

THE ART OF RULING BY DISTRACTION

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An art is an art. You may be gifted or talented or just a hard working chap but there are some of us who insist that the art of ruling by distraction requires that you be an African in the first place. The art of ruling by destruction is universal and mastered by the West too but the fine art of distraction is beyond the capacity of the non-Africans. Blessed be Mother Africa!

The art of ruling by distraction is an African talent mastered today by the likes of Yoweri Museveni, Jacob Zuma, the late and unlamented Meles Zenawi, Paul Biya, Kabila Junior, the new Pharaoh in Cairo, Ali Bongo, Mugabe and more. It is a fine art of taking the attention of the people from REAL issues unto the non important ones. Take Jacob Zuma who is facing a challenge to his ANC chairman post (we can bet he will win) and the big uproar he generated about a cartoon made of him in his naked state. The newspaper that printed it was put under siege and all of a sudden the genitalia of Zuma became so important that serious issues (like the minors' strike, the economic penury and the vast corruption like Zuma having his private house built by public money) were all relegated to secondary status. The distraction is made easier and effective because, in most African countries where dictators rule, the mass media is on the whole dominated by the State which, again in most cases, is dominated totally by one man—the president or the prime minister as the case maybe. Moreover, a people preoccupied on survival would hardly be focused on other things anyway unless it manages to break out and confront the main causes for its miserable existence under malevolent cliques.

If, for example, we are to listen to the President, ministers and the parliament of Uganda we would be excused if we conclude that the problem of that country once called the pearl of Africa is not corruption, nepotism and / or dictatorship but a handful of gays, Gay bashing in Africa is part tradition and macho culture and part

political distraction undertaken by the leaders of Uganda, Zimbabwe, Malawi, etc... In reality, the hue and cry about gays is a non issue. Africa has more threats than some people with their own sexual proclivities. The leaders of Africa who make gays the issue are actually indulging in the politics of distraction. Take the so called "new leaders of Africa" hailed by the central character of the Monica Lewinsky scandal. None of them has proved to be new, original or even democratic. But all have turned out to be tyrants kneeling in front of the superpower. Dictators and pseudo monarchs, corrupt to the core. But then again once can quote the Ghanaian leader Kufuor and declare (as we say after washing one's eye with salt) that the "perception of corruption does not mean that corruption really exists". Nigeria loses more than \$ 10 billion every year to corruption. Under the late Meles Zenawi, who was unable to swindle death, Ethiopia lost 15 billion dollars with the tyrant and his wife taking 2-3 billion dollars. As a whole, Africa loses some 150 billion dollars per year because of corruption. Paul Biya of the Cameroon, one of the most corrupt tyrants in Africa (he is said to have more than a hundred foreign bank accounts) spent a million Euro for a summer vacation in France that did not even last a month. Idris Deby of Chad paid a 27 million dollars dowry for his fourth wife, the daughter of a Janjaweed chief. The wife of Meles Zenawi, the Queen of predators and thieves, spent a million euro in Spain on shopping alone. Ali Bongo, a former aspirant Gabonese James Brown and the country's president today (as one African writer put it, a man born into and raised in corruption) pretends that he is indeed fighting corruption. Alpha Conde, the pseudo progressive who had promised a new beginning for Guinea, has now practically taken into his, and his clan's hands, the mineral riches of that hapless country. The West is complacent as the stolen money often finds its way to its own banks. All these thugs need a side show to benumb the people and to turn the peoples' attention elsewhere. Hence, the art of ruling by distraction, an art reaching perfection by African dictators-- just you wait and see as the arrogant and racist Chinese may have a lesson or two learn.

The present tyrants and official robbers have a repertoire they can draw from. We have had fantastic showmen like Idi Amin (the King of Scotland), Emperor Bokassa

(Africa's Napoleon) and Sese Seko Mobutu (the cock of all Africa), who were all big "actors" when compared to their drab and pale shadows today. Tyrants who rule for decades claim they are really democratic and the elect of the people. However, almost all practice not only the brutal act of theft and corruption but the fine art of distraction. This art requires from the tyrants no shame at all, a rigid control of the mass media, a developed penchant for lying and a very good list of scapegoats and excuses. Many books of excuses exist in the world at large but few are fit for the situation confronting the African tyrant and that is why we should demand our tyrants to write the definitive book and teach the West and the East on the originality of distraction African style. For example, war with a neighbour has grown thin in the Horn though Rwanda and Uganda still practice it. The campaign against gays has worked but that is also becoming a *déjà vu*. Much as I detested the dead dictator in Addis Abeba he was a master of the distraction art. The Arab Spring and the wind of revolution (now aborted) blowing far and wild and Meles came up with the idea of a Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile (what we call Abaye). He launched a vast money raising campaign accompanied by a concerted propaganda of an Egyptian possible invasion or attack. So much so otherwise intelligent people got drunk on the fake nationalism of Meles. The fools parted from their money and common sense—they were distracted. What famine? Ethiopians just do not know how to eat properly and to diet. What invasion? We just crossed the border with Somalia. Blame the West for the famine and economic disaster and claim boldly a 12% economic rise annually. Who cares if the reality and the claims do not match, the aim is to feed-cow dung cooked statistics and lies and to distract. Listen to the wife of the late Meles claiming she has little or no money to pay for her children's schooling—hard pressed Ethiopians almost volunteered to make a collection for her. All that was and is a gem! The practitioner of the distraction art should not be afraid of the illogical or the ill conceived. On the contrary, the expert practitioner will launch one ill conceived cover up after another and confound the populace into believing that the tyrant is a Saint with very good intentions for his country and people. There were and there are people who really liked Mobutu,

Bokassa, Mengistu (who still lives in Mugabe's capital), Meles and Omar Bongo to mention but a few. Go figure! How distracted can you get?

The ability to lie boldly, to declare the bull pregnant, to say corruption is just a perception, to attack the neighbor, colonialism, imperialism, and now the Chinese, to say the gays are behind all the society's' malaise, to blame the opposition for all the difficulty in the country, to claim I am poor with just a few hundred millions whisked away, and through it all to maneuver within the lies calmly, boldly, and sanctimoniously so much so that the people cry our Long Live Papa. It does not matter if you are small like Burundi and Rwanda or Djibouti and Gambia or impoverished big like Ethiopia the tyrant should boast of making his country a middle class country come five years, of being a regional power and as they like to say a power base. No qualms. Let them foreigners laugh and smirk but the targets will lap it all like the proverbial poor man who consumes butter in his dream and hopes he will have no constipation because of his real hunger. I do have many suggestions to make on how to play the distraction game but here is not the place to divulge them prior to selling them off to the needy tyrants. After all, distraction is profitable, it is a sleeping pill for the masses and do not expect from me a Marx like quotation about opium of the people. Our times are intolerant as you all know and come to think of it distraction and religion can rhyme. But who I to probe this further!

Au revoir as the French would say when the going gets tough or as one African politician said: if you believe the promises of tyrants you have only yourself to blame. If you are distracted you will be destructed. That is the truth.