

## Japanese Hunters

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Chepkemoi was asked by the members of the community to report what the Japanese were doing in their little makeshift structure that had been allocated to them six months earlier. She did not know how to approach the Japanese. Luckily, it was suspected that every one of the Japanese in the hut knew how to speak English. But Chepkemoi had only managed to grasp some very basic English words. She did not know how to dress too. In the wee hours of the assignment day, she went to the river to bathe. Then took the Vaseline at the opening of the attic, smeared on herself properly, wore her best robe that was bought for her as a Christmas gift last December, then she made for the hut occupied by the Japanese.

“Hodi! Hodi!” she knocked at the door.

“Karibu!” one of the shortest Japanese replied.

Chepkemoi was given a cup of tea that tasted a little like a cow’s urine at noon. Then the Japanese continued with their discussions. There were five of them in total, five male and a woman, she reported, making sure that a woman was not an integer. All Japanese were seated on the floor. One of them was busy looking into a book. Another one was busy washing utensils and doing a lot of kitchen work. A huge one was playing on the floor doing some press-ups. He was fairly half-naked with only a tiny panty wound around his loins. The fourth Japanese was busy watching people playing vigorously on a screen fixed firmly on the wall. The woman Japanese was seated on his laps. Chepkemoi could not find out exactly why a woman was seated on a man’s laps. Perhaps, she was male? Her breasts were tiny. There was a possibility that she was male. The last Japanese was ironing clothes on a wooden stand, while singing *chepo kabarkire* or a song like that because he wiggled his hips many times, sang with punctuated pauses while snapping his fingers.

Exactly thirty minutes later, all the Japanese kept quiet. They huddled on the floor and tea was served with some dried lizards or similar delicacies. They vigorously attacked the food using small sticks with pointed tips. Chepkemoi was so scared! She pretended that she was not hungry, but managed to take the tea with a lot of struggle. In the process she asked them what made

them come to the African village. One of them said that they had heard of some news that there were descendants of the Japanese there. They were called Amaeru (to presume on the love or kindness of someone) and that they were good hunters. The Japanese wanted to learn more and reconnect with their ancestral kin. Chepkemoi confirmed that it was their clan Amaeru (depend on the work of your hands) that they were referring to.

The Japanese took a lot of interest in that realization. One of them pulled out a detailed programme for hunting with those people. They gave Chepkemoi some little money to go back to the village assembly to explain their purpose for coming and make the necessary arrangements for hunting.

At the village assembly Chepkemoi explained to the elders and young men through a male interpreter because, as a woman, she was not allowed to speak to an assembly of elders. “This girl has told me what she found out at the Japanese’s,” the interpreter said.

“Yes,” the crowd roared.

“There were many Japanese in that small hut, all lying down as if mourning! The females were on top of the males! But Chepkemoi could not confirm what was happening!”

“Haha,” the crowd laughed.

“But they are good people because they gave her some tea and some things like cut snakes! She did not taste, so no one knows if they were snakes or how they managed to capture them!”

“Ohoo,” the people were shocked.

“I was told that they eat snakes too!” one of the members of the crowd said.

“But the message from the Japanese is that they want to go on hunting from tomorrow,” the interpreter ended.

An elder joined the conversation by asking the young men to prepare to accompany the Japanese on hunting the following day. It was arranged that bows and arrows should be procured for all the male Japanese then a staff for the female Japanese. Then they should be trained on how to hunt and a hunting programme based on their programmes is prepared. Another elder rose up. “This is going to be very simple. Let Kiptuya sell them all the bows and arrows he has in stock

together with the quivers. I will surrender mine too. But each set should be KES 300. It is upon the young men to make a list of activities,” he ended.

“The bows and arrows a set go for USD 1,500!” Kiptuya interjected.

“Have you handled dollars, Kiptuya!” the elder responded.

“Their money is called Yen,” a school-going boy shouted.

“Yen, Yen, Yen,...!” Kiptuya repeated several times. All the members of the assembly were left laughing.

A young man shot up. He outlined the programme. He said, “I will lead the young men accompanying the Japanese.”

Chepkemoi was asked to go and report by asking the Japanese to appear in person at the assembly. Within a short time the Japanese arrived. At instant, there was dead silence and complete order in the assembly before a senior elder picked himself up with the services of an interpreter. “Thank you very much. Chepkemoi has told us that you plan to go for hunting and we have made the arrangements for you as she should have briefed you,” the elder said.

“We are most grateful!” a male Japanese said. “My colleagues will introduce themselves one by one.”

“Kishi Takemura, *arigatou* [thank you],” one of them said.

“Minami Nakamura,” the female one said, while bowing.

“Masao Himura,” another one said.

“Toshiba Nomura,” the fourth one said.

“Takahito Kasemura,” the fifth one said.

“And I am called Nakata Miyamura, *arigatou*,” the leader said while bowing. All of them sat down. The elder continued, “I am now handing over to the hunting expedition leader, Kirop wake up!”

The hunting leader began detailing the process of the hunting. “My elders I will lead these *mura* people properly!” he said. Then laughter ensued. *Mura* sounds like the plural name of mice in the local language. He was a little confused then continued, “Our visitors are required to pay for the

bows and arrows, training and for leading them every day, as long as they want. Thank you!” he ended.

“You have forgotten the Yen!” the weapons-maker elder shouted. Everyone laughed. Then the youth leader said, “You are required to pay KES 1,500 for five sets of bows and arrows. The lady in your group shall be given a wooden staff, which is free of charge.” The Japanese leader rose up and thanked the people of Amaeru Village for their kindness. He handed them two notes equivalent to KES 2,000 folded tightly. A lady seated next to them saw it then hushed, “These people fear money so much!”

The following day the Japanese under the leadership of Chepkemoi arrived at the Tumbo archery ground. The practice of using bows and arrows began with how to tie, to dismantle, to handle and to shoot out an arrow. The Japanese were trained in different groups. They seemed fast learners as they could do it within thirty minutes. Except for some disturbance from the female Japanese who needed to use a toilet for fear of open defecation, the range and target shooting exercises continued in earnest. Before long a tenor-like voice sifted from the nearby stream.

Everyone rushed towards the direction of the noise. It was the most normal spontaneous response to danger by the local community. The Japanese did not hesitate to follow suit.

At the river teenage boys were struggling to shoot at a big fish that had knocked down the boy who had wailed. They had shot all their arrows into the water but all missed as the fish disappeared into the deeper section of the river - a dark grass-covered corner of the river between very huge and old fig trees. The leader of the hunting expedition asked all the members to contribute in locating and catching that big fish.

It was suggested that the course of the river be diverted away from the section where the fish hid. Everyone joined in the struggle where logs, rock boulders and plant leaves were staged together and sealed with sand and gravel. Sticky clay was applied subsequently to seal off water from entering into that “fish corner”. All this was done by hand. The Japanese contributed immensely by collecting leaves and clay soil from a nearby ant-hill.

After the river was diverted successfully, it was the work of everyone to assist in reducing the puddle waters in order to ensure that the fish were visible, making it easy to shoot them with arrows. There were no containers to scoop the water out. They all used their hands. In the

process the pair of trousers of one of the male Japanese tore open, making some loud crack-like noise. Everyone burst loud. Fortunately, he had a pair of shorts inside. He threw the pair of trousers away from the river as he continued with the work. He did not mind. Two hours on the water in the “fish pool” was still a lot and some sand seepage made their efforts seem a little futile. They were hungry too. The leader asked some young Amaeru hunters in the group to divide themselves into two groups. One group would go to a nearby cassava garden and uproot some cassava and the other one would collect firewood and light huge fire for roasting the cassava.

The Japanese split themselves into three. The group with the lady Japanese remained with the leader of the hunting expedition to guard the fish from escaping, while trying to catch a few small fish for roasting and eating with roast cassava. Two Japanese joined the cassava roasting group. Three Japanese were in the fire lighting, and cassava and fish roasting group.

As everyone left for their different assignments, the Japanese woman suggested to the leader of the group that they used her net-like shawl to catch some fish so that their group should not disappoint the rest. The leader agreed. The leader and some young boys who had remained behind began scaring the fish into the shawl held by the two ladies, straddling the pool of water on one end. Just when the group assigned to uproot cassava came back, they had managed to net seventeen small fish called *karak*, enough for everyone to get one. The two groups handed over their finds to the group responsible for roasting them as they embarked on drawing water out of the puddle, for the fish to become visible possible to be shot with arrows. All this time they were chewing and swallowing raw cassava roots.

All of a sudden, one of the Japanese holding his bows and arrows saw a small fish swimming towards him. He aimed an arrow at it. Surprisingly, he managed to shoot it at the back then carefully lifted it out of water. Everyone shouted in congratulation for his achievement. Then, it appeared that it was the turn for using arrows to arrest the clever fish. The group roasting the cassava and fish joined. They kept shooting at the fish while nipping at the roast cassava and fish, and drinking water. The exercise was not easy because shooting at small fish required a lot of skill. The hunting team did that the whole afternoon until dusk caught up with them. They retired into their different abodes with a reasonable number of fish. The village members of the group roasted all theirs before they dispersed to their different homes. The Japanese carried their share to their hut. All this time the Japanese were accompanied by Chepkemoi, who lagged

behind with a handsome Japanese. Everyone suspected that they were interested with each other. Then they tried to keep off. But later at night Chepkemoui reported to a group of young women that he did not ask for “anything”.

The following morning around 5 a.m. there was a war-cry in the village. It was reported that a hyena had attacked an isolated sheep pen, killing several sheep overnight. The whole village was awakened. They gathered at the village war assembly ground. Chepkemoui was asked to alert the Japanese and confirm if they were ready to join the war-party hunting the hyena. She found out that the Japanese were awake and ready to join them. But they were warned that like any other war, a war against dangerous wild game involved a lot of hardships, running around whole day without food or water against the afternoon heat. The Japanese packed their food. The female Japanese insisted that she should join the war-party. Against the taboos, she was allowed in the company of Chepkemoui, making Chepkemoui the first woman in the village to join a war-party.

The war-party assembly was properly seated at the *ketpo awen* (the usual tree under which tradition allows). The two female members were all the time mentioned by the war-party leaders, mostly mid-aged and elderly men. The young men were kept down and did not stand up to speak. Immediately after, the war-party was divided into different groups, with the Japanese again separated into groups of twos and threes. The lady Japanese and Chepkemoui were put into a group composed of purely elders. Their task was to follow the footprints of the hyena, while keeping in constant communication with the groups waylaying the hyena at different strategic positions possible to shoot it dead. The elders carried their bows and arrows and *panga* (sword) for clearing the way into the bushes along the suspected path followed by the hyena.

The Japanese woman asked, “Supposed the hyena charged at the warriors?”

“Haha!” the men in the assembly laughed. But one of them replied that the hyena was a coward creature that got scared when they saw brave warriors. “But a wounded hyena might run wild!” Chepkemoui interjected.

“That is the problem of allowing women into a war-party!” one of the men remarked by clicking then said, “Let’s disperse for our different tasks!”

Before the war-party dispersed, a loud cry punctuated by heavy shoving noise emanated from the westerly direction. Suddenly, a hyena carrying a white arrow on its stomach rushed into the crowd, snipping at the thigh flesh of one of the elders seated down, as it continued making a lot

of noise *ng'ang'i ng'ang'i ng'ang'i*, running for its dear life. The elder cried hard as everyone of the war-party was shocked and at the same time tried to save the injured old man who was bleeding hard, and flailing and writhing in pain. Fortunately, one of the Japanese hunters had some bandages and anti-septic spray in his backpack. He pulled them out and attended to the elder. Before long a group of young people from another village emerged. They were following the trail of the wounded hyena. They explained to the war-party that they had had a similar experience they had had with a predatory hyena but managed to shoot it just in time. They suggested that a few men and the ladies who were left in shock should take care of the injured elder, as they continued to hunt the wounded hyena and the other hyena that the village war-party was pursuing.

The Japanese lady refused to remain behind. She was then allowed to continue with the war-party, as Chepkemoi was allowed too. The elders were asked to take their injured colleague to the nearest health centre. But only two of the elders agreed to go back. The rest continued with the two ladies.

Priority was put into shooting dead the wounded hyena. The Japanese woman volunteered to lead the war-party with Chepkemoi. She surprised everyone. After many kilometres of walking in the direction of the hyena, they stopped abruptly. Everyone suspected that the two ladies could have spotted the hyena. Then the Japanese woman pulled out a shot gun from her backpack, cocked it and aimed at the wounded hyena. She confirmed it dead. Nightfall was busy engulfing. Then the war-party regrouped. Most of the members were tired and dejected after a whole day's running about. They sat down. The elders addressed them then they all dispersed, going back to their different villages. The Japanese in the company of Chepkemoi went in the direction of their hut.

About seventeen minutes past, a long cry from up a tree was heard. An elder who was harvesting honey saw a long python winding up very fast. He threw some honey at the python to hold it at bay a few metres from him. He kept doing that while shouting hard until he exhausted the honey. Then he quickly dismantled the burning bundle of short sticks that he used to smoke the bees. One by one he threw at the python that was clearly determined to swallow him whole. He remained with only two burning sticks when an elder arrived at the foot of the tree. The elder shouted, "Uuuu!!! Ask the Japanese woman to bring the gun! Somebody is dying!"

Within no time the Japanese with the two women on tow arrived. The Japanese lady did not hesitate aiming the shot gun at the python. At instant it crumbled down in a thud, as the honey man began climbing down slowly by slowly. On the ground, in fright, he just got hold of his *panga* and a pair of tire shoes, disappeared from the scene without a word. He left the assembly of rescuers alone. None of them was surprised at that. Shortly young men from other villages responding to the war-cry arrived. They were amazed that there was nothing to do with all their bows and arrows.

Before they finished shouting their complaints, a young man appeared. He suggested that they went hunting for wild quails and other wild birds. Just before nightfall he had stalked them and knew where they pitched for the night. He had bought two spotlights for illuminating to identify and confuse the birds for moonlight. The female Japanese said that she had another spotlight in her backpack. She pulled it out. But Chepkemoi protested going for night hunting and instead go back home because she was feeling hungry. The young man gave them an idea. He observed that there were about four holes underground occupied by red and white barbet birds. He would “burn them out” using embers. Then they would roast, eat and continue with their wild quails hunting. Quickly, they lit some fire. But a male Japanese said, “Wait a minute! Why don’t we skin the snake?” Everyone laughed. The young man dropped the embers into the first hole to scare the birds out. One by one the birds emerged in escape as he squeezed their throats to death, while throwing them to the other young men to pluck the feathers, roast and serve the members. The width of the hole was the size of a wide open mouth, whereas its length was the size of the hand of a mature adult. Thirteen birds came out of the first hole. He moved to the second hole, where seventeen birds were squeezed to death. In total they were enough for each of the team members to get two dead birds.

The young man moved to the third hole. He wanted to make sure that everyone was fully satisfied and ready for the next escapade. As he dropped burning embers into the hole, a small black snake spurt out, as it made for its safety, while the young man was left worried of his life in case of a bite. He cried once in shock. Then Chepkemoi suggested that the other team members looked for ripe Sodom apples, which were procured immediately. She squeezed out the fruit juice, dripping on the hands of the young man. There was no reaction. She concluded that he was safe. And the young man was very lively again.



They abandoned plans for burning out more birds, as everyone seemed a little satisfied from the roast meat. This was evident when other young men were asked to fetch some clean drinking water from the nearby river. The young men scooped out some sand at the bank of the running river, creating a shallow lake then kept waiting for clean water to fill.

Thereafter everyone stood up and followed the young man.

A few metres to the shrubs where he suspected the wild quails had staged for the night, he commanded everyone to keep quiet and walk stealthily. A near hundred percent compliance was registered. As he pointed the spotlight on the birds, it was discovered that there were eight wild quails in a row along a branch of a shrub. The young men suggested that they each shot at the birds at a go. The ladies protested suggesting that they could use a staff to smash them to death. The young men decried interference from women who were not supposed to be part of the hunting mission after all. They decided to shoot at the birds at once. They all missed and the birds flew away different directions, with their flying force nearly uprooting the shrub. The eight arrows were left to be sought after the following day.

One of the young men a little behind shouted, "I told these stupid young people that the ladies are always right!"

The young men decided to sit down and discuss the strategy for killing the wild quails in their next shrub hiding. They would borrow the sticks carried by the ladies, with two of the young men smashing the birds to death. Then they made for the next bushes where the lead young man had registered some chirping early evening.

A short distance away was a flock of innocent wild quails fast asleep. Two of the young men borrowed the staffs from the ladies. With support spotlighting from a distance, the two young men crawled slowly by slowly towards the shrub. At a strategic position, they smashed the wild quails confirming at least seventy-five percent of them dead.

It was past midnight.

As they made for the dead wild quails, some sudden laziness was registered among the members of the hunting expedition. Some of them complained of profuse sweating, while others started sneezing confirming some sudden outbreak of allergy. From an electronic watch worn by one of

the male Japanese, it was getting hotter and hotter. The temperatures were above 50 degrees centigrade. They suggested that they returned home expressly.

As they trudged homeward, they found a group of dead duikers on the way. And all through until they reached home they did not spot any wild game nor did they hear any noise made by common wild game such as birds crying or jackals screaming. It was dead silent all through. At the crossroad before they dispersed to their homes, with the Japanese heading to their hut, it was agreed that they would chase after baboons and monkeys with hunting dogs the following day.

Very early the following day, as usual in the village, young men on duty would go round the village doing some surveillance for any enemies. They did that by checking any human footprints. But for every distance they covered, they found a dead wild game. First wild fishes were pretty dried at the banks of the rivers, wild birds had dropped down foot of the trees with feathers spread everywhere as if a mattress of feathers had been prepared at no cost. Out of fright, the young men hurriedly made back for the village assembly to explain their findings. They found the villagers together with the Japanese already seated.

The leader of the surveillance team reported their findings one by one. “My elders, I am at a loss to explain that there is nothing else to hunt! All the bushes and waters down there are dead silent! This is the first time in the short period I have lived that I have had a first-hand experience of the worst side of humanity...” he said as he sat down in fright. The Japanese leader woke up. He said, “There was recorded sudden rise in atmospheric temperature overnight. I heard from the news and also confirmed from my watch. This killed all the wild animals. This is a result of global warming, caused by gradual and unbalanced accumulation of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. The climate of this place has now changed and new species of wild life shall emerge and next time we shall resume our hunting expeditions!” An elder stood up. “What do we do with our Japanese friends now that there is nothing more to hunt?” he asked.

“Let’s marry them all!” a woman responded. The crowd burst into laughter. Then he concluded, “We ask our Japanese friends to go back safely and bring some medicine for this disease called global warming! We want to resume our hunting very soon!”

“No, this global warming thing is good because better wild animals who may be our ancestors shall come to this land!” another elder said. Everyone broke into laughter, as the Japanese

jumped onto a small vehicle heading to town. The people of Amaeru kept waving at them, as they waved back, until the vehicle was out of sight.