

# MOVE AGAINST KENCO FOILED

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ILLUSTRATION BY SOPHIA MARTINECK

**BIZARRE THIS BUST** up between Wambui and Kizito; I mean, bizarre because it was just coffee.

By chance, we found ourselves living in Victoria Hall on Upper Brook Street and went to the same Manchester University. Wambui was Kenyan, I – Tanzanian, Kizito – Ugandan, Abesolome – Ethiopian, Anopa – Zimbabwean; and Majoro – Rwandese Ugandan or was it Ugandan Rwandese, he had a Rwandese passport but spoke Luganda and behaved Ganda. The rest of the students in the hall were white.

Wambui travelled to Kenya regularly during term breaks while Kizito had not gone home for two years. Perhaps there was jealousy there, I don't know. But knowing the European love for Kenyan coffee, Wambui brought packs of it on return and put them in the kitchen for everyone's use. And boy did they love it.

One day, on the internet, Wambui found this picture of a Kenya Coffee House in Romford! You should have seen his excitement. He printed it off – a large Victorian house – hung it on a wall in the kitchen and made this cute Kenyan coffee corner. From then on, he made sure that the corner never ran dry of Kenyan coffee. I think Kizito was getting irritated by the Kenya coffee success story because one time as we had supper together in the kitchen a white student, who had just made himself a brew, said to Wambui, “Thanks mate; this is great,” Kizito had clicked, “Kdt, Kenyan coffee is popular because people out here have never tasted real coffee.”

We laughed; I mean, Ugandan coffee is literally unknown in Britain but Kizito carried on: “Before Idi Amin, our coffee was far more popular all over the world. No one knew about Kenyan coffee but then we fell off the grid and Kenyan coffee took over.”



"You people need to get over Idi Amin and take responsibility for your failures," Wambui had retorted, "it's thirty-three years since he was ousted."

"What do you know, Wambui?" this time there was real emotion in Kizito's voice. "After all, our war is your profit."

"Is that why your Museveni is trying to destabilise us? So you can make money out of our misery too?"

"Now, now, Wambui," Kizito denied. "Museveni is no angel but he has no territorial interest in the region."

"Ahhh," Wambui clapped and laughed as if Kizito was the most shameless liar. Majoro joined him and they high-fived. Even Abesolome, normally quiet, shook his head. Kizito's serious face fell and we all laughed. We left it at that – harmless banter.

Now, as if to provoke Kizito, Wambui started to buy Kenyan coffee from British supermarkets. The packaging was sleek and shiny, you know, Western style – *Tassimo Corte Noire Kenya*, *Mocha Kenyan Style*, *Atomic café*, *Dormans Suprema*, *Espresso*, *Decaf*, but when he brought *Christopher Bean Coffee*, Kizito laughed, "I bet the real maker of that *Kenyan coffee* is called Christopher Bean, Mr Bean."

Wambui did not find this funny. I think the idea that Kenyan coffee has European names hit home hard, but he kept quiet. Yet soon afterwards, he brought another pack from Altrincham laughing that even Waitrose had its own brand, *Waitrose – mild and fragrant Kenyan Ground Coffee*. I thought that he was laughing at the irony.

Last Christmas, Kizito finally went home. On return, he brought a lot of coffee and tea. And perhaps this was the problem; because if it had been me I would have brought tea only: coffee was already Wambui's





turf. Anyway, Kizito put it next to Wambui's Kenya Coffee House and on the wall wrote, *Real Coffee has arrived: all the way from Uganda*. You can imagine the locally made Uganda coffee laid out next to the sleek British made *Corte Noirs*, *Tassimos* and *Espressos*! The packaging seemed rather random – garish greens and yellows – but coffee is coffee, people tried it. The *Kisubi* tea, spiced with lemon grass, was fantastic and it was the first to go. Myself I am a tea person and I loved it. Then one day Wambui tried the Ugandan coffee; he took one sip and remarked:

“I think eventually it will get there but at the moment the quality is still poor.”

We were in the kitchen as usual and I was giving him the eye, I mean, you don't say that, but he just carried on, “It's that poor sanitation and all the land fragmentation that makes it hard for you guys.”

Even I could not soften that remark with a casual joke. Kizito did not say a word. In retrospect, I think I should have said something to ease the tension. Anyway, the following morning, Wambui's Kenya Coffee House had been torn down. In the evening when we returned from lectures, Uganda coffee and the sign were in the bin.

Wambui and Kizito stopped talking.

We were caught in the middle.

The white students, not knowing what was going on, were upset about the wasted coffee and; *what the hell happened to the house of Kenyan coffee*? We were keen not to let other students know that all was not well in the East African Community as we called ourselves but Wambui could not hide his contempt for Kizito. He accused him of being haughty; in fact, all Ugandans were now haughty, they look down at all other East Africans, that was why they did not speak Swahili,

apparently they suck up to the British and spoke English with a fake accent, “They are fake, fake, fake,” he exclaimed.

When Kizito heard, he shrugged it off, citing history. According to him, in Uganda Swahili is considered as a language of violence because it came with slave trade. As for sucking up to the whites, he said that Uganda was never colonised the way Kenya was. I mean, you should have heard him say:

“The British came to Buganda because our Kabaka Muteesa asked H.M Stanley to write a letter to Queen Victoria asking to marry her. To him the British lacked proper men: otherwise why would they be ruled by a woman? And so he offered to rule them through her. Of course that creep, Stanley, instead wrote that we were asking for missionaries but who cares? The British came, gave us guns and we overrun the rest of the tribes creating a large kingdom. And when we got fed up with the British's dastardly ways we asked for our independence and they gave it to us. Naturally, we can't hate the British the way you do: what they did to us we had been doing to others.”

I tell you even I was irritated by this. I mean, Ethiopians were never colonised but Abeselome does not go on about it. And, Swahili is more Bantu than Arabic but I kept quiet. Anyway, we decided to put an end to the silly feud. Anopa reprinted the picture of the Kenya Coffee House off, this time even bigger, and put it back on the wall. Then we went to ASDA, bought two big jars of *Kenco* and put them underneath the picture. As for Ugandan coffee there was nothing we could do: it had been thrown away. The white students hoorayed and clapped when they saw the coffee corner back and that was it. Ugandan coffee had made a move against Kenyan coffee and lost. ●

**Jennifer Makumbi's novel *Kintu* will be published in June 2014.**