

THE Weekly Review

For the Thinking Person

'SUNDAY NATION'



THE DARK PAST

It won't be business as usual when King Charles III lands on Tuesday to begin his first visit to a Commonwealth nation as monarch. Kenyans will demand an unconditional public apology and official acknowledgment of wrongs over and above 'inadequate' expressions of regret previously offered by the British government. Will he do it?

kenya lens

■ BRITISH-OWNED TEA ESTATES IN THE RIFT VALLEY BACKYARD ARE UNDER PRESSURE TO RELINQUISH 100PC OWNERSHIP

KING RETURNS TO MAU MAU LAND**Will he apologise for the colonial atrocities that happened from the 1890s as the UK expanded its empire?**

● BY JOHN KAMAU

When King Charles III visits the country on Tuesday, the question that will be lingering will be whether Britain will finally apologise for the colonial atrocities that happened from the 1890s as it expanded its empire towards Africa. What he chooses to do will be his legacy.

In recent years, Britain has been pressured to issue formal apologies – rather than hide behind the “we-deeply-regret” mantra. In 2019, it refused to apologise over India’s Amritsar massacre of 1919 when British troops shot at protesters demanding the end of colonial rule. Ten years ago, British Foreign Secretary William Hague expressed “sincere regret” for crimes committed by imperial officers during the 1950s State of Emergency in Kenya, which was partly declared to forestall the push towards independence. In April, the British Prime Minister refused to apologise over the slave trade, continuing a tradition where top leadership has expressed “sorrow” or “deep regret” over colonial and other atrocities.

As part of his Kenyan visit – the first in Africa ever since he took the throne from his mother, Queen Elizabeth II – King Charles III will be under the same pressure. He will be taken to Uhuru Gardens, which, though it’s a site of Kenya’s independence, it was the place where British torture on innocent Kenyans took place in April 1954 as it launched Operation Anvil, which left thousands of men, women and children caged behind barbed wires as London fought to retain its most important settler-colony in Africa. Historians have likened Lang’ata and other holding sites to a British Gulag.

Lang’ata is a site of pain, triumph, and memory. The construction of a museum at the site – with the tomb of the unknown soldier – was a significant development in how Kenya wanted to remember its history. When he opened the museum, former President Uhuru Kenyatta acknowledged that Kenya’s freedom was the result of an armed struggle. “We will forgive them, but never forget,” he said of the British. “This place will rekindle memories of our armed struggle, but also the good, the bad and the ugly of our history,” said Kenyatta. If King Charles visits the museum, as expected, how he handles that part of history and the words he chooses will determine how Commonwealth countries will continue to relate to the former metropole. And more importantly, how Britain intends to confront its history during King Charles’s reign. For the royal family, Kenya is an important site. It was at the Treetops Hotel in Nyeri that Charles’s mother – Queen Elizabeth II – learned of her father’s death and took over the reins. Ever since, Kenya’s history was weaved within the royal family’s, and has continuously attracted its members for private and official visits. The expected visit to Lang’ata is of importance.

At the Lang’ata site (named Uhuru Gardens), Jomo Kenyatta received instruments of independence from the Duke

of Edinburgh who was representing the Queen. Kenya, which became the 34th African state to get freedom, was to be a test case on how it would treat the minority white settlers and Asians. Never before had an African government taken over power where the population of whites was as large. While the ceremony ended Kenya’s 68 years as a British protectorate and colony, it also opened some new relations with no radical break. Some historians and commentators regard cordial relations as part of neo-colonial continuity schemes. The visit will be a stamp of approval for President William Ruto, and will take place some 40 years after President Moi welcomed Queen Elizabeth in her first state visit to Kenya. The Queen had made two stop-over visits in 1971 and had a luncheon with Kenyatta at State House, Nairobi. But it was President Moi who would win more favours from Britain.

Shortly after Moi took power, records indicate that British officials recognised him as an ally. In a brief to the Queen, Moi was described as “sincere, intelligent but rather modest man”. According to historian Poppy Cullen “this second quality is particularly interesting given earlier views of Moi as unintelligent”. *The Daily Telegraph* had also described Moi as “rated by many as one of Africa’s most successful leaders... (and as) one of the great surprises of the post-colonial era in Africa”. Moi was then looking for aid, and London was seeking Kenya’s support over Rhodesia – the last of British settler colonies.

Queen Elizabeth first visited Kenya in 1972 in what was seen as an attempt to help erase the bitter past after she had watched Kenya go through its most painful period in history while she was in power. Ironically, she was hosted by the prisoner that Governor Patrick Renison had in 1960 dismissed as “leader unto darkness and death”. While she had last visited Kenya when it was still a settler colony in 1952 – a tour disrupted by her father, King George VI’s death – the 1972 meeting was like testing the waters of the relationships. Ahead of her visit in 1972, Prince Charles and Princess Anne had visited Kenya and met with Jomo Kenyatta at State House, Nakuru. “I have always longed to come and Kenya seems the most sensible and best place to come. There are masses of game to see here,” he told the press. Prince Charles’s visit appeared to have done some miracles: During a meeting with Kenyatta, the Queen is said to have laughed out loud after Kenyatta complimented her for bringing up “charming and refreshing” children in reference to Charles: “They reminded us that things at the Court of St James are human, too... and you are not immune from the challenges of parenthood. But your case they have been well met,” Kenyatta said. But the 1971 visit was almost marred by several Asian protesters carrying placards and protesting Britain’s immigration laws, which discriminated against the Asians leaving Kenya. While the protesters were ordered to leave the International Embakasi Airport minutes before the prince landed, it was an indicator of how



Prince Charles with President Jomo Kenyatta in Gatundu, Kiambu, on February 17, 1971. Below: Mau Mau fighters.



history followed the royal family wherever they went. King Charles III could have easily avoided such disruption when he was a prince. During the Queen’s silver jubilee in 1977, Charles visited Kenya amidst rumours that a blonde accompanied him. One of his biographers later recounted: “As he watched a bevy of beautiful flamingos flutter past him on Kenya’s Lake Nakuru, Charles laughed at photographers, “You have caught me with plenty of birds this time – isn’t it a pity that they are only the feathered variety?” Charles was reportedly amused by the gossip spread by British tabloids on a mystery blonde: “If you read the British newspapers, the bush was thick with the other kind of birds when I was on safari.”

The British High Commission in Nairobi could only confirm his presence and gave no further details. Kenya was a space for royal retreat, and such visits

were seen to boost the image of a tourist destination. In 1977, Charles was again in Kenya for a private visit with the press following him to conform the identity of “woman camping companion”.

In 1978, he was back in Nairobi to attend Jomo Kenyatta’s funeral, which the British government partly organised. It was during this period that he caught the attention of the media after he snubbed Ugandan President Idi Amin, then accused of atrocities and human rights abuse. While Amin took a seat two places from Charles, the two ignored each other throughout the funeral. But Charles had taken one of the bullies of Africa. While Kenyatta did not reciprocate with a visit to London after he became president, the royal family could occasionally send their members for royal safaris or as part of solidifying the relationships between the two countries.

Kenya had significant British invest-

ments, and it was felt in London that the country is strategically important. The country had also entered into military agreements and armament programmes though this slowed down during Kenyatta’s reign. By the time Moi took power, he was seeking £30 million. King Charles III is arriving at a period that Kenya’s economy is struggling and when Western currencies have battered the shilling. His visit is, however, a plus for tourism.

Perhaps important is that with Ruto, playing the pan-African card, Britain has seen a personality who could her advance a broader African policy. Already, Ruto is being courted by the Americans and has reshaped Kenya’s foreign policy to suit US interests. With King Charles’s visit in the first years of his presidency, Ruto may have a much greater voice within the Commonwealth. UK interests in Kenya have been under attack, especially in Ruto’s Rift Valley backyard, where British-owned tea estates are pressured to relinquish 100 per cent ownership. More so, there have been murmurs about the British soldiers training in Kenya – and how they have negatively impacted the communities.

British Army Training Unit Kenya members have been accused of sexual abuse, murder, and leaving unexploded ordnance in parts of their training grounds. Moreover, Kenyans have argued that the more than 200 military personnel have enjoyed impunity since 1963. King Charles may not address the politics. He may not apologise. But behind the scenes, these issues will remain away from his interests in wildlife and technology.

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kenya lens

■ ROYAL TOURS ARE USUALLY MORE IMPORTANT FOR SYMBOLISM RATHER THAN ANY IMPORTANT POLICY STATEMENTS



Activists will present a petition to the King over gross human rights violations committed by the British government during the entire colonial period and the continued injustices perpetuated by its corporates, citizens and programmes in Kenya.



The British government in 2013 acknowledged that Kenyans were subject to torture and ill treatment at the hands of the colonial administration.

OH, THE PAINFUL COLONIAL PAST

Human rights organisations and political activists are looking forward to the visit not so much for the opportunity to bow before the King, but to ask the hard questions

● BY MACHARIA GAITHO

King Charles and Queen Camilla can be assured a proper royal reception when they land in Nairobi on Tuesday. One can expect that President Ruto will pull out all stops to make the visit a resounding success. He will feel greatly honoured to host the British royals, and at them accepting an invite which makes Kenya the first African and Commonwealth country they have visited since ascending to the throne in September last year following the death of Queen Elizabeth.

The visit, to many, cements President Ruto's standing in African and developing country leadership, a status he has assiduously sought through a record number of overseas junkets in his first year in office.

At a time Kenya is suffering a depressed economy, and security challenges that have made even China, which Ruto has just visited, for the first time issue a travel advisory for its citizens, the royal visit will certainly stand as a much-needed vote of confidence which the country will be keen to exploit to the fullest. Kenya will be guaranteed blanket exposure on British media, with the large travelling media contingent assured to not just cover every minute of the visit, but also branch out into reportage of many other facets on the country, including the good, the bad and the ugly.

There may well be outsize expectations of gains from the visit, but the reality is that royal tours are usually more important for the symbolism rather than any important policy statements or commitments to financial aid or development projects. The King is ceremonial Head of State, not Head of Government. By tradition and custom, he will steer

well clear of any pronouncements or activities that might be seen to intrude on the roles and functions the Legislature and the Executive.

However, the visit is still an important indicator of Kenyan-British relations, especially because every aspect of the royal itinerary, including speeches, places visited and groups or individuals met, will have been approved in advance by the Whitehall.

A British government press release on the visit indicated that King Charles and Queen Camilla will be on the routine and humdrum rounds of meeting with President Ruto and First Lady Rachel Ruto, a State luncheon, official receptions, but it also revealed fascinating aspects of an itinerary loaded with more than just symbolism, but a deliberate effort to address critical sticking points between an independent nation and her former colonial master.

Kenya, and Kenyan officialdom, has always displayed a fawning, obsequious, attitude towards Britain. But not so for Kenyan political and social activists, who are looking forward to the visit not so much for the opportunity to bow and curtsy before the King and Queen, but to ask hard questions. A great opportunity to address lingering questions will be presented when the King and Queen visit the Uhuru Gardens Museum for what will be the first extended public display of exhibitions delving into the struggle for freedom from British colonialism.

The press release issued here by the British High Commission revealed that "the visit will also acknowledge the more painful aspects of the UK and Kenya's shared history, including the Emergency (1952-1960). His Majesty will take time during the visit to deepen his understanding of the wrongs suffered in



Vice President Daniel arap Moi welcomes Prince Charles and Princess Anne upon their arrival at the Embakasi Airport on February 8, 1971, as Foreign Affairs Minister Njoroge Mungai and British High Commissioner Eric Norris look on.

this period by the people of Kenya. Together, Their Majesties will tour a new museum dedicated to Kenya's history and will lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior at Uhuru Gardens, as well as visiting the site of the declaration of Kenya's independence in 1963".

Just last year when then-President Uhuru Kenyatta toured the new museum, the Chief of the Kenya Defence Forces, Gen Robert Kibochi, publicly called on the UK to return 'looted' Kenyan historical artefacts that are in museums or private collections in that country. And just last week, a group of Nandi community elders renewed demands for the UK to return the skull of Koitalel arap Samoei, the fabled chief, spiritual leader and freedom fighter. Samoei, who led one of the earliest rebellions against colonial occupation, was killed by Brit-

ish army commander Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen in 1905 after being tricked into attending a truce meeting. He was beheaded and head reportedly taken to England. The elders are also seeking the return of their stolen cultural artefacts, as well as compensation for atrocities suffered during colonial rule, including murder, detention and forcible displacement.

"We are appealing to King Charles, we need to get that skull to be brought back to Nandi for honourable burial," descendant David Samoei told Kenya media earlier this year. At Uhuru Gardens Museum, the King will tour a display that brings out the horrors of colonialism and the gallantry of freedom fighters. The museum visit will offer a chance for acknowledgment that wrongs were committed, and that will probably come

with a public apology from the monarch. Despite the significance of such a gesture, it's almost certain that the royal visitor will still face some hard questions and accusations, with real likelihood of protests and demonstrations. Any disturbances will have to be delicately handled lest the lenses of world media are trained on the Kenya Police factory setting of tear gas, water cannons, truncheons and live bullets in crowd control.

The Weekly Review has learnt that the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC), the independent watchdog which has played a critical role in agitation and lawsuits against colonial injustices, is preparing lengthy and comprehensive petition for attention of the King. So are many other activist groups who will not let pass the opportunity to make their voices heard.

Whether critical civil society and protest groups will be allowed anywhere near the King during his official engagement is unclear at the moment, but it is obvious that British High Commissioner Neil Wigan and his staff are aware that various groups with grouses are relishing the chance to loudly protest, and will have to be handled with sensitivity to avoid ugly situations developing.

KHRC was part of the historic lawsuit in British courts that in 2013 secured compensation for claimant Mau Mau freedom fighters, an official apology and funding for a memorial to victims of colonial atrocities. It supported the out-of-court settlement following years of protracted litigation, but is now set to take advantage of King Charles's visit to push for further concessions.

According to Executive Director Davis Malombe, the premier human rights

Continued on Page 21

kenya lens

■ HE'LL MISS GOOD COMPANY IN A STATE WHERE EVERYTHING WAS SEEN WITH THE LENSES OF BRITISH SENSIBILITIES

ROYAL ETIQUETTE: WHAT NOT TO DO

Ladies must prepare to observe strict fashion and style protocol that befits the royal couple. No pant suits. That will be against the dressing etiquette. Hats will do very well for them. At State House, the First Lady must have taken curtsy lessons for the occasion

● BY OMULO OKOTH

King Charles III and the Queen Consort will find a very different Kenya. Virtually all the vestiges of British rule are gone. When Charles Njonjo died in January last year, he was interred with everything that personified British traditions and sensibilities. The King would have found a perfect company, a namesake and a man with whom they share many things in common.

One day in Nanyuki, I was in the company of media colleagues heading to Dol Dol to cover the annual Rhino Charge, an off-road four-wheel drive vehicle event, which is more of show of might and glamour among the Kenyan propertied and moneyed class than any serious motorsport contest. While seated inside a banda of a fairly nice hotel for a well-deserved break, a group of boys – three white and one half-cast – dressed like any ordinary folks, but speaking with a slightly upper class twang, sauntered inside and settled around a table. They were followed by some crew-cut casually smartly-dressed ramrod two white guys in dark glasses, who settled on a not-too-distant table, but strategically positioned to shadow the boys' table.

I happened around their table, after visiting the washrooms, and one of them remarked about a Kenyan cricket jersey I was wearing (at the time, Kenyan cricket was trying to invade the space occupied by the exclusive Test club). I acknowledged his compliments, but did not take too much notice of anything else, possibly flattered by the appreciation from a young man.

Within 10 minutes, the boys left as casually as they had come in, again followed by the two white men. Then word leaked around that it was Prince William and Njonjo's son with their friends, whose parents occupy huge swathes of land around Mount Kenya. These were school mates (in the UK) on holiday, so-called gap period, enjoying the sun in Kenyan countryside.

Not quite like Sandringham Estate in the English county of Norfolk, which houses the Royal Station, but why not have a jaunt in a country which had lots of sentimental attachment to grandmother, the Queen Elizabeth II.

Media colleagues were a tad too late for soundbites and pictures. No one even knew where they headed. "Ooh my God! How did we miss that page one picture, a world exclusive?" John Thuo, media fixer for Rhino Charge, cursed. We were stewing in our frustration for the rest of the trip to Dol Dol. Subsequent enquiries by the team with the High Commission about the presence of the future king in Kenya were met with the traditional "no information about the royal presence (in the country)". End of story.

That is the camaraderie Njonjo had with the royal family that King Charles



King Charles III and Queen Camilla stand on the Buckingham Palace balcony following their coronations on May 6. Below: Prince Charles shares a joke with Attorney-General Charles Njonjo before flying out of Kenya in February 1971.

III will dearly miss. President Daniel arap Moi, another royal family's alter ego, who even named his twin children Philip Kipchirchir and Doris Elizabeth Chepkorir after the late Duke of Edinburgh (Philip Mountbatten) and Queen Elizabeth II, went to be with the Lord in February 2020. Richard Erskine Frere Leakey, the scion of the famous archaeology family of Louis and Mary Leakey, who described himself as paleoanthropologist and conservationist, and who was appointed by Moi to be the top bureaucrat, died the same month with Njonjo (January 2022).

Uncle Moody Awori is down with poor health and not in government, while Ki-jana Wamalwa, famed for his proper pronunciation of English, is also gone. King Charles III will miss good company in a country where everything good was seen with the lenses of British sensibilities – from Land Rover vehicles to Kenya Bus Service, London taxis, to Lonrho conglomerate, then owned by Tiny Rowland. The folks who displayed exquisite and aristocratic sartorial elegance with products from Saville Row are long gone.

Perhaps, journalist-turned-ambassador Manoah Esipisu (our man at the Court of St James) and the King's representative in Nairobi have flown in some tail coats for use at the House on the Hill for the distinguished gentlemen. Ladies must prepare to observe strict fashion and style protocol that befits the royal couple. No pant suits here. That will be against the dressing etiquette. Hats will do very well for them. The First Lady must have taken curtsy lessons for the occasion.



The Nairobi Club gentlemen of the era of Job Ominyo would have found a friend of theirs in the King. But, alas! Most of these guys are long gone.

Among the dignitaries to receive the King and the Queen Consort will be a governor of the capital city who neither plays polo, nor savours jazz and does not quote Shakespeare and Charles Dickens, among the greatest play writes and novelists of the Victorian era, whose stories still spice up dinner at royal and high society events to-date. When the royal couple decide to go for sports events, they will be received by a minister who dresses more like a musician than an overseer of government policy. And that brings me to an area the royal couple may find some like-minded company. You see, that is the power of sports.

The King may find something to look forward to in polo, the king of sports.

It's not lost on royal watchers that King Charles III was an avid polo player, a sport he bequeathed to his rebellious son, Prince Harry. Moi's grandsons, Kimoi and Kigen, and their father, Senator Gideon Moi, should invite the royalty to Manyatta Polo Club in Gilgil to have a fun-filled afternoon there. But the place where the royal couple will find real stuff is Timau.

Timau is a back-water place near Mount Kenya, hardly ever heard of outside Central Province, but it is where some of the best cut flowers are grown and exported to Europe almost on a daily basis. There is a small close-knit white community here, which owns thousands of acres of land, which they utilise so professionally one would wonder whether this is Kenya or somewhere in Europe. They even have their own water supplies and produce their own electric

ity. Their farms have airstrips and helipads. Some families fly their children to schools in Nairobi using helicopters. They attend Banda, Peponi, Pembroke House, from where they proceed to colleges in the UK. One weekend at a polo event in Gilgil, I overheard a phone conversation between a member of Manyatta and a polo fan who wanted to come, and was enquiring about the situation. Well, he was told that all helipads were occupied, so there was no need to come. When I counted, they were around 15 choppers parked there majestically.

If you are still wondering whether I am talking about events taking place in Kenya, better visit places like Lewa and Timau. Timau is where serious economic activities, of agricultural and floricultural kind, are happening. The royal couple will be in good company there if the Grosses – Anthony and Rowena – are ready to step into the space Njonjo left. The Voorspuys, Tristan and Cindy, should be handy to lead the couple to experience the local polo scene and the exquisite *mzungu* hospitality there.

Hiroimi and Jadini Nzomo, Kimoi and Kigen Moi will complete the line-up for a friendly polo match that they king should find worth whiling away time at. After all, Timau is not too far from Tree Tops where the then young Elizabeth Alexandra Mary Windsor and Philip Mountbatten were honeymooning with Philip when her father, King George VI, died and her world suddenly turned into what she had not bargained for.

Prince Harry used to play polo in the same team as Rishi Ahluwalia, son of Kenyan businessman Ashe and Kiran Ahluwalia, during his student days in the UK. His sister, Amber, is a refined polo player from her student years in Cheltenham in the UK. Horse racing is no longer where it was during the height of British socio-economic presence in Kenya, and thus may not offer the Royal couple good sporting entertainment.

Many years ago, horse racing was where the British white community showcased their presence in Kenya. I still recall the Limuru Gymkhana with nostalgia. It was held on December 26 every year and it was so big that riders would fly in from Britain. British companies in Kenya would fall over one another to get sponsorship space and hospitality boxes on the podium.

It was an event Lonrho-owned companies used to show their might – Toyota Kenya, Norfolk Hotel, East African Tanning and Extracting Company (EATEC), among others, displayed their products therewith pomp. The British High Commissioner led his staff there in sampling the great Kenyan hospitality. In all, the King will find a very different Kenya, away from what the face of British capitalism epitomised in the last century.

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Confronting the colonial past

Continued from Page 19

body in Kenya is working on a petition for presentation to the King out of concern for gross human rights violations committed by the British government during the entire colonial period (1895 to 1963) and the continued injustices perpetuated by its corporates, citizens and programmes in Kenya, to date.

They will demand an unconditional public apology and official acknowledgment of wrongs over and above 'inadequate' expressions of regret previously offered in 2013 by then-Foreign Secretary William Hague and High Commissioner William Turner; as well as a 2015 apology from President Kenyatta for post-colonial violations. KHRC will also be demanding reparations for all the atrocities committed to the different groups in the entire country, including adequate compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantee of non-repetition.

They are also looking at reparative development for communities and regions they say continue to suffer the long term effects of colonial and post-colonial programmes of the British government. It is not clear at this stage how the commission proposes beneficiaries of such reparation will be identified, and the sums being asked for.

They also want de-classification of all materials and documentation on colonial atrocities, as well as return of Kenyan historical artefacts held in Britain for rehousing by the National Museum. It is not clear whether the commission has a list of artefacts that should be returned.

Contacted by *The Weekly Review*, Prime Cabinet Secretary Musalia Mudavadi, who also handles the Foreign Affairs docket, declined to comment on the petitions and other actions planned for the royal visit by civil society and activist groups. He is expected to give a press briefing with his British counterpart on Monday, a day before the King lands.

High Commission staff and advance teams from the British government who have met President Ruto and Foreign ministry officials have broached concerns about likely protests, and are keen to avoid any ugly incidents. It is understood that they have reached out to some of the civil society and activist groups to offer inclusion in the programme rather than have them out causing mayhem in the streets.

On colonial atrocities, Britain already made a major and ground-breaking concession in 2013 when then-High Commissioner Christian Turner gave an official apology. "The British government recognises that Kenyans were subject to torture and ill treatment at the hands of the colonial administration,"

Turner said at a news conference. "The British government sincerely regrets that these abuses took place."

That apology was, however, forced at the conclusion of a historic 'Mau Mau trial' when British courts ruled that the government was culpable for torture, killings and other atrocities visited on freedom fighters on colonial detention camps. An out of court settlement from the case pushed by KHRC saw the British government agree to pay each of more than 5,000 claimants a sum of about Sh350,000. The bulk of the settlement went to the British government paying for the building of a memorial to victims of colonial atrocities. There were also official acknowledgements and apologies from the High Commissioner in Nairobi as well as the Foreign Secretary in the House of Commons.

Torture and ill treatment

This is what Hague told the British Parliament: "I would like to make clear now and for the first time, on behalf of Her Majesty's Government, that we understand the pain and grievance felt by those who were involved in the events of the Emergency in Kenya."

"The British government recognises that Kenyans were subject to torture and other forms of ill treatment at the hands of the colonial administration. The British government sincerely regrets that these abuses took place, and that they marred Kenya's progress towards independence. Torture and ill treatment are abhorrent violations of human dignity which we unreservedly condemn."

These apologies of 10 years ago will most likely be repeated by King Charles, so they will not be new, but still significant coming from him. There will, however, be many others issues, some related, crying out for attention. There were groups that complained at the modest compensation, and that only the 5,000 claimants benefited, and further lawsuits have since been filed.

There are also issues of historical land injustices afflicting Kenya to this day that are traced to colonialism.

These range from ongoing issues over the vast tracts of land owned by multinational British tea farms in Kericho, the large expanses of ranches and private conservancies still held by British and other settlers in Laikipia, as well as issues around British military training camps in the same region.

The King will make a visit to the coast, which will be significant, given issues around Islamic extremist and the threat of terrorism, now added impetus by the renewed conflict between Israel and Hamas militants in the Gaza strip, and Kenya and Britain's firm support for the former.

POPULISTS ARE GOOD AT COINING CAPTIVATING NARRATIVES

THE MASTER OF SPIN

Ruto has mastered the art of turning a challenge into an opportunity

BY ELVIS ONDIEKI

A great deal of scientific thought has been channelled towards understanding why cats hardly fall on their backs when dropped in an upside-down position. Similar attention may be heading the way of President William Ruto and how he manages to manoeuvre situations that look like political blows and land unscathed – if not stronger. Ruto is quickly joining a list of politicians associated with the prefix 'Teflon', the chemical used in making non-stick cooking items. In the list of Teflon politicians are personalities like former US President Donald Trump and Netherlands Prime Minister Mark Rutte.

They are known to quickly turn bad press to their advantage and even thriving further. When he made his "mambo ni matatu" utterance in September, Dr Ruto caused a storm. Through it, he gave the corrupt three options: Leave Kenya, go to jail or be "transported" to heaven – a euphemism for execution. Some critics found it unpresidential because it suggested the use of extrajudicial means as official policy. Wiper Party leader Kalonzo Musyoka said it was a recipe for anarchy. A lobby group went to court to compel Ruto to withdraw it. As he repeated the phrase in a subsequent address to the nation, the President sought to appeal to the locals by saying it was the only way to save sugar factories and other dwindling investments. Ruto has now patented the remark.

According to a notice in the latest journal from the Kenya Industrial Property Institute, the phrase "mambo ni mangapi" accompanied by a three-finger sign is Ruto's intellectual property. Equally, "mambo ni matatu: mambo ni matatu" are registered to Ruto. Using them in clothing, advertising, education, and personal and social services without Dr Ruto's permission can land you in trouble.

In turning the tide regarding "mambo ni matatu", President Ruto continued his tendency to spin "negativity" to his own advantage. Two years ago, as his opponents cast aspersions on him calling himself a hustler, he couldn't resist spinning that. "People are worried that the lowly have begun to realise that their issues are important and must

be part of the national conversation," he said in September 2021 in an attempt to endear himself to voters at the bottom of the economic pyramid.

When his competitors threw jibes at his choice of a "backward" wheelbarrow as his party symbol, Ruto had a response. "We picked a wheelbarrow because it is a sign of working. You will find a wheelbarrow in a deputy president's house and you can find it in the house of an unemployed person. He will have it there to help him do his work," he argued in December 2021. "It can help you in all jobs." When he was under fire for engaging in "tangatanga", which was going round the country to address rallies rather than focus on his duties as deputy president, his response was that he was seeking to stay close to the grassroots. Even in the face of personal storms like the 2017 matter when a woman came out to accuse him of neglecting a daughter he had sired out of wedlock, Ruto responded and explained how he was supporting the mother – effectively shutting down a story about his private life that could have proved a political liability. According to political and policy analyst Edwin Kego-

li, the "Teflon Ruto" phenomenon is due to the President's giftedness. "(He is) uniquely gifted in terms of oration, political creativity and debate," said Kegoli. Ruto's eloquence is a fact that the opposition Azimio la Umoja One Kenya coalition reluctantly admitted in their analysis of his one year in office, though they were quick to note it often amounts to little. "Despite the rhetoric, despite the eloquent words and the confusing figures, Kenya Kwanza has been badly exposed on all fronts," said the coalition's statement. "No amount of oratory or extravagant claims can hide the harsh fact that we have had an extremely disastrous and difficult one year and there is no reason whatsoever for Kenyans to believe that the next one year will be better," it added. In Kegoli's view Ruto has mastered the art of turning around a perfect storm to his advantage.

"He's able to change narratives and is somebody who comes up with ownership. He says 'I am responsible for saying this, I am responsible for saying that'."

or he's also taking responsibility for his actions. Like in the social issue of Baby Abby, he came out and said 'I do not disown anything and this is my responsibility and I have done a number of things to make sure that the mother is comfortable and the baby is taken care of'. That silenced any criticism or the social issue turning into political fodder and giving advantage to his political enemies," said Kegoli.

According to Prof Winnie Mitullah, a political science expert, it is all because Ruto is in his element as a populist. "Populists are very good at coining captivating narratives for rallying populations. The hustler narrative is not different from the concept of *jua kali*, which Kenya has had for many decades, but Ruto popularised an alternative word as a rallying call," said Prof Mitullah.

"Mambo ni matatu, which is now patented, is easy to sell because corruption remains a major challenge and when the President says people will go to jail, leave Kenya or go to hell, the message hits what all of us know is a problem and earns Ruto a good score from many citizens," she added. Kegoli thinks the art of the spin is a mechanism Ruto's rival Raila Odinga lacks. "Raila lacks political propaganda machinery. If you remember the issue of mitumba (when Odinga pledged to reduce dependency on second-hand clothes if elected President), the propaganda machinery on the wing of Ruto was able to turn it around and make it look so bad; that Raila intended to kill mitumba business. That was not what Raila meant. Raila lacked a support base on how to legitimise his assertions and turn around the message that was in his manifesto and pronouncement because the propaganda machinery of Ruto always overpowered what Raila had,"

argued Kegoli. Ruto has cut the image of the politician who never lacks an answer. Whether he is being criticised for taking wads of cash to churches in donations, or for constructing a hotel on dubiously acquired government property, he always has a response. "Mtoto wa masikini akipata, ameiba, lakini mtoto wa tajiri akiiba, ni kwa sababu ya baba yake (When a poor person's child creates wealth, he is accused of stealing; but when a rich man's child steals, it is because it is his father's)," he observed in 2018 amid questions over the wealth he was amassing. Like wrestler Amalinzze the Cat in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, who got the nickname because his back never touched the ground when he was in fights, Ruto looks like he will keep building a fortress using whatever brickbats are thrown his way.



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opinion

Our development woes originate from incoherent policies



KARUTI KANYINGA

Everywhere you go in Kenya today, people are discussing the high cost of living. The increasing costs of petroleum products continue to cause increases in costs of activities in all sectors. The rising global oil prices, ongoing international conflicts, and a weakening Kenya shilling make it hard to find immediate and sustainable solution. And it is not going to be easy to find such a solution soon if there is no change in our everyday practices. Whether Kenyans tighten their belts or hold prayer rallies for the economy, it is not going to be easy.

But the economy will not collapse. Not at all. Kenya has a such a resilient informal economy that it is hard to give in to this pressure. Moreover, devolution has led to increased economic activities including in spaces that were dormant for decades. All counties have active market centres where there is visible growth of informal activities. Indeed, informal economic activities continue to provide livelihoods to many. A majority of formal sector employees, at national and county level, engage in informal economic activities to bring additional income beyond what they get from their regular jobs.

However, there are some employees in the public sector who are involved in predatory behaviour which adds pressure to the economy. Public servants, for instance, have cultivated a per diem culture which has matured to a point where it cannot be eliminated without causing a crisis in service delivery.

Incomes from per diems, month to month, in some instances is far higher than basic salaries of public servants. Teas/coffees, mandazi, fuel for vehicles, airtime for cellphones, hand copies of newspapers and other items under hospitality budget lines have an incredible impact on costs of running the public sector.

Predatory culture of public servants is picking up fast in the private sector. But removing these items from the budget is impossible. Cartels supply these items and they cannot allow removal without a fight. It is one budget line that remained active even during the days of the Covid pandemic. The private sector has picked this behaviour too – it is the same actors who bridge interests in private and public sector. How goods and services are procured for private businesses now attract the same cartels that dominate the public sector.

All this implies that our challenges

have deeper roots and require much more reflection than we have done thus far.

It also means the country has not reflected enough on what strategies to put in place to address the root cause of challenges we face. But the decay in integrity is just a tip of the iceberg. The development challenges we face have origins in failure to implement viable policies. This is an issue I now turn to.

Development challenges

A close review of data by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics show that we are net importers of goods including goods we can produce. We import more than we export. And this is where the problem lies. Let us begin with the cost of living as an example. All public opinion surveys carried out from around 2009 show that over 60 per cent of Kenyans have been concerned about cost of living. Many people have always said the country is ended in the wrong direction on account of high cost of living.

Optimism about the future direction of the country is always blurred by costs that ordinary households incur in daily living expenses. But some of these challenges would have been arrested had the country implemented viable policies in various sectors. Interestingly, for the last 15 years, the country has continued to import huge amounts of wheat,

rice, and maize. Kenya imports three times more wheat than rice. What is worse is that we also import wheat flour in huge amounts every year. These are products that our farmers produce but not in adequate quantities.

The point here then is that our policies to support agricultural production have not registered adequate success. We have not adequately supported farming of these crops to a point where the costs and volumes of imports would decline. The costs of imports will certainly continue going up because of depreciating shilling. There is no immediate end to this. But if agricultural policies were effectively implemented to support production of wheat, rice, and maize – and sugar – these costs would certainly come down.

Past policies have not worked because of inconsistencies in implementation of policies as well as constraints posed by vested interests in the agricultural subsectors. Notably subsidies do not serve the purpose they are intended. Fertiliser as an important input is always subsidized but the main beneficiaries are large and medium-scale farmers.

They have the means to transport their fertiliser from the source to their farms. Small scale farmers whose increased productivity would reduce imports rely on the market priced fertiliser near local business centres because the costs of access-

ing subsidised fertiliser are prohibitive. Someone will may think that the small scale farmers are registered to access the fertilizer with ease but this is not the case.

Local cartels still make it hard for the ordinary small farmers to access the fertiliser. Sometimes the subsidised fertiliser finds its way in the hands of corrupt public officers who sell to local businesses.

A look at data on imports show that there are many other imported products that could be produced locally if we had supportive policies. But these would require supportive bureaucratic and political commitments to produce. The import of these products is again dominated by vested interests. Those importing them are so powerful and entrenched in the economy that it will take real courage and determination to break them.

These products include animal and vegetable oils, edible products and preparations, some chemicals, insecticides and fungicides, furniture, and associated repair items, among others. Some of these are produced locally in small quantities without adequate supportive policies. Indeed, our manufacturing sector has been on decline precisely because it is cheaper to import some of these than to produce them.

The cost of production is sometimes high because there is insufficient policy reflection on what it would take to reduce cost of production. Incentives are lacking in some key sectors to promote production. Improving the economy and reducing the cost of living is not going to be easy on account of vested interests that dominate and constrain import market.

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It's that time again, when Halloween ghosties and ghoulies walk free

You may agree or not, but a lot of people here will tell you with a straight face that this is the scariest time of the year.

On Tuesday, October 31, is Halloween, or All Hallows' Eve, the eve of the Christian feast of All Saints on November 1, a day for people to remember loved ones who have died.

For many others, it is a time when the dead rise from their graves and walk the earth.

Polls taken this year found that 34 per cent of Britons believe in ghosts, 28 per cent say they have felt a supernatural presence and nine per cent that they have communicated with the dead.

Certainly, you just have to turn to the television listings to see how fixated this nation seems to have become with the supernatural.

Ghost-hunting and paranormal investigations with titles such as "Uncanny" abound on air, depicting investigators prowling nervously through abandoned buildings in search of the undead.

There are books and podcasts, Facebook groups, forums and walking tours, as well as such popular Halloween activities as trick-or-treating, carving grotesque lantern faces out of pumpkins, apple bobbing and dressing



GERRY LOUGHRAN

up.

It's all about spectres and vampires, witches and skeletons, poltergeists and things that go bump in the night, the night of October 31.

Just before writing this, I saw the driver of one of our local buses with painted white face and wearing what seemed to be a nun's habit, an early entrant in the scary stakes.

Halloween activities have exploded over the years, which social historians put down to American influence and commercialisation of the original feast. A one-time evening of home-made fun now stretches to a week and more, with expensive costumes, masks and diabolical paraphernalia on sale in the big stores.

This has not always gone down well with traditionalists, especially some Christians. Just this month, a Catholic priest in Czechoslovakia stamped

angrily on Halloween pumpkins near his village church.

Father Jaromir Smejkal said, "Leaving the rectory on Sunday evening, I saw numerous symbols of the satanic feast of Halloween in front of our sacred grounds. I acted according to my faith... and removed these symbols."

Upon learning that the pumpkins were carved by the village children, the priest said it had not been his intention to harm anyone, especially not children.

All this a long way from "Ducky Apple Night," when our dad filled a tin tub with water and challenged us kids to duck our heads under and snare one of half a dozen bobbing apples with our teeth, though what we usually got was a mouthful of other kids' spit.

It was hard to believe at first... a boy of 13 was knocked off his bike, surrounded

by armed policemen and handcuffed because an officer thought his water pistol was a real gun.

The lad was having a water fight in Hackney, inner London, with his little sister; his pistol was blue and white, hers pink and white. Unmistakably, toys.

Are our policemen blind?

A clue was offered by the children's mother. She asked, "Was his real offence being a black boy on the streets of Hackney?"

"I know," she said, "and the police know, they would not have treated my son in the way they did if he had been a white boy." "I know that they would not have treated me with contempt as they did or describe me as 'aggressive' if I was not black."

The Alliance for Police Accountability said the scene involving the boy was horrific and appalling and officers did treat his mother with contempt.

An investigation by standards department of the Metropolitan Police, the force that covers London, found that no misconduct had been committed by officers involved. A complaint of racial bias was being investigated.

They call it "charge rage," the latest version of "road rage," where motorists

fight and argue, not over bad driving, but for access to plug-in points for their electric cars. The motorway service station chain, Moto, has hired marshals to manage queues and calm down stressed and angry drivers who claim charge points are too few.

The Department of Transport said 96 per cent of motorway service areas already have such facilities and hundreds more will be installed in coming months.

Terrible jokes for Halloween: How do you write a book about Halloween? Use a ghost-writer.

What's it like to be kissed by a vampire? A pain in the neck.

Why didn't the ghost dance at the party? He had no body to dance with.

What do you call a witch with a rash? An itchy witchy.

A man believed his car was haunted, so he asked a priest to exorcise the vehicle. The priest performed the necessary ritual and presented the car owner with a bill for £100, which the man refused to pay. A few weeks later, the car was repossessed.

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people, power and politics

■ At the dawn of independence, he was employed by the Royal College as the resident carpenter

How Kirima built his **multibillion-shilling** empire

In 1976, Gerishon Kirima placed a notice in the Kenya Gazette that he and his G.K. Kirima and Sons company would not be held accountable for any debt incurred by his relatives, family, or staff without his express authority.

That is how the billionaire ran his empire. Kirima was frugal – a billionaire who was the king of bean counters.

Thirteen years after his death, Kirima is back in the news after the High Court declared that he was the owner of the vast land in Nairobi's Eastlands that had been occupied by squatters and sold to unsuspecting investors by brokers, cartels, and land sharks. It is true.

I have seen Kasarani MP, Ronald Karuri, question how Kirima acquired the land. One needs to see the land transaction files at the Kenya National Archives, and it is all there. Kirima had, by 1967, emerged as one of the astute African businessmen. He had started as a carpenter and knew the art of creating wealth by being frugal. At the dawn of independence, he was employed by the Royal College as the resident carpenter, and he started operating a small workshop in Bahati, the hub of African entrepreneurs. It was in the Bahati workshop that the family would eke extra cash. They also run another workshop in Kaloleni where his first wife, Agnes, would attend customers. From here, she brought up her children.

Kirima was parsimonious, albeit thrifty, with the little money he earned. He opened bars and restaurants, taking advantage of the rural-urban migration, which had brought thousands of people to Nairobi to seek work. Banks were looking at this emerging class of entrepreneurs to support – as white settlers sought buyers of the vast ranches they held. Again, the Kenyatta government had no money to purchase all the land on offer.

The land Kirima bought used to be owned by an Italian farmer, Domenico Masi, a cattle rancher, who had opted to leave the country. Kirima purchased the land and cattle and became one of the major meat suppliers in Nairobi. But rather than enter the trade as a wholesaler, Kirima had opened his Kirima Butcheries and tapped into the emerging African middle class in Nairobi's Eastlands and the city's environs.

During this period of Africanisation of business, Kirima fought to break the Kenya Meat Commission monopoly by opening his abattoir in



JOHN
KAMAU

Njiru and entering into the most lucrative trade: meat supply. It was not surprising that he added 108 acres from British settler Charles Case, the son of an Ol Kalou rancher, William Herbert Case. His next purchase in the same area was the 472 acres in Njiru he purchased from Percy Everley Randal – a South African rancher who had sold most of his land to the UK-based Magana Kenya.

With these ranches, Kirima established himself as a rancher keeping beef animals, supplying Nairobi with meat, and breaking the Kenya Meat Commission monopoly, which had ignored steers from African-owned farms. Alternatively, they underpaid African farmers.

This pro-settler attitude would mark the demise of KMC for its history was the history of colonial meat supply. Previously, during the colonial days, the government had established the African Livestock Marketing Organisation to regulate the animals from African farms destined for KMC. Kirima had seen this opportunity, and he had brought together all the African butchers to demand their inclusion in the meat industry. As chairman of African Butchers – later Kenya National Butchers' Union – Kirima became the voice of the multimillion-shilling industry.

Njiru was part of his ranch, the space in which he was to build his empire. Before independence,

Africans were not allowed to buy high-quality meat from KMC, and the areas identified as "African locations" were supplied with low-quality meat – only fit for roasting. After independence, this low-quality meat was identified in KMC parlance as FAQ, meaning Fairly

Average Quality. That would be anything from hooves to offal meat, and each butchery had its quota, which was not guaranteed. It was this monopoly that Kirima sought to fight since KMC was the only licensed supplier of meat in Nairobi butcheries. But there were pirate suppliers, and police and council askaris were always on the lookout.

But ranching was not as profitable as Kirima projected, and so he was left with real estate in an area that was not inhabited. The price of meat was government-controlled, curtailing the development of the meat industry. Many other farms in the vicinity – but owned by cooperatives, including the Kiambu Dandora Farm and the Embakasi Ranching Company would also collapse to the same fate. And like Kirima's Njiru Farm, they have faced the same problem with squatters.

Kirima ventured into the transport industry, and his Kirima Bus Company was one of the most flourishing in Central Kenya and competed with Dedan Ndjorge Nduati's Jogoo Kimakia Bus Service. It was these two African-owned companies that would challenge the British company Overseas Trading Company (OTC) on the central Kenya route. But Kirima Bus Company did not survive for long after Kenyatta issued a decree that allowed Matatus to enter the transport business from Nairobi to other towns in 1973.

Kirima and other transport entrepreneurs, Muhuri Muchiri, Oginga Odinga, Tom Mboya, and Nduati, were some of the first casualties. But before he sold the buses, Kirima was in a group that asked Kenyatta to intervene.

But Kenyatta is reported to have told them to invest in Matatus if they think they are eating his business. Kirima then folded his transport company

and was

allowed to start his abattoir in Njiru. As KMC naively marketed its "up-market" beef, the Kirima group snatched the growing lower-end market and promoted the consumption of roast meat to build a viable meat industry.

Because of that, Kirima became the love of many Nairobi dwellers and was elected a councillor and Nairobi Deputy Mayor. Despite his dismal education, he was elected as MP in Nairobi. Meanwhile, he had ventured into coffee farming and real estate and his children would not be spared. They would join the other coffee pickers and at the end of the month, they would also be sent to collect rent from his rental houses in Nairobi's Eastland.

Despite the wealth he had, Kirima was not sophisticated. He never showed off his wealth. It is no wonder that people wonder how such an inconspicuous man turned into a billionaire. When he lived, one could spot him around his Kirima Building, opposite Jeevanjee Gardens, Nairobi, in the company of age-mates or taking tea in the eateries nearby.

Court succession documents showed that Kirima's estate could rake in Sh20 million monthly. One day, Kirima came to Barclays' Banl Market Branch with a bag full of money. He had apparently walked from the nearby office. Then the daughter came rushing and asked him: "Why should you risk?" Kirima looked at the daughter and wondered who would dare take his money.

It is perhaps this kind of faith that saw him watch his estate invaded by squatters. His later years were drama-filled: Witchcraft stories, a new wife, deaths, and threats. As diabetes took a toll on him, people took advantage of his estate and started selling plots. With poor eyesight and still hanging on to the properties, Kirima watched as politicians also used his land as bait to attract voters. Kirima was not alone. All the land owned by land-buying companies in Nairobi's Eastland would be invaded in a similar fashion.

By going to court, the Kirima estate wanted to right the wrongs done to a pioneer African businessman. It is the story of how systems in Nairobi have collapsed – to the extent that even Nairobi MPs do not know the history of that land. It is also the story of billionaires who failed to push their empires to new frontiers.

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OBIT

'Shaft' action star Richard Roundtree leaves the stage



• LOS ANGELES

Richard Roundtree, an icon of Blaxploitation film who starred as detective John Shaft in Gordon Parks' 1971 action thriller, died on October 24 after a short battle with pancreatic cancer. He was 81 years old. His death was confirmed by Patrick McMinn, his manager since 1987.

"Richard's work and career served as a turning point for African American leading men in film," McMinn said in his statement. "The impact he had on the industry cannot be overstated."

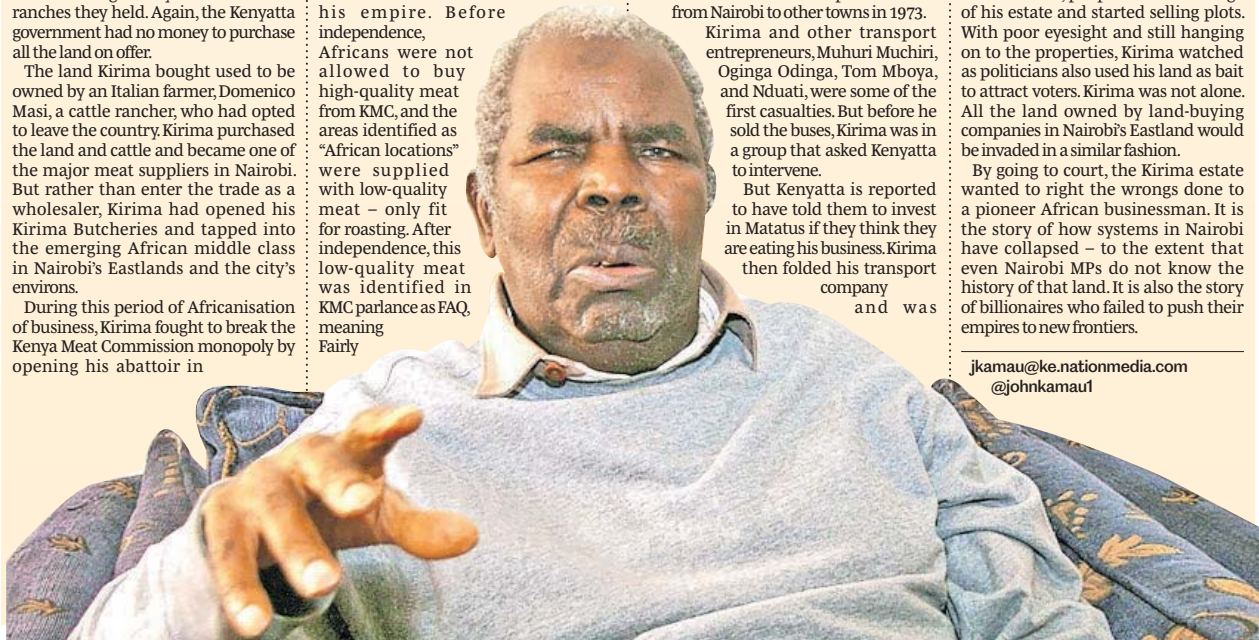
Roundtree was a leading man from the very start of his lifetime in screen acting. After beginning his career in modeling, he secured "Shaft" at the age of 28, marking his feature debut. The MGM release earned \$12 million in ticket sales off of a \$500,000 production budget, helping to save the studio from bankruptcy.

A breakthrough hit, "Shaft" set the tone for a prolific decade of Blaxploitation filmmaking and demonstrated Hollywood's historical failure to consider Black talent and the moviegoing audiences that they could reach. When asked about the "exploitation" label attached to "Shaft" by the *New York Times* in a 2019 interview, Roundtree expressed some ambiguity about the term.

"I had the privilege of working with the classiest gentleman possibly that I've ever known in the industry, Gordon Parks. So, that word, exploitation, I take offense to with any attachment to Gordon Parks... I've always viewed that as a negative. Exploitation. Who's being exploited?" Roundtree said. "But it gave a lot of people work. It gave a lot of people entrée into the business, including a lot of our present-day producers and directors. So, in the big picture, I view it as a positive."

Two sequels about the "bad mother (shut your mouth)" quickly followed within the span of two years: "Shaft's Big Score" and "Shaft in Africa." In 1973, CBS attempted a "Shaft" television series starring Roundtree — a run that only lasted a handful episodes.

"You can't erase events, but that's one I wish I could," Roundtree told the *Times* in 2019. "I had just come back from 'Shaft in Africa' when they tried to convert the character to television. It wasn't going to happen. That was an ugly point in my long, illustrious career."



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