

THE CHEETAH GENERATION: AFRICA'S NEW HOPE

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A. Introduction: The "Blame Game"

On July 8, 2003, the U.N. issued a stern warning about worsening economic and social conditions in black Africa, just as U.S. President George W. Bush, began a five-day tour of the continent. In its Human Development Report (2003), the UNDP warned that at the prevailing rates black Africa would take another 150 years to reach some of the development targets agreed by UN members for 2015.

"Unless things improve it will take sub-Saharan Africa until 2129 to achieve universal primary education, until 2147 to halve extreme poverty and until 2165 to cut child mortality by two thirds. For hunger no date can be set because the region's situation continues to worsen" (*Financial Times*, July 9, 2003; p.1).

Each time a crisis erupts in Africa, the first instinctive reaction of its leaders is to look for a foreign scapegoat or conspiracy. Africa has always been the victim of hostile external forces, the leaders would claim. Naturally. As leaders, they are above reproach -- not even for their own corruption whereby they plunder the treasury and pocket the proceeds. Somebody else must have put the booty in their pockets!!

Speaking at the United Nations Millennium Summit in Sept 2000, then Ghanaian President Jerry Rawlings blamed Western countries for much of the monumental corruption in Africa, saying they have a responsibility to curb the menace so as to promote good governance on the continent. "There will be less corruption in Africa if there is no place to hide the proceeds of corruption or if the proceeds of corruption, once uncovered, are returned to their real owners, the people of Africa," Rawlings said (*Panafrican News Agency*, Sept 8, 2000). According to *New African* (Dec 2001), "Rawlings now openly says that the IMF and the World Bank compounded his problems in office and were responsible for some of the economic and other difficulties facing the country today" (p.14). Naturally, he never complained when the same Western financial institutions were doling out billions of dollars to his government and praising the country as the "star pupil of Africa" in 1994. For his part, President Sam Nujoma of Namibia dismissed the IMF and the World Bank as "the imperialists= well-organized machinery to get Africa=s cheap labor and raw materials for their economic development" (*The Economist*, Jan 17, 2004; Survey, p.16).

Blaming foreigners for the horrendous multiplicity of crises that have befallen the continent has been the indelible trait of African leaders. Unwilling to accept responsibility for their own disastrous failures, their natural propensity is to look outside Africa for the solutions -- even for the problems that they themselves create. For four years, war raged across the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Speaking before the U.N. General Assembly in Nov 2001, Zambia's president, Frederick Chiluba, pleaded: "I appeal to the international community, through this august assembly, to provide the necessary assistance and conclude the peace process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)" (*The Washington Times*, Nov 22, 2001; p.A14).

There are scapegoats for even domestic problems. In an address to celebrate Zimbabwe's 21st independence on April 18, 2001, President Robert Mugabe attacked whites as "snakes" and promised violence to supporters of the main opposition party. "The snake we thought was dead is coming back again," he bellowed (*The Namibian*, April 19, 2001, web posted). "The whites are coming back, he railed. But the incendiary remarks drew scarcely a cheer from the nearly full 65,000-seat National Sports Stadium on Harare's outskirts. The economy was in tatters, reeling from international isolation, sanctions, and a campaign of terror, repression and violence by Mugabe's

thugs against opposition supporters. The Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries, citing shrunken markets and shortages of fuel and foreign currency, had reported that 400 industrial companies closed in 2000 with the loss of 10 000 jobs.

As President Mugabe was railing against "snakes," a 30-minute power cut interrupted the occasion, silencing him, the other speakers and blanking out the large stadium television screen. Master of ceremonies Simbarashe Kanyongo immediately told the crowd after power had been restored that the cut was "the work of enemies" (*The Namibian*, April 19, 2001, web posted).

B. African Emperors Have No Clothes

The jarring rhetoric about white snakes and western colonialism, however, now falls on deaf ears. In fact, the colonialism/racism paradigm, within which most African problems were analyzed, has become so obsolete that Africans no longer believe in it. In April 2000, African and European leaders held a summit in Cairo to strengthen mutual cooperation between the two continents. Commenting on the summit, Timothy Kalyegira was scathing in a guest editorial:

"As usual a series of speeches and affirmations were made. And once again, the spectacle of African leaders calling upon the West to ease their debt burden, create equal terms of trade, and give Africa a fresh start.

No one was asked who it was that had accumulated the huge debt. No one was honest enough to wonder who it was that had spent half the national revenue on military hardware, on opening up private accounts in Swiss banks, on grandiose roads that start nowhere and end nowhere.

Equal terms of trade?

No one was asked what Africa manufactures, produces and exports to deserve equal terms of trade with the West, as though terms of trade are dictated by political will.

Most of the African leaders who attended the Cairo Summit have either overstayed in power, rigged elections, or come to power through military coups@ (*The African-American Observer*, May-8, 2000; p. 6).

Squatters are speaking out too: In Kenya, the big problem is not white people. The big problem is our own leaders,@ said Paul Kanyiri, a squatter in Kagoshi, Kenya (*The New York Times*, May 1, 2000; p.A6). Even Ghana's state-owned newspaper, *The Mirror* (July 15, 2000) was quite terse:

"For many years, the continent=s problems and position as the poorest on Earth have been attributed to colonialism and the exploitative and repressive trade between the developed North and yet to be developed South. However, these excuses have become obsolete in the recent times and as Kofi Annan pointed out to the Heads of states at the Lome Summit (July 2000) that most of the problems can be placed at the doorsteps of its leaders who have failed over the years to pursue policies that would engender development. Mr. Annan was only giving credence to an opinion which many open minded analysts of the African political scene have long held, but which have been suppressed for good reasons by those who wield political power in the continent" (*The Mirror*, July 15, 2000; p.12).

Milan Vesely, an African columnist, warned:

As hopes wither and economies flounder, a new general of Africans are turning their backs on the continent's old guard political leadership. From Zimbabwe to Uganda, Angola to Kenya, post colonial leaders and pre-independence political parties are falling from grace. Desperately holding onto power by political manipulation and old western-bashing slogans of the 1960s, they blame their nation's financial ills on foreign exploitation rather than on their own failings -- but with a new generation of educated

African citizens, such transparent rabble rousing rings increasingly hollow. Economic progress, not political slogans, should be their concern"(*African Business*, April 2001; p.41).

Whether African leaders are listening is another matter by the campaign to push Africa in a *new direction* is gaining momentum. In this battle of ideas, certain experiences become memorable. They may come as innocent, every day run of the mill events but do come with profound import.

One such memorable experience occurred to me in July, 2003, when I was invited to Ghana by Dr. Charles Mensa, executive director of the Institute of Economic Affairs, to participate in a 3-day workshop at Elmina. My task was to give a series of lectures on AGlobalization,@ ARent-Seeking Activities of Africa=s Elites@ and AEconomic Freedom and Economic Development@ to a group of young African graduates. They were about 30 of them from Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and of course Ghana.

These young African graduates were quite energetic and intellectually agile. What made my day at the workshop was this young Sierra Leonian, called Mustapha -- about 24 years old. He had told his friends that he was going to take part in a workshop in Ghana. Thereupon they asked him who were going to be the speakers. When he mentioned Professor Ayittey, his friends became "ecstatic" (his own words) and demanded "proof" that Professor Ayittey would indeed be speaking. And, if he was, he (Mustapha) should record every word Ayittey said.

Upon arriving in Ghana, Mustapha went to town and purchased a small tape recorder but lost it just before he got to the workshop. Thinking that he would be in "big trouble" (his words) if he returned to Sierra Leone without the tape, he rushed back to town and scrounged for hours before another tape recorder to purchase. By the time he got back, my lectures were over. Poor guy. To save his neck, he got me to say and repeat "I am Professor George Ayittey" for the tape to record. I also gave him copies of my lectures.

I may have saved his neck but he left a deep impression on me. Mustapha comes from a new generation of young African graduates and professionals, who look at African issues and problems from a totally different perspective. They are the *cheetah generation* B Africa=s new hope. They do not relate to the old colonialist paradigm, the slave trade, nor Africa=s post-colonial nationalist leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, Kenneth Kaunda or Julius Nyerere. The *cheetahs* know that many of their current leaders are scandalously corrupt, their governments are hopelessly rotten, and commit flagitious human rights violations. They brook no nonsense about corruption, inefficiency, ineptitude, incompetence or buffoonery. They understand and stress transparency, accountability, human rights and good governance. Nor do they have the least inclination for colonial-era politics. In fact, they were not even born in that era. As such, they do not make excuses for nor seek to explain away government failures by blaming some external force. Unencumbered by the old shibboleths over colonialism, imperialism, and other external adversities, they can analyze issues with remarkable clarity and objectivity.

The *cheetahs* are different from the stock of African leaders, intellectuals or elites, whose mental faculties are so foggy and their reasoning or logic so befuddled they cannot distinguish between right and wrong. They see a Western imperialist plot in every African adversity and rally to the defense of such African leaders as Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and Sam Nujoma of Namibia, who incessantly rail against colonial injustices. Having liberated their countries, such leaders have transformed themselves into semi-gods, who must be worshipped. This is the *hippo generation* -- Aintellectually astigmatized,@ and stuck in their colonialist pedagogical patch. They can see with eagle-eyed clarity the injustices perpetrated by whites against blacks but they are hopelessly blind to the more heinous injustices perpetrated B right under their very noses B by the Mugabes, the Ghaddafis, the Eyademas, the Obiangs, and others against their own people. The *hippos* only see oppression or exploitation only when it wears a white fact. The *cheetahs*, on

the other hand, are not so intellectually astigmatized. Perhaps a mention of a few *cheetahs* besides Mustapha would be appropriate.

The Ghana Cyberspace Group (GCG), led by Yaw Owusu, is a pack of *cheetahs*, who mobilized young Ghanaian professionals in the diaspora to effect political change in Ghana in 2000. They never subscribed to former President Jerry Rawlings= rant about the IMF, the World Bank and other chimerical external enemies. Subsequently after the defeat of the tyrannical Rawlings regime in Ghana, they transformed themselves into an Ainvestment club@ (Ghana Investment Club, GIC) to mobilize funds for investment in Ghana. They were not waiting for the World Bank to do it for them. Nor are they globe-trotting, begging for foreign aid. Their web address is <http://www.gcg.org>.

Paul Sunwabe, a Liberian, styles himself as AAYittey=s number 1 fan.@ He and Chantelle Abdul, a Nigerian, mobilized a group of young African students at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., and held a series of conferences and seminars to push a different perspective on Africa. They have vowed to work tirelessly to expose the crimes committed by African despots and work to block the grant of political asylum to any such despots in the U.S. They have also pledged to demand Aintellectual accountability@ and Aprobity@ from African professors and intellectuals B why they are often silent in the face of massive corruption and hideous atrocities perpetrated by African leaders against their own people.

James Shikwati, the executive director of the Inter Regional Economic Network (IREN), is a Kenyan *cheetah*. I have been much impressed by the activities of IREN (<http://www.irenkenya.org>). I participated in a conference James organized in November 2003. Most of the attendees were young B under 30 years old B representing Kenyans from all walks of life, including journalists (from *The East Standard*, the *Daily Nation*, among others) and also reporters for Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC).

Our generation B the *hippo generation* -- have miserably failed Africa and left trail of horrendous devastation, chaos, instability, destruction and vapid corruption across Africa, I told them. And, instead of taking full responsibility for this sordid record, our generation is constantly inventing new excuses to defend our record of failure. Thus, only they, Africa=s young professionals, can take Africa in a new direction. Their minds have not been polluted with anti-colonial rhetoric and garbage. As such, only they represents Africa=s new hope -- capable of clear thinking and seeing with acute clarity.

This new breed of young African professionals I met in Kenya impressed me greatly. They were not into the blame-game. Nor were they just sitting there, expecting Western colonialists to come and fix Africa=s problems. Neither were they calling upon their government to do everything for them B including their own funeral arrangements. There were three notable cases.

The first was a presentation by SIFE (Students in Free Enterprise) -- a group of young university students that were involved in community-based entrepreneurship projects in the Marurui and Kibera slums in Nairobi. They were teaching petty traders, hawkers, small artisans, market women and those in the informal and traditional sectors about simple accounting techniques -- how to secure micro-finance, how to secure a job, how to improve the productivity of their businesses, among others, so as to make these self-employed artisans self-sufficient. Among their projects are *Ajitegemee@* Project (a Swahili word meaning Aself reliability@) and *AMsingi Was Biashara@* (Basic money making). They were also teaching people in the informal sector how to find skills that the community could use to profitably earn a living -- for example, making beads, household decorations, leather items, identifying markets, marketing them and plowing profits back into the business.

The second was a young Kenyan, Jackson Kyengo, the director of Distance African Tours:

<http://www.distancetours.com>. After four frustrating years working in government as civil service employee, he quit his job and started his own safari touring company. His mini-buses provided transportation for the Conference. His buses were clean and efficiently run.

In Africa, politics remains the gateway to fabulous wealth. The richest persons in Africa are heads of state and ministers. Quite often, the chief bandit is the head of state himself. As such, there is always a ferocious competition for the presidency, ministerial positions and public sector employment & competition, which often degenerates into civil strife and political instability. If only Africa's elites would seek their wealth in the private sector -- like Jackson Kyengo -- Africa would produce a better economic report. Wealth is not created in the government sector. And, moreover, by creating their own wealth in the private sector, the elites, come a change of government, would not have to be hauled before commissions of enquiry, investigating their ill-gotten wealth.

The third was Akinyi June Arunga is a female *cheetah*, who blazed a trail across Africa & from Cairo to Cape Town & produced the BBC documentary, *The Devil's Footpath*.⁶ Displaying tremendous courage and determination, she traveled through Egypt, Sudan, Congo, Angola, Namibia to South Africa, coming face to face with deprivation, unspeakable horrors of war in the Congo, collapsed infrastructure, devastated economies and the misery endured by the average African but yet undaunted in their daily struggles by a remarkable spirit of resilience.

Strive Masiyiwa is another *cheetah*, who has been hounded and persecuted in Zimbabwe for refusing to play by President Mugabe's corrupt rule. In 1993, he challenged Mr. Mugabe for his right to start a cell-phone business. For almost 5 years, the president tried to prevent him from setting up his company, fearing the establishment of any telecommunications network outside official control. But Mr. Masiyiwa was not deterred and fought back through the courts, arguing that the behavior of the state telephone monopoly violated the constitutional right to free speech.

In 1995, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Mr. Masiyiwa, and he started setting up base stations around Harare, with the help of Swedish telecommunications giant, Telefon AB L.M. Ericsson. It was then that Mr. Mugabe entered the fray. Mr. Mugabe issued a presidential decree, making it illegal for any private business to build a cellular network. Offenders faced two years in jail⁷ (*The Wall Street Journal*, April 24, 2000; p.A24). Ericsson abandoned the project and Mr. Masiyiwa had to hide in the trunk of his car to avoid arrest. But the Supreme Court struck down the decree as unconstitutional and Mr. Mugabe backed down.

In June 1998, Econet Wireless Ltd. hit the microwaves, which were by this time also being used by two other cellular operators: one owned by the government and the other owned by a group of ruling-party loyalists, including Mr. Mugabe's nephew, Leo Mugabe. Within weeks of coming online, Econet captured 45 percent of the market, which, by February 2000, had grown to 60 percent, with more than 100,000 subscribers. Econet's market capitalization on the Zimbabwe stock exchange rose 2,000 percent, turning the company into the country's second-largest. International investors snapped up shares of Econet. But Mugabe's government grew suspicious of growing foreign interest in the company.

The turning point came at the February 15, 2000 referendum, when opposition activists used Masiyiwa's telecommunication network. Zimbabwe's economy was in tatters, wracked by mismanagement, fuel and commodity shortages. To divert attention from his economic woes and unpopular involvement in Congo's war, Mugabe asked for draconian emergency powers to seize white farmland in a referendum. The opposition organized, transmitting a simple digital text around Zimbabwe from cell phone to cell phone, hundreds of thousands of times. All it said was: ANo fuel. No forex. Vote `NO.`⁸ Mr. Masiyiwa's offense was that it was his company which carried the messages.

According to newspaper reports and government insiders, a furious Mr. Mugabe brought the subject up in several cabinet meetings, cursing Mr. Masiyiwa and accusing him of being behind the message campaign. Mr. Masiyiwa pointed out that he conducted an investigation, ordering overnight billing and system-diagnostics records and discovered that the messages originated from subscribers themselves, mostly youngsters, who are the biggest users of the free short-message service. But Mugabe was not convinced. That Econet was the only cell-phone company with no ties to the government only heightened his suspicions.

Making me responsible for the messages sent on my network is like holding me responsible for the contents of private conversations,@ said Mr. Masiyiwa. AI was told that the president was so angry that he actually said I should be eliminated@ (*The Wall Street Journal*, April 24, 2000; p.A24).

Though the government denied the president made such a remark, shortly after the referendum, which the opposition won, the ZANU-PF dominated parliament passed a bill, granting the government sweeping powers to intercept and monitor all telecommunications and internet traffic, as well as the authority to force telecommunications companies to suspend certain services. Many observers and diplomats said the bill was aimed at Econet. Fearing for his life, Mr. Masiyiwa fled to South Africa, where a pride of *cheetahs* is breeding.

Zulu musician, Bonginkosi Thuthukani Dlamini, has become a celebrity in South Africa who calls himself Zola. Ten years after the end of apartheid, Zola has risen at rocket speed and positioned himself as a lead character in the new South African drama. As *Washington Post* correspondent, Lynne Duke, described:

"His music is *kwaito*, the hard-pumping South African style that is the soundtrack of the harsh lives and pastel dreams of a black township generation that came to adulthood after apartheid's fall. In the black township slang called *isicamtho*, *kwaito* (pronounced KWAY-toe) means "cool, wicked talk," though some say it takes its name from an old township gang, the AmaKwaitos. t's akin to rap, but its rhythms and languages are distinctly African, along with the music they call Zulu hip-hop, which is filling the airwaves here. In addition to *kwaito*, Zola does hip-hop.

His name comes from the community where he grew up. Zola is an impoverished place down in Soweto, one of the nation's largest black townships, which is still mired in squalor and poverty, although the post-apartheid government has brought some telephone service and electricity to the township. What has made Zola a household word is the persona he's created as the "ghetto dream maker." He grew up among the humble, the powerless, and now, he says: "I need to be heard. I'm one of those young-generation people. I need to be heard."

Most of the black heroes hail from the old South Africa, from the struggle against white minority rule. But Zola, 26, did not come from that struggle. Born a year after the 1976 police massacres of the bloody Soweto uprising, he was a baby on his mother's back during those times of upheaval, a wild teenager when Nelson Mandela, known affectionately as Madiba, became the country's first democratically elected president. But as Zola sees it, the younger generation is striving to reach far beyond the struggle of their parents.

"We're still connected with that apartheid umbilical cord thing. We're still there, if you look to the old generation. These are our moms and dads. We don't look at them as ignorant. We look at them as a deprived nation. The biggest thing that they [apartheid's leaders] used was education. They did not give them education or gave them wrong education. And the things we learn of the world, we have to go back to them and explain. . . . We live in a global village, which they were excluded from, and we need to tell them that this is how life is now."

So in his music and on television, he's a narrator of a new South African story. And people,

millions of people are listening B not just in South Africa but elsewhere in Africa.

When the presidents of Algeria, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa, traveled to Kananaski, Alberta (Canada) to present NEPAD to the G-8 Summit for funding by the rich nations on June 26, 2002, Mercy Muigai, an unemployed Kenyan woman, was unimpressed:

“All these people (African leaders) do is talk, talk, talk. Then if they do get any money from the *wazungu* (white men), they just steal it for themselves. And what about us? We have no food. We have no schools. We have no future. We are just left to die" (*The Washington Times*, June 28, 2002; p.A17).

Another *cheetah* is born.

The writer, a native of Ghana, is a Distinguished Economist at American University and President of The Free Africa Foundation, both in Washington. His new book, *Africa Unchained: The Blueprint for Development*, will be published by Palgrave-MacMillan in the Fall.