

UNO

On the great lawn at the UN headquarters in Nairobi, UNON building, United Nations Office Nairobi, stands an elephant made of straw. It misses a leg, but from a distance it seems to me to be very realistic. The whole compound is enormous, a part of the landscape. On the horizon, you see people walking around, UN employees, jogging for recreation. To balance things out, I take off my shoes and smoke another cigarette. The grass is hard, and the individual blades are set far apart from each other, so you can see the earth in between. I'm not sure if you can walk around barefoot, or if there might be small animals, snakes, insects, plants, African hazards, that you drop dead from if you step on.

Tree planted by Deng Xiao Ping, on his visit to the UN Headquarters in Nairobi. A small tree with a cord around it. If you get a bit closer, you can read that it was planted by Madame Deng Xiao Ping, probably as part of the ladies' program. The ladies' program, the best part of any ambassador's life. The ambassador responsible for me is always busy with something that mostly takes him to one of the national parks, where he's currently calling me from on his cell phone. That's nothing special for him, but my phone is being redirected across the globe. So here I am, roaming in Africa, and I don't even want to know how much it's costing me, how much I'm paying to give the impression of being professional.

I stub my cigarette out on my shoe. This grass, this soil, wildfire, I think to myself, inextinguishable, and elephants that get herded for kilometers because of it. I decide to pocket my cigarette butt.

When it rains, the water sits on top of the ground and they lay out small planks so you can go from tent to tent with shoes on. Right now there isn't a tent set up, no Women Caucus, and no book presentation. The area slopes down towards the river. On the other side, there are the villas' gardens. Everywhere in between, but in such a way that you can't see it, is barbed wire. A catastrophe has occurred, so I'm told over the phone, and I'm the one who caused it. Sure enough, just as he'd feared, the European Union had complained that we'd gone it alone. We had tabled a resolution. I see myself standing in the office the day before. We already had the resolution with us. Patrick had it in

his hand. I was standing around, and somebody called out: "Does Austria sponsor the resolution?" And I said: "I can't decide that," and by the time Patrick said: "Write this down. We can figure it out," I was already out the door. I now convince myself of that, and it gives me the certainty to calmly tell the raging ambassador in such-and-such National Park: "It wasn't me."

All that, and actually above all that makes him angry, and in the end he'll have to come to the party tomorrow evening, which means that he'll have to fly back and leave his Austrian industrialists all alone on Our Africa Trip. So he'll be there tomorrow, and he'll tell our EU colleagues how indignant he is about it. How clever, to yourself be the one who's most appalled, so that in the end you weren't the one who made the mistake. And yet it doesn't matter. They have enough countries that support the resolution, and France also always tables its own resolutions, regardless of any and all agreements within the European Union, if it's in the interest of their large corporations. 'Water and sanitation in least developed areas', of course, as long as these projects are financed by the World Bank and employ large multinational corporations. Eau et Gaz de France. And the group of experts can talk at length about the need for local solutions. We in Europe know better. Transmission lines! You need transmission lines. And who can built them? Only multinational corporations.

Our small scandal, which he is explaining to me on the phone at my own cost, while my cigarette has long ago been smoked and the sky is already beginning to get dark and actually all I wanted to do was to walk over this lawn, will be yet another reason why here in Nairobi everything is always so terribly disorganized. And why it will be necessary in the final report to once again, with a sigh, draw attention to the terrible conditions in this country, which make it impossible to work here. Actually, on the phone, he isn't particularly diplomatic in any way, rather highly offensive, and because I said, I remember exactly, that I couldn't decide that, instead of, and this I could very well have actually done, still deciding it, since when he isn't there I'm the one who decides things like that, and then he should be here instead of jetting through the national parks, now I'm also getting upset. This small raving voice that's costing me so much money. No, he doesn't have the right to do this, and he's simply not right, either.

Further away, they're starting to set up the tents. The theme of the party is vaguely oriental. Carpets and low wooden stools, dark wooden benches, but

these are admittedly African. During the time in which he goes on talking, they manage to set up the tents, and it starts to rain.

I go into the library to check again whether an email has arrived. In front of the window of the library is a wall of rain. You can't see the building next door, just this dark gray wall directly in front of the window.

That it is really cold and raining like the skies are about to fall on us. Some towns like in the coast are impassible as water is everywhere. Anyway, did you read about the clashes that were in some parts of the country? Like here in Nairobi we had war breaking out between Mungiki and Talibans. To let you know Mungiki is a group made up of people from the Kikuyu and the Talibans are the rest of the Kenyan tribes. They fought in Mathare, one of the largest slums, where as it happens i come from one of its vast corners. 8[eight] persons were killed. Houses were burnt and many people had to flee their houses. Right now as i am writing, my things are being ferried to my sisters place. We are refugees in our own country.

Ms. Deng Xiao Ping plants trees, schoolchildren also plant trees, the nobel prize winner started a project to plant a hundred thousand plants here, and since then trees are planted on every official occasion. People love trees. I'm not so sure it that's the case in Nairobi, after all they hardly ever see them.

The school plants a tree. Not that I'd so much like to take a photograph here. But I still just dare to photograph a tree, though to the kids scurrying around and acting bored it seems silly to waste an image for a tree, if there isn't a person in it. They'd gladly be in it, they say, if I'm taking a photo, they'd stand in so that the photo would make sense. Then they even grab hold of the tree, and it doesn't look like they had planted it, more like they're touching a tree for the first time. The trees are small, and they grab hold of them like your grab hold of a goat. Maybe. I never held a goat, but they hold onto the trees as if they could run away. It's too bright. I can't see the images on the display. Together, we form a sort of tent, and they see themselves as small shadows next to the shadow of the tree.

The sun is right above us. The sun is very bright. In a few seconds, I'm going to have a sunstroke.

They've set up tents on the soccer field. A second white woman with

dyed blonde hair and a face that's melting who's also showing slight indications of sunstroke, like me, these narrowed eyes and the discontented look, is now approaching, tottering across the lawn. An umbrella is being held up above her, and she's wearing a two-piece woman's suit. It's the Polish ambassador. And since I'm starting to suspect that I won't survive otherwise, I sit with her in the VIP tent. It's the VIP tent on the sports field in a suburb of Nairobi that had been flattened on the field with the help of an NGO, and to celebrate this day the structure of the outhouse is being presented, which stands a bit off to the side. Access to water and sanitation.

Four people and the TV team that traveled all the way here, which also consists of three people, are struggling with the loudspeaker.

On the other side of the soccer field, a crowd stands in the blazing sun. On the right side under a different tent sits a music ensemble in fantasy uniforms, grumpy old men with tall hats who stand up every five minutes to play the Kenyan national anthem. The conductor thus has to stand in direct sunlight and then disappears immediately afterwards into his refuge in the shadows. The sounds system whistles, and behind me I can sense the two Chinese visitors I'm responsible for getting nervous. The head of Public Relations for HABITAT is from Australia and is wearing a cowboy hat and a safari vest, a hunter's vest with twenty small pockets. I'm wearing a HABITAT T-shirt, 'I am a City Changer', a size XXL given to me after Patrick took a look at my own, which he declared inappropriate. "We aren't on the run here," he said.

There are kids in pink and kids in green and politicians in dark suits, who are taking a seat in armchairs in front of me in the VIP tent. The loudspeaker now whistles only intermittently, and one after another kids in pink and kids in green dance. Then they commence with the speeches. They speak in Sheng, so I understand some of it. Namely, that the grandmother of one politician had cultivated bananas but also oranges, and what's the problem with either oranges or bananas? Next to me, Patrick is becoming increasingly nervous, because essentially there is an agreement between the UN and Kenya that UN events are not to be used for political agitation. And that they're crazy, that they never abide, and are continue doing it, again and again. Banana means 'Yes', and oranges means 'No', or, like Crispin said, it's about the orange revolution in a banana state, and whether or not they recognize the newly

rewritten constitution. It's about the referendum that's soon supposed to take place.

"Are you going?" I ask Crispin later that evening. No, it's the same either way. "If they had wanted to pursue real politics, they could have done it with the old constitution."

On the other hand, you can pretty much rule out the possibility that they'll ever come this far again.

"Given the form that it's in right now, the constitution needs to be rejected," Lawrence also says, my Chinese boss at UN-HABITAT, even though it was once a major project, a truly participatory process, and a valid attempt. "But then they somehow veered off from their main message, the break with the American presidential system," he continues. This king-like president of the American constitution who the new Kenyan constitution initially wanted to pair with a prime minister. And that got lost somewhere, with the result that the disappointed future prime minister, the one they ousted at the last elections, the vote against whom had been tampered with, a member of the ethnic group Luo, like Crispin and a lot of other of the people who are dissatisfied, now founded oranges and initiated a referendum concerning the new constitution. But, as Lawrence says, even a prime minister wouldn't guarantee that the political situation would improve. "Look at France!" Now they have two Air Force Ones, or whatever they're called in French.

To the right, in the tent, a woman now emerges who passes a note through the rows that makes its way on to me. I just pass it on, and she walks around the whole row to pick it back up again on the left side and redirect it emphatically towards me. It's an invitation to the dinner following the event, and evidently, out of all the teenagers who squeezed into the VIP tent in with me and are now listening to endless speeches without showing any signs of exhaustion, it was in fact intended for me, but unmoved, I pass it to my neighbor on the right. I hope she'll go. They're now handing out bottles of water and orange juice to the people in the tent. It's noon, and we're near the equator, and for hours now we've been listening to speeches about bananas and oranges. There's no longer an outside. The sun makes it impossible to leave the tent.

The Chinese visitors, whose sole contact person is me, even though one can hardly call me that, because we can't exchange a single word, but all the

Kenyans talk to me when they want to talk to them, and the Chinese visitors talk to me when they want to talk to anybody, and I don't understand anything, and when I pantomime 'Would you also like something to drink?' – 'The bus is back there!' – 'The toilet is on the other side!' – 'The program is still going on!' – they look at me with desperation in their eyes, and I can't do anything. Our tin can of a bus is jammed. The only place in the shadow is the one we're already at.

The national anthem also sounds metallic, and the Chinese woman pours water over her handkerchief and hands it to her sweating husband. Both are tiny. I assume they think I'm a monster, and I assume they have no idea what to think of me. She looks for the toilet. I've already been there. It's the little blue house in the middle of the meadow, between all the school children.

They want me to stand up for them, to help them get their flight to Nairobi refunded, for our treaties to continue, for their to be money, and I can't do anything because I don't understand. The Chinese translator already left with the head of the Chinese media union yesterday evening. A woman of exceptional elegance, disapproving of me, and with a terrible smoker's cough. Within 24 hours, they fly back and forth between Beijing and Nairobi, so that once more, as we assure each other jokingly, the planet will be destroyed by our flights before the signatures on the documents to save it have even dried. But we work together to also save each other, both of us, and by the looks of it, as I look around, some more pre-modern project makers as well. The translator was still standing with me in front of the hotel, smoking, and said, if I knew what this was about I wouldn't be here any more. In any case, he would by no means come back. The letters D&G glittered on his T-shirt, and I said: "I am so glad you are here." And he said: "I am not."

I get interrupted by the noise in the streets. I decide to go and see what the fuss was all about. Orange supporters were jubilant after defeating the Banana team. The banana camp which was in the red corner had the ministers who claimed that, since it was a government project, they will use all the resources at their disposal to see that they carry the day. On the blue corner we had the orange camp which also had a few ministers who were totally disagreeing with the others on such issues such as land, devolution of executive powers and wanted a people driven constitution which was left at Bomas

conference. There was another problem, not the constitutional one but a battle for supremacy as to who counts the majority of votes. Banana had the Kikuyus, Embus and the Merus against the orange which had the other forty or so tribes in Kenya.

Out of eight provinces in Kenya, banana only managed to get one. Orange team managed to get seven provinces and thus they won overwhelmingly. This was taken as a sign that people in Kenya were tired of being taken for a ride.