Chika Onyeani: Capitalist Nigger: The Road to Success – A Spider Web Doctrine
(Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2006)

This is an angry, perhaps controversial, book that points to a crucial deficit in African countries – the lack of economic power. Chika Onyeani says, “I decided to write Capitalist Nigger to open a debate on the state of the African race.”

(xvii)

In the foreword entitled “Power of a Word,” Onyeani shows that the old adage “sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me” is the way of the empowered; the disempowered are crippled by words. Onyeani entitles his book “Capitalist Nigger” because he will not allow a word, in this case Nigger, to turn him into a victim and render him powerless.

One of Onyeani’s main concerns is to turn Africans away from their perception of themselves as victims. A victim is one who accepts that s/he is powerless and that leads to negative behaviours, such as:

n allowing others to define one

n giving up one’s self-esteem and accepting one’s inferiority

n constant complaining, blaming others for one’s situation

n placing responsibility for one’s development on others

n protesting, begging and demanding
Onyeani believes that black people should stop being victims complaining about racism. Instead they should get on with building their lives and become producers rather than simply consumers.

The white master, Black slave mentality will continue to exist within the Black community because of our victim mentality. We believe if we continue to cry racism and oppression, the oppressors will change, feel empathy for us and give us what we want.

But that is not the reality of the world in which we live.

It is a jungle out there.

It is the survival of the fittest.

Those who dare to rise above mediocrity and beyond the use of racism as an excuse for their failures are those who will survive in this world.

No group can survive when all their needs are met by others.

At a point, they will feel burdened to continue to provide for us and cut off the sources of our pleasures. (91)

Onyeani has appropriated the term Nigger and put a new spin on it. For him it means an intelligent, dynamic, competent and capable African.

He wears the term as a badge of honour so when he is called Nigger he does not cringe and cower but stands up proud because the term does not demean him, does not reduce him in his
understanding of himself. This is what African-Americans have been doing for years and that is why they can refer to one another as Nigger because they have taken the sting out of the word, the negative connotations that are meant to hurt and disempower.

This is what Michael Jackson did when he sang “I’m Bad” meaning not just that he was good but that he was exceptional. This is what Gay people did when they appropriated the term Queer.

Subversion of derogatory terms is a form of self-affirmation as well as a means of negating other people’s power over one.

Onyeani wants Africans to face up to the reality of their situation. Africa is the poorest continent in the world and is a victim in every sense of the word in that it is dependent on other nations and has not developed the economic means to be independent.

It has great resources but outsiders develop these and Africans have become consumers of their own resources rather than producers.

Black dependency on the rest of the world to continue to solve its problems cannot continue. We want to be spoon-fed with every damned product.

We don’t find it shameful that others produce and we do the consumption.

(71)

In order to empower himself and hopefully provide the means of empowering all Africans, Onyeani has adopted the other ‘negative’ term “Capitalist” which revolutionary movements always eschew. But for Onyeani, poverty is disempowering. It is necessary to become a Capitalist because with wealth comes power. Being poor means being dependent and a victim. A Capitalist Nigger is not a victim.

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- has absolute belief in himself

- is an Economic Warrior with “the brain of a Jew and the tenacity and death-wish of the Caucasian.” (20)

- is enterprising and works out a strategic plan for success. He believes in success. Failure is not an option.

- is willing to take risks.

- is ruthless in pursuit of success and excellence.

- is disciplined, works very hard and sacrifices everything to reach his goal i.e. becoming independently wealthy.

A Capitalist Nigger does not believe “that the best job is one that pays you a salary at the end of the month.” (23)

Africans have to learn from others, even those they regard as the enemy, the strategies of economic empowerment. Political independence is empty without economic independence.

Today, Africa is worse off than when it gained independence from the former colonial masters. The standard of living of the masses has decreased steadily since gaining independence to the extent that now there is more malnutrition, more diseases, less provision of
essential services, such as good roads, clean drinking water, good health care provision and less freedom to express one’s views. (98-9)

Onyeani believes that Africans should adopt the strategies of white people; learn from them in the same way as the Japanese, Chinese and Indians have. They have copied from the West and improved on what they have learned.

In South Africa, we can begin by learning from the Afrikaners. When the Afrikaners came to power in 1948, they set about building their community. Education was in the mother tongue for whites and studies were offered in all aspects needed to build a powerful community.

And the Afrikaners soon had experts and outstanding professionals in the fields of administration, economics, engineering, law, agriculture, business, industry, science, medicine, education and communication. Where affirmative has not replaced that professionalism and expertise, it still sustains the country. Job Reservation, Bantu Education and other racist laws cosseted and protected white people.

True their progress was at the expense of Black people but that is not the focus here.

What has to be learned from them is that they built and developed their own community.

What they have shown is that it is essential to invest in your own community, to develop skills and expertise, support and build one another and thus grow the community.

And they were hard workers. Onyeani refers to this as the Spider-Web-Doctrine; a spider web does not allow whatever enters it to leave. Whatever wealth enters a community should be kept and recycled within it.

That means supporting the businesses within the community and using the skills in that community rather than going beyond to support businesses outside.

But Africans in general have personal and limited goals and have bought hugely into consumerism. They want instant gratification and must have everything of the best. They are not willing to make sacrifices and work hard. They have little thought for the future.

Onyeani deplores the fact that Africans are in competition with one another and have no real will to support and build community.
As a result, African countries are unproductive and can only plot their way to a decline.

“The Black race is a slave – pure and simple – an economic slave.” (5)

The whole of the African race is under economic occupation. You cannot achieve a true political independence without at the same time achieving economic independence.

The so-called political independence we think we have now is merely an illusion.

It is meaningless.

It is not supported

by any solid foundation. A house without solid foundation is bound to crumple sooner or later.

Without economic independence, sooner or later we will be recolonized politically. (51)

What Africans do not demonstrate is loyalty to their own communities. This has happened because they are losing their languages and the values implicit in their culture.

They are adopting Western languages and cultural values and their loyalties have shifted to what they consciously or unconsciously acknowledge as superior values, goods and services, i.e. the ways and products of their former colonisers. But because of miseducation, Africans can never be equal to the Masters. In schools, they choose, for the most part, easy options like social studies and literature rather than economics, engineering, science and technology.

As a result, African countries are unable to produce the scientific and technological needs of their countries. They cannot construct and provide equipment required for engineering, medicine, transport, industry and the military. And what is worse, they are unable to develop the natural resources with which their countries are so richly endowed because they do not have the scientific and technological expertise and equipment. They are thus dependent on Western, Japanese, Chinese, Indian, Korean etc. developers who are able to reap the major benefits from this natural wealth leaving a mere pittance for the countries in which they operate.

Africans are consumers and that makes their relationships to other countries parasitic.
Africa is the richest continent in the world. It has the greater share of the world’s natural resources. Yet, Africa continues to be declared the poorest continent in the world by the United Nations.

In most African countries, there is no good drinking water, no good roads, no electricity, no good health care.

Every country in Africa is supposedly independent, but every African country is still under the yoke of colonialism.

Africans depend on Europeans for all their needs.

It is a joke and the height of stupidity, to claim to be independent when you depend on your oppressors for everything you use. (63)

If African countries are to become independent and wealthy, Africans need to focus aggressively on economic growth. Onyeani suggests two strategies that Africans can use to change from consumerism to productivity. 1. To recognise the harm they have done themselves that has retarded their progress, they need to declare a day/days of atonement in which they acknowledge how they have contributed to their own enslavement. 2. Africans must become aggressively capitalist and must buy African.

“I am not ashamed to say that I am also purely motivated by the same greed that motivates Caucasians with “killer-instincts” and “devil-may-care” convictions. I see myself as an Economic Warrior for my people and not a victim. As a predator and not a victim, I have decided to confront the truth of my misfortune and when I look in the mirror I see the culprit standing right in front of me – it is me.” (xvii-xviii)