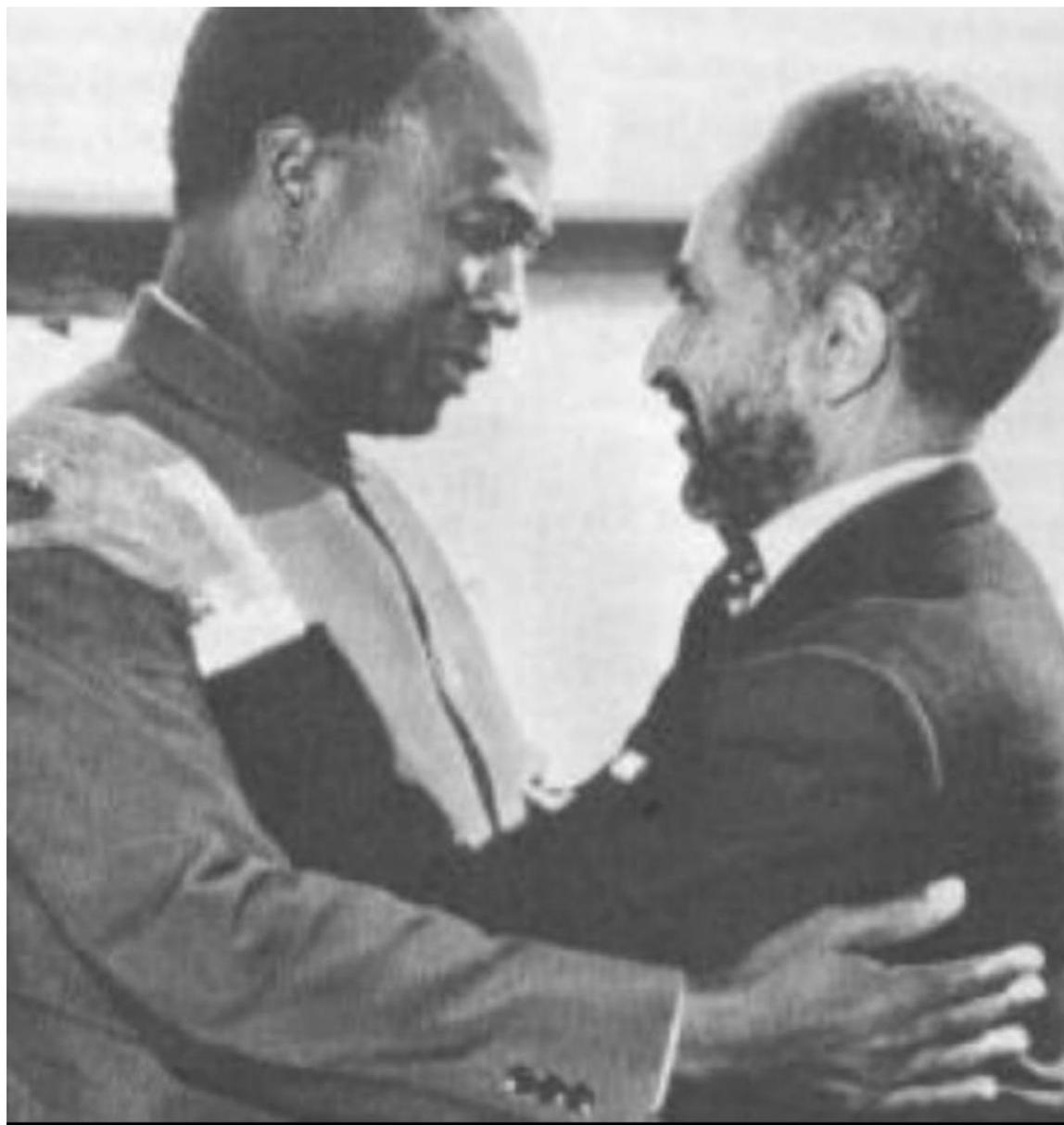


The Titans of Africa



and their shattered dreams

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Pan-Africanism: The Vision of Our Forefathers

Africa wasn't supposed to be like this. Our forefathers had a different vision of where Africa was heading as colonialism was coming to an end. When I was a young man in March 1957 the world's attention was on Ghana and its charismatic nationalist leader, Kwame Nkrumah, leading the first colonial territory in sub-Saharan Africa towards independence and ushering in a new dawn for millions of Africans. Standing atop a high wooden platform in the middle of the dust-blown arena, Nkrumah wept. He then gave a stirring speech. It was about a vision he had for the future development of a continent attested by many to be "the cradle of mankind" but cavalierly dubbed the "Dark Continent" by the nineteenth-century Europeans.

"Our Independence is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of Africa," 1 Nkrumah said. By "total liberation" he meant not only the freeing of the forty-four countries then still bound in colonial shackles, but more significantly, the freeing of the continent from the poverty, hunger, disease, and ignorance of the colonial era.

Kwame Nkrumah had a strong political outlook on Africa and an ideology which focused on total African independence and unity. His obsession with neo-colonialism reflected the widespread belief that nothing would be achieved by political independence unless combined with economic emancipation. The following excerpt from his book indicates the strength of his views and visions:

"It is far better to be free to govern, or misgovern yourself than to be governed by anybody else. The African personality itself is "defined as the cluster of humanist principles which underlie the traditional African societies."2

Emperor Haile Selassie was very much a part of this movement. In April 1958, in one of the finest moments for Africa, at the First Conference of Independent African States in Accra, he gave voice to the aspirations of that generation:

"The world is only now coming to realize what Ethiopia and Africa have long recognized, that peace, independence and the prosperity of mankind can be achieved and assured only by the collective and united efforts of free men who are prepared to maintain eternal vigilance and labor unceasingly to protect those most precious of God's gifts."3

The efforts of these and other Founding Fathers led to an important development in May 1963 when 32 heads of independent African states met in Addis Ababa to sign the charter creating Africa's first post-independence continental institution, the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Emperor Haile Selassie delivered another stirring speech:

"Today, we look to the future calmly, confidently, and courageously. We look to the vision of an Africa not merely free but united. ... We know that there are differences among us. ... But we also know that unity can be and has been attained among men of the most disparate origins, that differences of race, of religion, of culture, of tradition, are no insuperable obstacle to the coming together of peoples. History teaches us that unity is strength." 4

An extract from a speech given by the founding father of Tanzania Julius Nyerere, a giant figure in Africa's struggle for freedom:

“The humiliation of Africans became the glorification of others. So, we felt our Africanness. We knew that we were one people, and that we had one destiny regardless of the artificial boundaries which colonialists had invented....Respect for the borders inherited from colonialism comes from the Cairo Declaration of 1964. What the founding fathers – certainly a hardcore of them – had in mind was a genuine desire to move Africa towards greater unity. We loathed balkanization of the continent into small unviable states, most of which had borders which did not make ethnic or geographical sense. The Cairo Declaration was promoted by a profound realization of the absurdity of those borders. It was quite clear that some adventurers would try to change those borders by force of arms. Indeed, it was already happening. Ethiopia and Somalia were at war over inherited borders.

Nkrumah was opposed to balkanization as much as he was opposed to colonialism in Africa. To him and to a number of us, the two – balkanization and colonialism – were twins. Genuine liberation of Africa had to attack both twins. A struggle against colonialism must go hand in hand with a struggle against the balkanization of Africa.”⁵

Nkrumah's vision of an empowered, free, united Africa was shared by other Pan-Africanists, like the late president of Guinea, Sékou Touré:

“We prefer to live in poverty and liberty to riches in slavery...Guinea is a small country, but we have raised high the banner of freedom and know no fear... No one can claim for himself the right to speak for all of Africa; but each man has the right and the pride to be able to attempt to express the hope and aspirations of the people of Africa.”⁶

Another leading light of that era was the poet-president of Senegal, Leopold Senghor. His vision of a humanistic Africa has been described eloquently in several of his writings. A leading spokesman for cultural survival, he helped develop the concept of Negritude, which proudly celebrates African culture:

Negritude is the whole complex of civilized values, cultural, economic, social and political which characterize black people... the gift of myth making, the gift of rhythm, such are the essential elements of Negritude... Negritude is humanistic. ...it welcomes the complimentary values of Europe and the black man, and indeed, of all other races and continents. But it welcomes them to fertilize and reinvigorate its own values which it then offers for the construction of civilization which shall embrace all Mankind.”⁷

The vision of these leaders was to bring together former colonies in a United States of Africa and using the continent's vast human and natural resources develop centers of science, technology and industry, trade and commerce.

At the same time, everyone knew that there were serious obstacles to any kind of real union. African unity, in the sense of politically uniting Africa, was never considered to be realistic. *But it reflected the importance of unity in any dense to avoid sustain internal*

stability and prevent neo colonialism, n balkanization, and unfair exploitation of the resources of Africa through corruption and proxy leaders.

The idea of pan-Africanism was born out of the understanding of the common problems and the common destiny of Africa. Above all, our leaders had a vision of independent states where people would live in absolute freedom, with dignity and the ability to prosper in peace and harmony.

In the euphoria of the 1960s and the 1970s when most of the colonies became independent one after another, it was generally accepted that the enjoyment of the envisioned continental “Zion” was just around the corner even if there were many.

Africans who felt that Nkrumah’s prescription for the attainment of that Zion via a political union of the states was too idealistic. Pan-Africanism was the hope and vision of young people of my generation.

The Legacy of the 1960s and 70s

The destabilization in courtiers like Ethiopia is rooted in the infantile approaches designed and passionately argued by young men of the 1960s and 70s to democratize their countries. In the case of Ethiopia these misguided approaches were inherited by successive generations and became a legacy that has refused to go away even as the world and Africa underwent deep transformation, particularly after the demise of the USSR and the end of the cold war. The legacy of the student movements, instead of being a lesson learnt, has gotten stuck in the minds of the current elites and no kind of education or warning has been able to stop them from following the disastrous lead of the revolutionary generation.

The Ethiopian student movement recast Marxism in its own image and every element of youth discontent was defined in Marxist terms. The vast majority never actually read Marx but that was beside the point. They were obsessed by it and accepted it even before they read it, and when some eventually did read it they were convinced they had found the self-evident truth that they were looking for. There was no objective search for truth, no real analysis, no real thinking, just self-assured pronouncements.

The TPLF is the product of the struggle conducted by the students of those earlier times. They were naive, ignorant of the world and Ethiopian history, young people driven by slogans and not by ideology. The younger generations since then, instead of learning their lessons have followed their path and taken the policies to their extremes. They emboldened the TPLF. And the OLF. They gave vital support to the Eritrean secessionist movement. They interpreted the concept of self-determination to mean creating a state that resembled the most backward political system in the world: ***the apartheid***. “bantustanization” policy of South Africa. The logical end to this kind of policy is war amongst the various ethnic groups. Today’s struggle is to save Ethiopia from its own misguided, unread, misinformed and corrupted elites and youth, which control the destiny of the country.

Africa: The Youth Problem

“ Youth is easily deceived because it is quick to hope.” Aristotle

Aristotle had it right. Ethiopia’s young people are full of hope, but in the current political climate, that hope quickly sours and there are far too many dishonest politicians and would-be leaders ready to deceive them in that vulnerable state of mind. In Ethiopia, as in much of Africa, hope is turning to anxiety and then to despair.

A big part of the problem in Africa is social media:

..”.African millennials are increasingly using downloaded sites to access video entertainment and social media sites as tools for communication and a source of news and information. Mobile data continues to be the most used means through which African millennials access the Internet. Social network platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp and twitter have become an integral part of everyday life with over 60% using social media as their primary source of information. Television comes a distant 2nd at 25% with newspapers being the least important source 6%”⁸

Of course, social media has become an invaluable tool for communication in education, business and in many other fields. Generally, students use social media to share and get instant information, reviews and solutions to their problem. But for a great majority of the youth in Africa and certainly in Ethiopia social media has become the only source of information because it is quick, handy, and entertaining, as opposed to books and print or long-form media. Many of them do not seem to realize that you can’t trust everything that comes across the Internet, or if they do realize that, they are unable to tell a lie from the truth. If they are confronted with something they don’t want to hear, it’s “fake news.” They believe what they want to believe, and the truth be damned. “The medium is the message” and when the medium itself is inauthentic it is no wonder that the messages are awash with falsehoods and conspiracy theories. “From cries of ‘fake news’ to the rise of bots, bogus followers and other trolls, it’s hard to know whom, what or where to trust... Everyone on social media is infected with the same problem: The very nature of it causes almost all of us to be fake.”⁹

“Fake news—news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false designed to manipulate people’s perceptions of reality—has been used to influence politics and promote advertising. But it has also become a method to stir up and intensify social conflict. Stories that are untrue and that intentionally mislead readers have caused growing mistrust among American people. In some cases this mistrust results in incivility, protest over imaginary events, or violence. This unravels the fabric of American life, turning neighbor against neighbor. Why would anyone do this? People, organizations, and governments—foreign governments and even our own—use fake news for two different reasons. First, they intensify social conflict to undermine people’s faith in the democratic process and people’s ability to work together. Second, they distract people from important issues so that these issues remain unresolved.”¹⁰

What the United States is confronting is also found in Africa. A technology that holds so much promise becomes a double-edged sword:

“Social media can promote social, political and economic development, it may also increase opportunities for radicalization. Social media can equip terrorists with a low-cost tool to enlist, train, coordinate and communicate with followers and potential recruits remotely. Today, al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, ISIL and other violent extremist groups in Africa use Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other social media channels to broadcast their messages, inspire followers, and recruit new fighters to unprecedented levels.”¹¹

In Ethiopia, this extremism manifests itself in ignorance. Young people refuse to search for the truth. Why look for the truth when the fabricated stories are so easy to come by? If they are confronted with the truth it has been branded as the story of the “oppressor.” All of this is happening because of the overwhelming influence of social media.

Where Are We Now?

“Obviously the ideal of the visionaries remains a distant dream. Many things are not going well in Africa. Life expectancy is around 50 years, adult literacy rates are falling. Although there have been recent improvements, Africa remains the continent with the highest rate of child mortality”¹²

In some ways Africa is in fact moving backwards while the rest of the world is moving forward. From general food sufficiency and net exporter in the 1950s and the 1960s, Africa is now a net importer of food. Food of course ties directly in with poverty.

“With an average per capita income of roughly US\$ 1 a day, sub-Saharan Africa remains the poorest region in the world. Africa’s real per capita income today is lower than in the 1970s... With over half of the 700 million Africans living on less than a dollar a day, sub-Saharan Africa has the highest proportion of poor people in the world—some 50 percent Between 1981 and 2002, the number of people [on] the continent living in poverty nearly doubled, leaving the average African poorer today than just two decades ago.”¹³

“Most of the global poor live in Sub-Saharan Africa. The average poverty rate for Sub-Saharan Africa stands at about 41% and of the world’s 28 poorest countries 27 are in Sub-Saharan Africa with a poverty rate above 30%.”¹⁴ People are told that there is some hope for development There is no time for idealism in the face of practical concerns like making a living.

In Ethiopia, as is true in many other countries in Africa, young people have become a threat rather than an opportunity. Ethiopia is currently gripped with civil war, fear, extreme poverty, internal displacement migration and uncertainty. Its future is in the hands of its youth, but when young people are not given work and opportunities and protections, they will go to the only option they are offered. As the earlier quotation from Aristotle reminds us, youth are “quick to hope” but when they lose all hope in a government and feel that they do not have any future, this search for hope leads them into bad company. They join criminal gangs, rebels, or ethnic and religious extremists who give them money and empower them with guns to join a fight where there are no rules of engagement. In the process they lose compassion and empathy toward others.

This becomes a way of life. They lose their humanity. They commit crimes for the sheer thrill or for money or because they've been taught to obey orders without question. They become willing tools to whoever gives money and gives them "self-worth," in their own eyes.

Wherever I travel in Africa youth unemployment is the most serious challenge and key driver for conflicts and instability. Without gainful employment young people will take the only option they have and that is to rebel. In all the conflicts in Africa young people are on the frontlines in big numbers.

It is said repeatedly that the next generation, will be the salvation of Africa. But the truth is that most of the rural youth in sub-Saharan Africa are poorer than ever. Three out of four live on less than \$2 US a day and lack resources and skills. 23% of the youth population (15-24) are illiterate in sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁵

Young people are Africa's most precious resource and with no skills and opportunities can represent a risk rather than opportunity. African youth need to be included in a meaningful way in policy debates and in the search for the solutions to the challenges of the continent.

"Passion rebuilds the world for the youth. It makes all things alive and significant."
Ralph Waldo Emerson.

It is to our youth that we must turn for an improvement in the lives and livelihoods of Africa. The greatest asset of any nation is its youth and with passion and hope our youth can change Africa. But governments have to invest in young people by giving them the education they need and inculcating the values of tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund, suggests "... if youth make up 40% of the population, and people under the age of 35 make up over 65% of the entire population of the continent, then 65% of the continent's resources should be allocated to this age group." ¹⁶

A mechanism to engage them is important for durable peace, stability and development. At this moment, the youth of the continent should be involved in planning for their future. Due to the increased challenges of the continent's development, new dynamic energy needs to be harnessed from our young people. Ignoring them is putting the entire continent in danger. This is the population that will change the face of Africa. This is the generation that will be held accountable for all the challenges that face the continent. Young people are our greatest asset. It is critical that we engage this youthful energy to create meaningful productivity for the development of the African continent.¹⁷

In 1993 I and my dear Ghanaian friend Osei G. Kofi, a passionate pan-Africanist and author, tried to found a continental organization to address the challenges facing young people.¹⁸ **The project was titled "Africa: The Next Generation - Alliance of the African Youth" (AYA).** We put in a lot of hard work and considerable ground was covered. However, with the constant demands of professional full-time activities we weren't able to move our goal forward to actualize it. "The consolation is that some

measures of youth empowerment initiatives have sprung up in several African countries in pursuit of social justice, leadership, and political engagement awareness,” Kofi wrote.

It often seems difficult to know what to say or what to do to address the problems facing our young people. Bringing them back to normal life isn’t easy, but it comes back to the hope for a better future. The creation of a government with a political system that can offer them better is an extremely arduous process which first requires a good honest leader, which Ethiopia does not currently have.

What I can tell young people is this: don’t be deceived by charlatans and pretenders. Control your own destiny. Many of your current leaders are using you and taking advantage of your fears, your poverty, insecurity, your helplessness, innocence, and naiveté for their own narrow, egotistic agendas.

Human Security

Africa is beset by multiple problems with security issues at the top of the list. Unable to provide the basic needs for their own people—which include freedom and justice—and not being able to exercise full control over their Africa is beset by multiple problems with security issues at the top of the list. Unable to provide the basic needs for their own people—which include territory, many African countries are falling victim to transnational crimes and terrorism.

The crisis created by the activities of organized criminal groups is one of the most serious challenges to regional and global peace, stability, economic development and peaceful co-existence. Governance and the rule of law, corruption and dysfunctional institutions, weak civil society, poverty and horizontal and vertical inequality, porous borders, radical interpretations of religions and other extremisms, have coalesced, leading to the rise of violent militant groups and criminal gangs. In many parts of Africa the absence of hope for a better future has created an uncontested environment for recruitment and indoctrination. The fate of several African countries hangs in the balance as conflicts ravage parts of the continent, mostly in North, West, Central and the Horn of Africa, and spreading steadily southwards, most recently Mozambique. (AISSS) Extremism and rebellion have turned people against each other in such a brutal way that in some countries restoring harmony has become an impossible task.

Members of violent political or extremist groups are disproportionately young men, and even boys. Why? At the root of everything is poverty. “Africa is the world’s last frontier against poverty. Migrating, or Joining criminal gangs (drug, arms and human trafficking)*or violent political groups or extremist organizations becomes particularly attractive to these young men who crave a sense of belonging to something. The Africa Institute for Strategic and Security Studies (AISSS) conducts research and makes recommendation on the contemporary security challenges of Africa.

***Read my article on “Organ Trafficking” posted earlier on this web site.**

***My recent book “ What a Life” from which most of the information has been taken.**
<https://www.ebay.com/itm/125138051693>

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