The brand Kenya needs to be protected more than anything or anyone else."

An interesting element that emerges from Kiragu's article is Kenya's notorious belief in its exceptionalism, which is in turn based on accepting the West's racist disdain for Africa and expressing pride that Kenya is not a typical African country. Throughout the article, Kiragu talks of a Kenya that was doing well with tourism and export, and that had been the envy of other African countries, "many of which were in even more desperate shape than Kenya". He contrasts Kenya to DR Congo, Somalia, Sudan and Côte d'Ivoire, distinguishing Kenya from the others as a country "best known for its unspoiled game parks, which attract hundreds of thousands of international visitors who want to see lions and elephants and other animals roaming free".

One would wish that this was just one journalist writing a personal opinion, but unfortunately it isn't. What Kiragu is voicing is the hegemonic definition of Kenya, if we think of hegemony in terms of the ideas of the ruling class that are diffused through social institutions such as religion, media and education.

Between the investor and the tourist

In Kiragu's article, we also see a disturbing acceptance of the racist image of Africa that requires us to achieve two contradictory targets. These targets mirror the urban-rural dichotomy, the inequality in development, and worse, the ethnic distinctions between deserving "developed" and undeserving "backward" ethnic groups.

The rationale is that because Kenya must attract investors, it must work at meeting targets of "development" set by the West in the urban areas, while on the other hand, Kenya must continue to attract tourists, which it can do by offering resource-deprived regions as the image of an Africa untouched by Western civilisation, where wildlife "roam free".

This dual and racist tension between the investor and the tourist permeates all Kenyan life and institutions. Since independence, the government has reserved the areas around the railway for "development," and the areas further from the railway for tourism.

One institution in which this logic is evident is Brand Kenya. In the [Brand Master Plan](#), a document that Brand Kenya commissioned Interbrand Sampson, a South African PR firm, to write, Brand Kenya prioritises people in the following descending order: foreign investors; foreign tourists; and Kenyan citizens. The master plan reduces our constitution into a selling point that could be exploited for the Kenyan "brand".

The master plan is a shocking document to read because it uses the investor-tourist dichotomy in its description of Kenya. Indeed, the document has profiled Kenya as "an exotic destination that is surprisingly familiar, where people and nature live in harmony alongside ambitious economic developments".

This description is disturbing because it rehashes the colonial anthropological discourses of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For instance, being "exotic" and "surprisingly familiar" is an oxymoron typical of the European romantic period, because being exotic necessarily means being strange, and necessarily unfamiliar.

The brand document separates the people from the nation, and relegates us to a frozen past together with our natural

environment. If there is any economic development, it is not part of our lives. We are just living “alongside”, meaning that the elite are promising investors that flesh and blood Kenyans will not interfere with their investments by being unruly, or being visible for that matter. Indeed, ecologist Mordecai Ogada often says that the tourism which Kenya markets is a tourism with wildlife and no people, which is why many of the photographs advertising tourism and wildlife do not show the pastoralists grazing their herds near the wildlife.

**The brand document separates the people from the nation, and relegates us to a frozen past together with our natural environment. If there is any economic development, it is not part of our lives.**

Even when the master plan considers the people, it is only as labour for capital. Any democratic claims are not for the Kenyan people to live in dignity, but for ensuring that Kenyans remain out of the way while businesspeople invest in the cities, and while tourists relax in the wild.

Likewise, the recently launched National Tourism Blueprint leaves no doubt about the stereotypical profiling of Africans, and particularly of the Maasai. The document contains a photo of a man in a Maasai *shuka* skipping while holding the hands of two white girls, with a caption that reads: “Enriching cultural encounters with friendly people and ancient tribes.”

After all the work done by theorists on Orientalism and “decolonising the mind”, references to Africans as “ancient tribes”, using 19th century anthropological tropes, are simply mindboggling.

Daily and institutional violence

The focus of Kenya’s consciousness on foreign affirmation would explain why Kenyans experience daily life and institutional and collective processes as a form of physical, moral, emotional and intellectual violence. The institutions are not for serving them, but for pleasing foreigners.

In electoral democracy, for instance, elections are often followed not with sympathy for Kenyans’ frustration with the ineptitude with which the process is handled. Rather, Kenyans are treated to expressions of irritation about the lengthy periods Kenyans take to complete the process of elections, which interrupt business in the country. Democracy is not for Kenyans to have a say in the governance of their country, but for the government to prove to the West that Kenya is an ideal business and tourism destination – because we can manage “civilised” ideals like democracy and elections, unlike other African countries.

Similarly, roads are not planned to serve poor Kenyans or to be used by ordinary Kenyans. As [Patrick Gathara](#) has said in different forums, roads are prioritised over the people who should use them. The poor are evicted to make way for roads, and the roads are so badly designed that they kill hundreds of pedestrians, fail to accommodate bus stops or bus lanes for commuters, and have no walkways or bicycle paths for users without cars.

Another example is healthcare where [Vision 2030](#) and the [Jubilee manifesto](#) use tourism as the model for healthcare. The tourism framework for healthcare essentially leaves the cheaper treatment of communicable diseases in the realm of the public healthcare system, and reserves the more expensive treatment for non-communicable diseases, especially cancer, to private hospitals.

That is why the filling up the coffers of the National Hospital Insurance Fund (NHIF) is not the universal healthcare that the Big Four agenda makes it out to be. NHIF money will end up in private hospitals with the best equipment and specialists, which means a windfall for medical equipment manufacturers, pharmaceuticals and medical insurance companies. Meanwhile, government doctors fail to achieve the job satisfaction they went on strike for, and they watch as the government [imports doctors](#) from Cuba and pays them more than the local doctors.

In education, the same lack of care for Kenyan children applies. The shoddily written and launched curriculum includes pathways that are potentially discriminatory because they would allow schools to choose favourite or privileged children to pursue subjects that have better prospects of social mobility. Each time the [Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development](#) (KICD) officials discussed the document in public, the most common rationale for the curriculum change they cited was that the curriculum was what the business community wanted, and was following the trends in education abroad. And, no surprise, most of the theories on which the curriculum was tailored were up to 40-years-old and were almost all foreign.

Despite decades of major overhauls in political administration, the rationale of Kenya's institutions has remained deeply colonial.

Starting afresh

Kenya achieved a great milestone when it ratified the progressive [constitution in 2010](#). However, the institutions, their rationale and operational style remain firmly colonial and rabidly racist, which explains why Kenyan daily life is so violent.

**Despite decades of major overhauls in political administration, the rationale of Kenya's institutions has remained deeply colonial.**

Calling our institutional culture colonial does not mean that our institutions have not changed over the past sixty years. Rather, it means that the colonial rationale is repeatedly and deliberately reinforced in the present day. Decade after decade, regime after regime, government institutions have wired themselves, built themselves, and reproduced policy documents to remain focused on the West, and to wipe Kenyans out of the picture. These institutional reinforcements would explain why the government seems to be meeting little institutional and collective resistance as it rolls back the political and social gains made with the new constitution.

Seeking to explain why political reforms in Kenya have never translated into the material improvement of Kenyans' lives, [Gathara](#) wrote five years ago that Kenya had "tried everything except reform the patterns of thought that find their genesis in the attitudes and divisions of the half century of colonial rule that preceded them."

Our biggest political problem is no longer our constitution. It's our institutions.

We need to deconstruct, and probably destroy and rebuild, Kenyan public institutions. The few government documents I have interacted with, especially from the education and tourism sectors, are all riddled with racist tropes of Africans, and an obsession with Western approval so that we can earn Western money.

Kenyans will have to go through a national mental re-engineering that heals us of our inferiority complex and deals with our historical wounds, and then write an affirmation of dignity as human beings. Using that affirmation, professionals should write new major policy documents to cleanse them of their racist tropes, and to make the needs and aspirations of Kenyans paramount.

Such work will require a lot of brain work and will probably bring little glory. But if we do not spend time on understanding the ideas, attitudes and behaviour of Kenyan public institutions, the current government will reverse all the political gains we have made. And by 2022, Kenya will look curiously similar to the 1970s, when we were ruled by crony elites under a one-party system. We have to put our minds to work, and rewrite Kenyan policy documents and rebuild Kenyan institutions so that their primary reason for existence is to serve Kenyans.



**By Wandia Njoya**

Wandia Njoya is a scholar, social and political and commentator and blogger based in Nairobi, Kenya.



**Love our content? Subscribe to our newsletter today and keep updated.**

Every week you will receive a curated digest of our latest and best content straight to your email inbox. We will never share your email address.

Subscribe

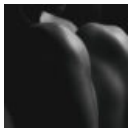
BRAND KENYA

TOURISM

VISION 2030

CONTINUE READING

YOU MAY LIKE



Bodies for Sale: Sex Tourism in Malindi

POLITICS

## Africa's Philosopher-King: Remembering Julius Nyerere

11 min read.

Was Tanzania's first president a hero or a heroic failure? DAUTI KAHURA examines the life of one of Africa's most respected leaders.

Published 31 mins ago on October 31, 2019

By **Dauti Kahura** 



11 min read.

On October 14, 2019, President John Pombe Magufuli officially moved his presidential operations to Dodoma, the capital city in the central region of Tanzania.

Was the move to Dodoma, which is 420 kilometres from Dar es Salaam, on the weekend preceding the 14<sup>th</sup> of October, a coincidence or a well-calibrated move? October 14<sup>th</sup> is the day that Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere, the first president of the Republic of Tanzania, died. In the wider scheme of things, it could as well have been both: President Magufuli, looking to be re-elected in a year's time, may have made a deft tactical manoeuvre to signal his re-election bid in earnest.

Forty-six years ago, in 1973, Mwalimu Nyerere had picked Dodoma as the future capital city of the republic, citing its centrality and its ample, expansive and flat land as fit credentials for the new capital. Although, Mwalimu did not live to see the transfer of the capital, President Magufuli understands the import of fast-tracking the transfer of the presidential operations to Dodoma: Mwalimu would approve of it and the electorate would interpret the move as being in tandem with Mwalimu's popular wish in a country currently in the grip of Mwalimu nostalgia. President

[CONTINUE READING](#)

POLITICS

## Violent Theologies, Women's Bodies, and Church 'Business' in Kenya

11 min read.

The explosion of deliverance ministries that conduct bizarre exorcisms on hapless followers is the result of governments having failed to provide services to struggling populations who turn to charlatans to ease their anxieties. This points to a society that has broken down at various levels.

Published 3 hours ago on October 31, 2019

By [Damaris Parsitau](#) 



11 min read.

“Get out, let her loose in Jesus name,” Pastor James Maina Ng’ang’a of Neno Evangelism yelled repeatedly in one of his many violent “deliverance orgies” that have sadly become a common feature of the many Pentecostal and Charismatic churches’ services in Kenya and beyond. In fact, deliverance ministries have not only proliferated in Africa in the last four decades, they have now also been commercialised and turned into big business in some of the evangelical churches.

As deliverance theologies become increasingly popular, they are also increasingly becoming violent. People are raising concerns about the disastrous and violent consequences of such theologies. Deliverance beliefs, teachings and practices are based on the assumptions that both mental and physical illnesses are the result of demon possession and, as such, ought to be treated through a violent expulsion of the demon.

In the recent past, for example, scores of disturbing YouTube videos have been widely shared on social media platforms where the notorious Pastor Ng’ang’a, acting as the leading “exorcist” in the country, frequently carries out bizarre deliverance services in his church. In nearly all of his church services, Ng’ang’a conducts deliverance services

[CONTINUE READING](#)


POLITICS

## Changing Gulf Dynamics in Somalia’s Upcoming Elections

5 min read.

The crisis in the Gulf countries has shifted political alliances in Somalia, which may influence the 2020/21 elections.

Published 6 days ago on October 25, 2019

By [Mohamed Dubo](#) and [Abdi Tawane](#) 



5 min read.

Somalia is preparing to hold a universal suffrage election in 2020/21, the first of its kind after more than two decades of no real elections until 2017, when an indirect election process was conducted that saw “traditional elders” selecting delegates who elected Members of Parliament who also elected the current president, H.E Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed “Farmaajo”.

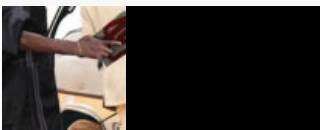
The National Independent Electoral Commission (NIEC) is upbeat that the country will hold peaceful and credible elections in 2020/21 despite the political, constitutional and socio-economic challenges facing the country. The electoral body launched a five-year roadmap in 2018 to help guide the management and administration of the country’s “one-person, one-vote” elections, notwithstanding the pending electoral law, as foreseen by Art. 47 of the Provisional Constitution, which is yet to be passed by the parliament.

More than 50 political parties (mostly based in Mogadishu) have been registered by the electoral body ahead of the next general elections to replace clan-based politics. This is a major step towards a return to democracy and a sign of enthusiasm for multiparty politics in Somalia, which makes the upcoming presidential election campaign more intense

[View the full article](#)

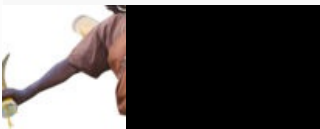
[CONTINUE READING](#)

## TRENDING



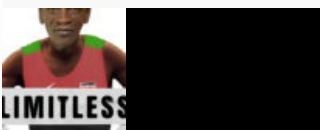
OP-EDS / 2 weeks ago

**Who Is Afraid of Commuter Ride-Hailing Apps? Tech Meets Matatu, and Why Nairobi Does Not Need State-Run Public Transport**



POLITICS / 2 weeks ago

**The Rebels Within: The Politics of Kieleweke and Tanga Tanga in Central Kenya**



CULTURE / 1 week ago

**Eliud Kipchoge: The Making of a World Champion**



POLITICS / 6 days ago

**Area of Darkness? Media Frames of Northern Kenya**





IDEAS / 2 weeks ago

## Gen Z, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and African Universities



CULTURE / 2 weeks ago

## A Park for the People of Machakos



POLITICS / 2 weeks ago

## Zimbabwe's Trauma: Impunity, Disappearances and Torture



IDEAS / 7 days ago

## Agency, Possibilities, and Imagination: Countering Myths about Africa's Past

### About

The Elephant is a platform for engaging citizens to reflect, re-member and re-envision their society by interrogating the past, the present, to fashion a future.

### By Section

- [Politics](#)
- [Reflections](#)
- [Culture](#)
- [Ideas](#)
- [Editions](#)

### By Content

- [Cartoons](#)
- [Data Stories](#)
- [Videos](#)
- [Podcasts](#)
- [Archives](#)
- [E Review](#)

### Contact

- [About](#)
- [Partners](#)
- [Contact](#)
- [Subscribe](#)
- [Write for us](#)
- [Submit a tip](#)

### Social

- [Facebook](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- [Youtube](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [SoundCloud](#)

