

Whose interests do Obama Fellows promote?

Recently, a colleague on this platform [argued](#) that “The reason divisions and social strife in America – racial and ideological – do not degenerate into social uprisings and systematic violence is because no external force is powerful enough to infiltrate and exploit those differences (in terms of ideas and practice).” He implicitly attributed the strength of the U.S system of governance to the existence of a critical mass of Americans who understand that their internal wrangles should never attract solutions that acquiesce to external interference. In other words, this critical mass constitutes a national shield against foreign aggression. However, anyone paying attention will notice that the American critical mass is unraveling and, as a result, the country is becoming more susceptible to external interference. If such a powerful nation is battling to contain its internal wrangles and is not capable of entirely securing itself from infiltration, what has gone wrong for the Americans and what lessons can Africa(ns) learn from this?

This unraveling is observed in the resurgence of “overt” white nationalism as well as in accusations and counteraccusations among the political elites of collaboration with foreign governments, something that constitutes a threat to the shared understanding of the national interest.

Whereas at this point in time this threat to the common understanding of the national interest is still marginal amongst the elites, it is certainly an attraction to those who seek to infiltrate America. Besides, it is also a slippery slope that could turn the American Empire upside down as externally sponsored social uprisings, similar to those America sponsors abroad, begin to eat away at the country’s social cohesion.

At any rate, such a development was unimaginable fifty years ago. Many had thought that America had tamed its last systematic social uprising, the civil rights movement that challenged white nationalism and threatened to tear America asunder. At the time, America had succeeded in overcoming this challenge by embracing what Dr. Marie Crystal Fleming [termed](#) "rainbow white supremacy". By this she means that the concessions that America made to accommodate the grievances of the civil rights movement in the 1960s allowed it to deceitfully project itself as a multiracial democracy at home and abroad while keeping intact the architecture of centuries of white nationalist policies and its intended racial inequalities.

This deceitful projection traded overt for covert white nationalism by coopting what the late Julia Hare [referred](#) to as the "leading Blacks." These were Black Americans who would promote the myths of America's democracy and undermine the credibility of any civil rights movement advocating the dismantling of the architecture, with President Obama being the perfect archetype.

This settlement remained in place until recent technological advancements. In an unusual context of post-electoral violence where the legitimacy of the election outcome is contested and that of American institutions undermined, the recent crackdown led by silicon giants such as Google, Amazon, Facebook and Twitter, and targeting extremist groups that support the Republican Party seem to be prompting these groups to [seek technological support from China and Russia](#) in order to maintain their presence in the American political discourse, a move that is likely to attract accusations of treason from the Biden administration and deepen the political crisis facing America. On the one hand, Republicans are likely to push back against these measures which target their core base. On the other hand, Democrats who see the political benefit of undermining their rivals also understand the dangers an

overtly racist America poses to the credibility of the empire and its moral standing as a global leader.

Lessons for Africa

If such a powerful nation is declining and doesn't seem capable of preventing the freefall, what lessons can Africans draw from these developments? I can think of two. One, the soul-searching needed for stronger societies protected by their conscientious critical mass is a global phenomenon and Africans shouldn't feel like they are alone in this bewilderment. Second, and more importantly, we have to build better: more resilient systems with less inequalities and stronger social cohesion. In other words, Africa needs not to emulate America, it needs to be radically different.

Thanks to America, we now know that however strong the political system, the weakness of social cohesion and consensus around what constitute the national interest will always facilitate external interference and spoilers, external exploiters or internal rivals, respectively. Evidently, their ambitions of sabotage thrive in a context of violence. Unfortunately, history is awash with lessons but little learning.

If during the cold war era most foreign powers mainly relied upon overseas-trained army officers as a means to control African armies – the then only true source of power – and expand their spheres of influence, the fall of the soviet empire and the subsequent imposition of multiparty democracy on Africa required an upgrade of the recruitment model. Today, in a polarized context, different initiatives are burgeoning across the world.

The leading Blacks were coopted to suppress the burgeoning civil rights movement in order to keep the African Americans under the control of the American system. Similarly, programs are crafted for “leading Africans” for the purpose of bringing

Africa under American influence.

“Leading Africans”

[The Leaders Africa Program](#) and [the Young African Leaders Initiative \(YALI\)](#) are such attempts to groom future generations of African leaders, a network able to project U.S soft power and entrench America’s value system in African societies. President Obama, perhaps the most famous Leading Black alive today –after proving to be an asset for the rainbow white supremacist system by undermining the Sanders movement for social justice at home – is being fronted by the same system to sell “The hope Africans should [not] believe in”.

China on the other hand, focuses on [providing training to African governing political parties](#) as a conveyor belt for its own value systems. Both approaches claim to provide what Africa seem to be lacking and yearning for: value systems on which to build democracy or maintain stability depending on what the provider views as the most pressing need between the two. Both America and China are filling the void of the absence of a systematic approach in Africa for nurturing leaders who project African values inside and outside.

There are a number of issues associated with these practices. First, both approaches run counter to the need for Africa to look for solutions from within its own value systems to build democratic and stable political dispensations. The results are either democratic rituals without democratic outcomes or the imposition of stability on rebellious societies, both with little prospects for sustainable peace.

Second, these competing approaches contribute to the polarization of African societies and undermine the opportunity for the emergence of the needed consensus around what constitute national interests whereas the latter should be agreed on and defended beyond partisan lines. It is a

tragedy that fuels exploitation.

Third, both are extractive in character. The conditions they impose – liberalization of African economies on the one hand and the awarding of mega infrastructure projects to Chinese companies on the other – allow foreign corporations to operate on the continent with preferential treatment regarding taxes and to repatriate their benefits, thereby [“denying the economy the multiplier effect it would have if the money had been earned by domestic firms”](#).

It remains unclear whether Africans will come to an agreement that neither approach caters for the interests of their countries and Africa as a continent. The need to transcend divisions, should be obvious to the principled in the face of exploitation. But the dominant tendency has had Africans become echo chambers of and accessories for the battles taking place for the scramble of Africa.

Indeed, being vocal and sounding alarms about Chinese debt trap, as if the World Bank and IMF are angels, or calling for western economic sanctions against unsavoury African governments only to lament that the latter have become preys to Chinese appetite only demonstrate credentials of an Obama Fellow and little else in terms of the leadership that will get Africa out of the East and West traps it is currently locked into. It is a betrayal to Africa and a dead end that only benefits exploiters and calls for a new direction.