

America's posturing myth and a Rwanda that does not need validation – lessons for Africa

So, this is Democracy? A president loses an election, refuses to concede but, instead, catalogues multiple electoral violations. Uncertainty ensues while the world watches on, some in shock and disbelief, and others in utter amusement. In-between all of this, however, perhaps significant lessons are being missed, especially for countries in Africa. In the last four years, the United States of America (USA) has shown the world both the extent and limits of what a president in power – and with an agenda – can do. President Donald Trump's rallying cry, 'Make America Great Again', has not only culminated in a mass movement of at least 70 million voters but became, in fact, an ideology that revealed certain possibilities.

To begin with, it is possible to have the USA that does not meddle in other countries. For decades, US imperialism has been the cause of much under-development across the world because of various threats and sanctions imposed on non-compliant countries. Trump's reluctance and others might argue that it is ignorance when it came to pursuing an aggressive and antagonistic foreign policy resulted in the possibility of peace prevailing around the world when the 'world's policeman' retreats. Of course, certain wars continued and there were even some high-profile assassinations of certain targets. Overall, however, we saw the benefits of a reluctant, if not disinterested, superpower when it comes to waging war.

Secondly, the MAGA philosophy of putting America first by maximizing domestic value through jobs, divesting from

International treaties and platforms and using the resources to mobilise domestic growth. Of course, coming as it did after the historic presidency of a black man, to make America great again really meant to make America white again. Empowered by various systems and practices, not least among them violence and imperialism, President Trump had all the tools at his disposal to drive an unashamed white supremacist agenda. 'Unashamed' because the US, through various machinations and manipulations, has also been a white supremacist country masquerading as an established Democracy. That Black people and Hispanics had their lives somewhat improve during this period is more of a coincidence – they took the proverbial crumbs that fell off a table fully laid out for others to eat.

What does all of this have to do with Africa, Rwanda in particular? Precisely because of the myth-making that has resulted in countries such as the USA posturing as democracies while exhibiting deficiencies that would be easily called out elsewhere, it is necessary that the harsh criticism and vitriolic attacks that a country like Rwanda routinely faces not only be exposed for what it is but also challenged. If uncontested, the myth-makers who consistently peddle fantasy, falsehoods and disinformation often couched as an irreproachable liberal ideology will diminish, and eventually, take away one of Freedom's most prized assets in any country – the power of Imagination.

What does it mean to use your Freedom to imagine a future so remarkably different from your past? This is a question Rwanda's critics and many others who struggle to understand what is happening in this country have not yet resolved. Perhaps one of the reasons is a reluctance to accept that a people so profoundly wounded and so violently dispossessed can, in fact, move past perpetual victimhood and regain their dignity as they build the nation they want for themselves. This reluctance – and I use the term loosely here – is also evidently couched in white supremacist attitudes that refuse

to accept that an African people can build on their dignity to foster an identity that rallies behind common aspirations for peace, stability and success for all. For these people, a nation using its history to challenge tribalism and hate so that it changes and transforms lives for the better is cause for incessant attack, all to prevent progress so that suffering continues.

Hence, for these critics, Rwanda must remain in the time-warp of the Genocide Against the Tutsi – perpetually afflicted by violence, pain and death. If the country attempts to confront that horrible history and use it as the basis to craft an alternative future, its attempts are met with a mix of resistance as well as – dare I say – sabotage. Take, for example, the (in)famous case of Paul Rusesabagina, who confessed to sponsoring terrorism in Rwanda post-1994 but is often caricatured (sic) as a victim of Rwanda's repression. Where in the world, today, can someone sponsor terrorism and be celebrated as a hero, a human rights defender? Even by western liberal standards, terrorism is a grave crime, wholly unacceptable. However, because Rusesabagina's terror is visited upon ordinary people in Rwanda, the damned people that must continuously live in violence and genocide, their lives do not matter. Only the life of the one who sponsors the terror matters because it helps to drive an agenda and mobilise hate against the people of Rwanda and their common aspiration for peace, stability and success.

Rusesabagina's case is even more curious because he relies on a fictitious narrative crafted in Hollywood to hide how he sponsors terror in Rwanda. Like other of his ilk, the fiction appeals to Rwanda's critics and detractors alike because, in their minds, there is no way in which a country can move past the wounds of genocide and still want to work for everyone, not just a select few organized around primitive concepts of tribe and identity. At the heart of these tragic circumstances remains the question of imagination. What does Rwanda want for

itself? And more broadly, what does Africa want for itself?

Post-war Europe went for unity and even created institutions such as the United Nations (UN), from which many other institutions have developed and evolved. In 1945, when this happening, colonialism was rife, with the first opening of independence in Black Africa still 12 years away. Decades later, we have Brexit and Trumpism on the rise, and no one is telling Europeans and Americans what to do – these developments are consequences of their own imagination. Such imagination affects the extent to which State-making processes unfold within particular contexts, inevitably.

In the case of Rwanda, therefore, State-making has taken on a character of inclusivity, determination and a strong desire to never experience again what the country went through in 1994. This means ensuring uncompromising security, peace, stability and setting socio-economic-cultural conditions that enable citizens to become makers of their own history, and not victims stuck in a past in which they are infantilised and pitied by the white supremacist gaze. We are not victims of Apartheid Beneficiaries proxies Afriforum. That might work for the likes of Barney Mthombathi, seeking validation at the expense of Rwanda. For this, Rwanda should not have to apologise.

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