

from the September 30, 2003 edition –  
<http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0930/p01s03-woaf.html>

FRONT PAGE

## Africa's new class of power players

By **Danna Harman** | Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

### COMING HOME: Africa's emerging power players



**KENYATTA**  
Possibly Kenya's  
next president



**MAKATIANI**  
Launched Africa's  
biggest Internet  
company



**KAYOMBA**  
Founded an  
independent  
newspaper in  
Rwanda



**DARKOH**  
Leads  
Botswana's free  
AIDS-drug  
program



**BRUKTAWAIT**  
Started Ethiopia's  
largest private bank



**TSELE**  
General Secretary of  
the South African  
Council of Churches

Every year Africa's best and brightest leave their cities and villages for Harvard or McGill University or the London School of Economics. Some are children of privilege. Some are hand-picked by private foundations or donor nations, casting their nets for the next generation of African leaders. Others are sent by parents who have sacrificed for years to send their offspring abroad.

Far from home, they sit through ethics classes, study theories of democracy, pore over law books, use state-of-the-art medical equipment, and talk about coming home and making a difference.

Yet on the planet's poorest and most war-torn continent, there remains a leadership deficit. Why?

The Monitor spoke with more than a dozen of Africa's promising young leaders who studied in the West - from the head of Botswana's revolutionary AIDS program to the founder of Africa's biggest Internet company to a possible future president of Kenya - about their choice to return home. We asked them about giving up a life of comfort for a life of contribution, what obstacles they face, and what they are doing to break the continent's cycle of dysfunction.

## **A graceful concession**

Early on Christmas morning 2002, Uhuru Kenyatta, his cheery necktie and plastered-on smile failing to make him look any less exhausted, stood sweating under the lights in Nairobi's Serena Hotel ballroom, slowly reading out the most important speech of his young life.

"These elections were a glowing tribute to the great nation of Kenya and freedom of choice," he began. "I accept the choice of the people and now concede that Mwai Kibaki will be the third president of the Republic of Kenya." There was a desire for change afoot, he continued, "but we were not perceived by the people as the change they were looking for."

Not a particularly notable address by Western standards, but practically revolutionary for Africa. The atmosphere in Nairobi that morning was drum-taut with tension. Riot police slapped their batons in anticipation. Newspaper editors had canceled their correspondents' vacations, expecting anger and violent ethnic clashes - that's what had happened after every other election in the country's history.

But Mr. Kenyatta's grace in defeat caught everyone by surprise and helped defuse the situation. The moment was more than just Kenya's first peaceful end to an election cycle. It marked a new maturity in African leadership.

The lanky Kenyatta is the son of Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta, one of Africa's "big men" - those who wrested power from European overlords. The elder Kenyatta was part of what was supposed to be a new day for the continent - Africa run by Africans.

Yet no sooner had the Europeans left than new overlords took control, this time with African names: Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, Idi Amin in Uganda, Mobutu Sese Seko in Congo, to name a few. For the next four decades, Africa was pockmarked by war, corruption, coups, and countercoups. The continent became a front line in the cold war, with the world's superpowers propping up some of the most despicable men. These big men often confused their own interests with those of the countries they ruled over, handing out favors and hoarding their nation's wealth in offshore bank accounts. The new day had faded to dusk.

In the 1990s, hopes hung on the next generation of leaders - men like Rwanda's Paul Kagame, Uganda's Yoweri Museveni, and Ethiopia's Meles Zenawi. They were, again, supposed to usher in a new era of African democracy. And while surveys show more political freedom in Africa now than when the decade began, that change often isn't felt on the ground. Mr. Kagame, for example, won reelection in Rwanda last month with 95 percent of the vote in a poll many saw as less than free and fair. Recent elections in Uganda and Ethiopia have gone the same way.

Now Africa watchers are forced to look to yet another generation. While some are pessimistic, others see another dawn approaching in young African leaders like Kenyatta. His self-effacing concession represented a transition of sorts - from those who did anything to gain power to those who want to embrace democracy, sound business practices, and the rule of law.

"We might not be seeing dramatic and sweeping change yet, but there are a number of people rising up who are able to see what the right thing to do is - and who want to try that," says Ted Dagne, an Eritrean-American specialist at the United States Congressional Research Service in Washington. "Systemic problems loom large, and it's going to take time for the new, independent African-born leaders to change this, but there are some good signs."

## **Sticking to his guns**

Ayisi Makatiani is often mentioned as one of young Africa's up-and-comers. But it's taken him the better part of a decade to gain that recognition. It was back when he was still studying for his degree by the placid Charles River in Cambridge, Mass., a decade ago that Mr. Makatiani first

came up with the idea of starting an Internet business: an online chat room that would link Kenyans living in the US who missed home and wanted to keep in touch.

It didn't take long for Makatiani, an electrical-engineering student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and his Kenyan friends to learn that they were on to something. A fast-growing subscription base and demands for hard news from home led them to a more ambitious goal: an Africa-based Internet service provider, complete with African content.

Most people back home still did not have electricity, true, but those were the early days of the dotcom craze. With the sense that anything could happen, they gave it a go. They knew navigating the waters of Kenyan corruption would be daunting, but they weren't prepared for the class 5 rapids they encountered.

Shortly after the opening of the Africa Online offices in downtown Nairobi, Makatiani's competitors, who had ties to high-level government officials, "convinced" the national telephone company to shut down his company's phone lines - leaving the main server unable to dial out. Customers began canceling subscriptions. "We were offering dialup service, and we had no dial tones," he recalls. "It was not fair. Not easy."

But today, Kenya's first commercial Internet service provider is operating in 10 countries and is considered one of the continent's best-run businesses. Makatiani has been named one of the World Economic Forum's leaders of tomorrow and recently started a promising new venture capital firm - Gallium Capital Partners - to fund tech companies in the region. Gallium has already been flagged by Fortune magazine as a model fund for companies in Africa.

Africa needs the kind of economic boost Makatiani's venture-capital fund can provide. Sub-Saharan Africa now is poorer, sicker, and more devastated by war than it was when the colonialists departed. At the start of the 21st century, it has the largest concentration of people in the world living on less than \$1 a day, the greatest number of civil wars ongoing, and the highest number of refugees. AIDS has cut life expectancy to 47 years, and only 12 percent of the roads are paved. Corruption still abounds.

But Makatiani always knew two things, he says, as he maneuvers his car along the highways of his current hometown, Johannesburg, South Africa, between meetings: He was going to become a major business player in Africa, and he was going to do it the fair, ethical way.

"That was a time where you simply could not do business without having to pay someone," says Makatiani, a handsome one-time track-and-field champion who today favors dapper suits and conservative ties. "But we didn't want to pay someone. We didn't want to join that club. It was like being part of the mafia."

But he also knew that he could not yell and scream and demand things in Nairobi that were par for the course in Cambridge - like getting a working phone line if he paid his bills. With the help of a colleague's influential father, Makatiani created a politically well-connected board of directors that began lobbying on Africa Online's behalf, protecting it from unfair demands and steering it toward helpful partners.

"What we had to do was educate [government bureaucrats and suppliers]. There are a lot of people around who have power but who are poor - trying to get a piece of the action. But we refused to cut corners," he says. If his group had started handing out bribes, he says, they would never have seen the end of it.

"Perhaps we were a little bit naive in those early days at Africa Online," he chuckles. "We wanted to stick to our guns. We might have been richer quicker, but I am not in the business of short-term advantages. And I have always been able to sleep at night."

"It will be men and women like Makatiani who will create the wealth that pulls Africa into the developed world," Red Herring, the respected technology magazine, wrote last year. "His company is treading where diplomacy has failed, confronting problems that have thwarted powerful international agencies, and slowly progressing toward its goal of creating a single market out of Africa's 800 million people."

### **Who knows division like Rwandans?**

For every African who goes abroad and returns with professional expertise and grand visions, there are many more who don't come back. According to the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, brain drain has been steadily increasing. Between 1960 and 1975 an estimated 27,000 highly qualified African professionals left their home countries. Between 1985 and 1990, the number was up to 60,000 - and Africa has been losing an average of 20,000 annually ever since. These figures do not include the sizable number of students who leave to study overseas - and haven't yet decided whether they will ever return.

If they do, many can be quickly defeated. Corruption bankrupts some. Others are knocked down by poverty, entrenched traditions, AIDS, or tribal warfare.

In 1994, Chris Kayomba was a refugee in Uganda, halfheartedly studying journalism, watching dead bodies flow into Lake Victoria, and dreaming of the day he would go home to Rwanda and make a fresh start.

More than 50 of Mr. Kayomba's relatives - brothers, sisters, aunts, cousins - were killed during the 100 days of genocide in Rwanda. In all, 800,000 people died in the ethnic cleansing.

When the genocide finally ended, Kayomba took a taxi back home to Kigali and, just shy of age 30, got together with some friends to try to do something about repairing the country. They started Umuseso, Rwanda's first daily opposition paper. Umuseso, derived from the Kinyarwanda word for "daybreak," was going to be something fresh, they told themselves. In a land scarred by Tutsi and Hutu tribal hatred, their paper was going to offer straight talk about ethnicity and government - "and Manchester United," adds McDowell Kalisa, a senior editor who also moonlights as the British soccer team's Rwanda fan-club director.

The paper would heal, challenge, bring up new ideas. That's what they thought. But in Africa, good intentions sometimes can take one only so far.

The team became discouraged. As government harassment grew, one fled to the Netherlands, two were jailed, and others left the country. Kayomba clung to his ideals, getting a scholarship for a master's degree in peace and conflict studies at the University of Londonderry in Northern Ireland. Ireland was something else, he recalls. At first he was not sure they were even speaking English - and he's sure many of them had never ever seen a Rwandan. But soon he began to love it, and made friends with everyone - Catholics and Protestants alike. He even became a go-between for them.

"Think about it," he says with a grin. "Who has better experience in evils of division than Rwandans? I know what that's like." In class they studied Israel and the disputed Asian territory of Kashmir, and in the evenings they held debates on different ways of resolving ethnic and religious strife.

When Kayomba came back from Ireland, he had big plans: He would write powerful commentaries in Umuseso about postwar reconciliation between tribes; he would advocate for overcoming the lingering animosities in the country without limiting freedoms; he would organize lectures on how other postconflict societies have dealt with their pasts; and maybe he would even run for office.

So far, he has done none of this. He needed to make money first, he admits. He grew tired of the infighting at the paper, the bureaucracy in and around the government, the prohibition of any real talk about ethnicity, and the mild but persistent harassment of anyone saying anything controversial at all. So he went to teach journalism at the University of Butare and do research on democracy for a Dutch nongovernmental organization (NGO).

He's married now, and makes four times as much money working for the NGO than he would working at his old newspaper. Sometimes he even writes a column for the government paper.

"There is no real independent media here," he says, defending his choice. "No one really addresses the issues anyway."

Umuseso is still around, though these days it's just Mr. Kalisa and his friend Robert Sebujurira, writing the stories, doing the editing, delivering the newspaper in a van. The focus has changed, too. There are more sports pages and far less talk about ethnicity. It's prohibited by the government - an extreme measure taken, they say, to prevent a repeat of the horrors that were born out of the combination of free speech and simmering ethnic tension that led, in part, to the genocide. In private, critics argue that the newly reelected President Kagame is using these laws to stifle freedoms and actually stirring ethnic divisions by shoving them under the carpet.

Kayomba's colleagues at Umuseso can understand his choices. "Rwanda is a poor country," says Mr. Sebujurira, "and it's hard to remain courageous when you need to make ends meet.... Don't be surprised if you meet someone with good ideas and you come back five years later and they are speaking the opposite."

"If you study or move out, you get new ideas - you are not confined in a certain cycle and as a result, you look at things so differently," explains Kalisa. "The problem is that you find you can't implement those good ideas back home.... Kayomba got so many good ideas [in Ireland]. But when he wanted to exercise them, he found this was not good ground to work on."

### **To serve the nation, not just the tribe**

Kenians haven't faced genocide like their neighbors, but tribalism is no less of a divisive force. Kenyatta's speech last Christmas - and the way he campaigned - was noteworthy for its relative lack of tribalism.

In Africa, the man with the tribe behind him is expected to take care of his people at the expense of everyone else. National pride or unity is not a concept that comes easily to a continent where colonialists unceremoniously split up rivers, mountains, tribes, and families as they divided up the land among themselves. Tribalism has been the order of the day ever since. Everything, it seems, takes a backseat to ethnicity. Take Kenya's exalted long-distance runners. When a Kenyan wins the New York marathon, the media in Nairobi hail it as a Kalenjin or a Luhya victory - not a win for Kenya.

Kenyatta's father, as president, gave members of the Kikuyu tribe - Kenya's largest and most influential - a disproportionate share of political and economic power. Afterward, President Daniel arap Moi exploited distrust of the Kikuyus for his own ends and handed out favors to his tribesmen, the Kalenjin, as well as to other supportive ethnic groups.

But in last year's elections, both Kenyatta and current President Kibaki - also a Kikuyu - campaigned on platforms to stop this cycle. The peaceful elections, with voting patterns less ethnically based than before, may be an example of an emerging national spirit that weakens old ethnic cleavages.

"We are not fighting for liberation anymore," says Kenyatta. "Now it's time to rediscover what sort of leadership we want. We need to design and build systems and create institutions that will serve - not just individuals or this generation - but posterity. America has done this, and this is why it is still standing firm after 200 years."

### Fighting 'brain drain'

America was home for Ernest Darkoh. He had a nice apartment in the New York borough of Brooklyn, he was making good money, his social life was thriving, and his first nephew had just been born.

But something was gnawing at him.

"I could see my life stretching ahead of me in the States," says the 33-year-old American-born son of Ghanaian parents. "I would be ... just another professional."

It's the end of a long day at work in his stuffy office in Gaborone, Botswana's tiny capital city, and he sways slightly on a swivel chair. "What I wanted to do was follow my heart," he says. "Go somewhere where my input was really needed."

More than 15 million people have died of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa, and to date, 11 million have been orphaned. In Botswana, 38 percent of adults are HIV-positive and life expectancy has plummeted to below 40 from over 65. By 2010, it could sink to 29, predicts the United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS - a level not seen in developed nations since the Middle Ages.

Outside input here is needed, and Darkoh - with a medical degree and a master's in public health from Harvard, an MBA from Oxford, and a several years' experience working at McKinsey Company in New York - wanted to give it.

One of his projects at the consulting firm was a study, the first of its kind, of the feasibility of launching HIV/AIDS antiretroviral therapy in Botswana. Soon after, he was recruited by Botswana's government to head its AIDS-drug rollout efforts. It is a groundbreaking project into which private US companies and foundations have poured millions.

The program distributes the drugs free of charge to anyone who needs them. It is generally regarded as the developing world's most comprehensive assault on AIDS and a model for fighting the epidemic elsewhere.

Even so, Darkoh hesitated before accepting. "I had certain criteria in my head that needed to be fulfilled," he says. "I wanted to make sure I knew what I was heading into."

He wanted to make sure he could be effective and had a clear mandate, he says, and he wanted to have independence within the public sector. "Because you can really get bogged down by a system and get nothing done," he explains. "Especially in this part of the world."

He's up early every day and spends most of his time in the office. He complains, only half kiddingly, that he would prefer to be more hands-on with patients, but that someone has to do the administrative stuff. Still, he travels in pretty rarefied circles: He met with President Bush during his trip to Africa this summer, as well as Microsoft founder Bill Gates, who has poured some \$50 million into the project Darkoh is spearheading.



**ERNEST DARKOH:**  
• Operations manager,  
Botswana National  
Antiretroviral Program  
• Educated at Harvard and  
Oxford universities  
ANDY NELSON - STAFF

Darkoh initially had to overcome the perception that he was too young for the job. "I knew that the key to gaining trust was to show that I was sensitive to the politics and that I could deliver results," he says. "I had to work almost 20 hours a day for the first year of the program."

Getting qualified Africans who study abroad to come back to a place where they will make less money, face more frustration, and often not be able to put into practice some of the advanced techniques they learn in Western schools, can be a challenge, say many here.

"Parents pay a lot of money for their children to get the sort of training I did," says Ibou Thior of Senegal, another Harvard graduate who today is director of the Botswana Harvard AIDS Institute. "And the expectation is that not only will you make a difference - you will also make a living." A person returning from study overseas, argues Mr. Thior, needs to be rewarded, not frustrated.

"The government needs to provide good working conditions and opportunities so one can apply what has been learned.... Otherwise, you might not want, or be able, to return."

### **No one challenges the system**

As an undergraduate at Amherst College in western Massachusetts, Kenyatta would set off to see America during weekends or breaks. He loved the freedom. "The best time of my life," he remembers.

Once, he and his roommates took a road trip to Florida. Another time they caught a cheap charter flight to Los Angeles and drove to San Diego, just to see something new. He switched majors several times, in the end settling on a double major of economics and political science. He dated different women, partied late, and audited random classes on slow afternoons. Everyone knew who he was, says an old schoolmate, but no one cared.

When he graduated, he was ready to apply for an MBA. The idea was for him to run the family's vast business empire. That's what was expected of him as the son of one of Africa's big men.

Kenyatta was born in 1961, just as Kenya was shaking off its British colonial masters. (In Swahili, his name literally means "independence" or "freedom.") His father, who helped bring Kenya this independence, dominated the political scene for more than 20 years until his death. Almost automatically, power then passed to the elder Kenyatta's deputy, Daniel arap Moi, who proceeded to rule for another two decades.

But Kenyatta didn't get his MBA. He went home and chose not to run the family's vast enterprises - five-star hotels, airlines, banks, and giant farms - that his father had amassed. Instead, public service called. "It was always there, my interest in politics," he protests, defensive against the charges of nepotism and a life of privilege. "But I brought a lot back from the US which really helped me decide. I left Kenya thinking one way. But then I was able to sit back and see it all in context. It was the first time I saw clearly."

To be sure, study in the West does not automatically bestow perspective, integrity, or a penchant for democratic principles. Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe, for example, has six degrees from prestigious Western universities. Few today would consider Mr. Mugabe at the vanguard of democratic reforms.

Some say study overseas can be counterproductive, imbuing ideals that do not suit the real world back home. But many of those interviewed say that overseas exposure made them "global citizens," giving them a perspective that they wouldn't have been able to get without leaving Africa for a time.

Kenyatta was sheltered growing up, he admits today with a lopsided grin. The people around him did not encourage any real challenge to the system.

"Things were done one way, and that was the only way," he shrugs, resisting a cigarette - he is trying to quit - and smoothing down his smart gray suit. He owns traditional African garb - a colobus monkey skin and hat, and a fly whisk, for example - but they come out only on special occasions. He prefers his designer clothes.

Kenyatta certainly benefited from Kenya's corruption. But unlike many other sons and daughters of privilege across the continent, he claims to want to fix what has gone wrong. He came back "not exactly to make amends," he says, fumbling as he tries to formulate carefully the delicate sentence, "but, well, I began seeing there were a lot of things not necessarily right with the order of things in Kenya."

### **'Are you trying to be white?'**

If you are an African, says Darkoh in Botswana, and you leave Africa and come back, people more often than not regard you with suspicion.

"They think you have tried too hard to Westernize," he says. "They ask: 'Are you trying to be white?'" New ideas and dynamic people are not welcomed with open arms, he says.

So governments can become filled with the also-rans. "A crisis like HIV/AIDS comes along and everyone looks to the government to address it - but they can't handle it," he complains. "Most of the systemic institutional inadequacies we are currently experiencing with HIV/AIDS existed long before the disease came knocking on our door. HIV/AIDS did not create these systemic deficits - it has simply exacerbated them."

The numbers bear out Darkoh's concerns. According to statistics from the International Organization for Migration, more African scientists and engineers work in the US than in all of Africa. A few years ago, Zambia had 1,600 doctors; now only 400 practice there. More than 21,000 doctors from Nigeria are working in the US. Sixty percent of Ghana's doctors left during the 1980s, placing the healthcare system in critical condition. An estimated 20 percent of skilled South Africans have left the country in the past 10 years, and in Zimbabwe the professional workforce has shrunk by two-thirds in just five years.

In order to replace those who have left the continent for greener pastures, Africa spends an estimated \$4 billion annually on recruiting some 100,000 skilled expatriates.

The solution, says Darkoh, is for African governments to invest in getting the right people. "Major corporations do not get the results they do by hiring weak talent," he explains. "The right people in the right place at the right time will deliver the right results." It is time for donors and recipient countries to insist on results and institute accountability frameworks, he says. "In the 1980s, development aid was based on cold war needs, but today, it's about accountability. That, coupled with African leaders realizing that they themselves have to be more responsible ... those are already improvements," he says.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is seen as part of this shift in approach. Last year, NEPAD was initiated by African governments themselves, whereby they agreed to become more accountable for good governance in return for billions of dollars in annual investment, aid, and debt reduction from wealthy donor countries.

Africa Online's Makatiani, a NEPAD advocate, already sees signs of progress in Kenya. "During Moi's time, corruption was the norm and no one was ever punished for being corrupt. But time has passed and the new government is changing that." In the nine months since Kibaki came to power, the government collected more in taxes than in any similar period before, and corrupt businessmen, as Makatiani puts it, "are running for their lives." Makatiani says these changes can be found all over the continent. Corruption "is becoming much less acceptable," he says.

Darkoh adds, "Now, the governments need to further shape up and woo back their Diaspora communities, instead of making it hard for them."

He would rather be in Africa, he says, than anywhere else in the world. He just started his own healthcare services company - BroadReach Healthcare - which assists developing countries, donors, and assistance agencies achieve better outcomes on investments made in healthcare, particularly for HIV/AIDS treatment. He is able to make a meaningful and tangible difference in Africa, he says, which he might not be able to do in the US. He knows others, Africans and Americans born to African parents, who would come back as well - if conditions were right.

"But they worry," he says, about everything from respect and good working conditions to security, healthcare, and civil liberties. "You might want to be a hero," he suggests, "but when you start thinking about actually moving, your mind begins wandering to questions such as whether there's a health clinic to go to when your kid gets an asthma attack in the middle of the night and what your bank account is looking like."

### **A call for young people to serve**

Kenyatta doesn't worry about his bank account. But 10 months after his concession speech, his pace has not slackened. He can be found in his office until 11 p.m., his crumpled suit jacket tossed over a chair.

He meets daily with NGOs, visits constituencies across the country, works on restructuring his party, and, from the benches of the opposition in the old assembly hall downtown, raises questions on every issue of the day - from constitutional reform to anticorruption legislation. He embraces the democratic principle of the "loyal opposition" in a country that has never really allowed such a thing.

"I get fed up a lot," admits Kenyatta. "Most of us do."

But, he stresses, the problem is that most young Africans assume leadership is a game of others, and not about them. "You tend to lose the best minds and best assets because young people don't want to engage in the rough and tumble. But that is the wrong mentality. You need to engage," he says

Makatiani says the politics of Africa are going into "Phase 2": The older generation of leaders were revolutionaries, freedom fighters like Kenyatta's father, accustomed to taking big leaps and getting things fast, he explains. "But the new generation like myself is more realistic and is ready to take smaller steps," he says. "We are ready to work hard for incremental, but real, success."

Kenyatta agrees, and says that he embodies that shift. "I believed, as a child, it was the right of others to be there and set up the rules of the game - and neither I nor anyone else could challenge that. But, you know, with more exposure you begin to think more: Actually, I can do it, too - and differently."