

Review

African nationalist transformational leaders: Opportunities, possibilities and pitfalls in African fiction and politics

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The paper studies selected African writers' dreams and fears, the way four novelists have been diversely excited by the topical issue of African leadership and discerns that artists dig into past history and tradition to reconstruct epic leaders, while fictionalising contemporary history and behaviour to critique modern African political leadership. The paper examines how African leaders have been portrayed in literary works of art, (Sundiata, Nehanda, Man of the People & Last of the Empire), how they have behaved on the ground and suggests theory for those kinds of behaviour. The purpose is to argue that the lack of transformational leadership is the bane of African politics. A cursory look at the relationship between the current crop of African political leaders and their nations' citizens prompts effective performance and good governance enthusiasts to question the apparent absence of important transformational leadership tenets among most African leaders. That relationship is often marked with a literal cordoning off of the masses from the person they made leader; the leader and the led seem not to share a vision, yet the leader professes to champion a national vision towards which he pulls the followers. The paper argues that Nkrumah and Nyerere's separate calls for African leaders to be weaned from foreign ideologies attest to the perennial lack of a home-grown vision in the African leaders by dint of their disregard for the needs and conditions of their followers. Hence, the conduct of national politics in post independent Africa has been fundamentally antithetical to the tenets of transformational leadership maybe because after independence most liberation movements either failed or refused to transform themselves into governing movements with all that goes with statecraft. To appreciate the behaviour of African leaders we turn to Mazrui's tribal theories of leadership: the elder, the warrior and the sage traditions. The research suggests that African politicians could benefit from borrowing leadership styles from Burns' (1978) and Bass' (1985) transformational models of leadership. It contends that Africa needs transformational political leaders able to personify, articulate and defend a national vision, and thus garner voluntary support from the diverse masses, but, instead, has lately been 'blest' with inconsistent leaders, those who rule by quid pro quo and, at worst, outright dictators.

Key words: Transformational leadership, charismatic leadership, Short termism, rainbowism, gerontocracy, saladization, Machiavelianism, warrior tradition.

INTRODUCTION

20th and 21st century African political leaders have often faced the challenge of leading towards liberation, people

of diverse ethnic backgrounds and, sometimes, those of contending political affiliations and races. The case of

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Angola and South Africa can best illustrate how the politics of ethnicity and caste had to be handled with care by the nationalists since even the hitherto despised ethnicities, some whites, and Coloureds¹ participated in the anti-colonial struggles alongside dominant ethnic groups (Gonye, 2010). African political leaders such as the late John Garang of Southern Sudan have also had to contend with the inherited problems occasioned by the arbitrary boundaries drawn up at the Berlin Conference of 1884. Contemporary leaders have also had to contend with leadership over people who have been born under traditional leadership but have been raised under Western colonial one. All these problems have influenced the kind of leader who has emerged in Africa, hence the intention of this paper to discuss the opportunities and obstructions these conditions have created for the emergence of transformational nationalist leaders.

The colonial experience adversely transformed the political leadership styles in Africa, offering Africans an alternative leadership style, and catalyzing opposition to it. The 1960s and subsequent years saw African nations begin to decolonize. Since the emerging African leaders were assuming leadership at a more national, sometimes revolutionary, and at other times, modern democratic level informed by constitutional politics, different kinds of leadership emerged in Africa; genuine liberators and dictators. According to Idahosa (2004:13) the political thought and ideology of African leadership has been influenced by “the resistance to colonialism and the development of nationalism; the legacy of colonial underdevelopment and how to overcome it; and the association with, and sometimes antipathy to Marxism.” Though the most influential socio-political thought guiding most African leaders was, understandably, socialism, Nkrumah’s declaration that Africa should develop without necessarily gazing either to the East or to the West and Nyerere’s desire to nurture home-grown African socialist democracy (Mazrui, 2004; Idahosa, 2004) pointed to the necessity of a leader who was conversant with his/her context and in reciprocal understanding with the people he or she led. The research suggests that contemporary African politicians could benefit vastly by borrowing styles from the transformational model of leadership. The paper, however, rues the fact that, in the post colony, what seems to have emerged is “defensive nationalism” (Ake, 1976), the ideology bequeathed to independent Africa by its equally authoritarian leaders whereby leaders who had promised peace and justice with independence, increasingly abandoned that grand plan and turned their followers into enemies. What seems to be a problem of African leaders has been an absence of an entrenched, enduring ideology. When they have not been preaching foreign ideologies, they have harped on a dubious call for the preservation of African culture and tradition, as if the

latter were static objective phenomena.

Oftentimes, during Africa’s liberation period, a special kind of transformational leader reminiscent of the biblical Moses emerged, a leader whose mission was to lead fellow Africans out of foreign subjugation and a leader whose vision was to guide followers to a just, prosperous and unified future. Leaders who immediately come to mind are Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Samora Machel of Mozambique. Initially, Nkrumah did not embody only a vision for independent native Ghana but also an independent and unified PanAfrica (Mazrui, in Ostergard et al., 2004) while Machel did not only convince his nation that Mozambique was not yet free as long as other states in Southern Africa remained under colonial tyranny but went ahead to lead his people into lending their country as launching ground for many Southern African guerrilla armies (Mpofu et al., 2009; http://ts_den.aluka.org/fsi/img/misc/pdf/struggles.pdf). Sadly, contemporary African national politics has been contrary to the dictates of transformational leadership. The leadership has not come down to the people to acknowledge the followers’ indispensability to the attainment of inclusive national goals but have only turned to them as to disposable tools – followers can be hired for political expediency and can be fired if the leader’s objective has been achieved. Yet, as in an organisation, there is need for leaders to set aims, objectives, evaluation mechanisms and the desired ends. Apparently, African leaders’ ascendancy into the management of state affairs was marked by a wishy-washy and woolly vision that they could not articulate to the people in order to derive the necessary synergies. The people are a resource that can be harnessed and canalized towards the achievement of an envisaged idealized future. That this did not and may take long to happen says a lot about the inorganic nature of the African leaders, “the lack of practical links between them and the masses of the people, their laziness...” (Fanon, 1961:119). This lack of a creative and fruitful dialogue between them and the people is not because of a congenital aberration in them but because they have a hazy agenda about what needs to be done and how this should be done. Achebe (1984:1) was pungently forthright when he observed that:

The trouble with (Africa) is simply and squarely a failure of leadership...The...problem is the unwillingness or inability of...(the) leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal responsibilities which are the hallmarks of true leadership.

Granted that colonialism left sediments of intractable problems, these could have been surmounted had Africa had dedicated, devoted and charismatic leadership able to scan the national environment, conjure up options and possibilities and convince, persuade and inspire the people to a better and stable Africa. Unfortunately, the African leadership, was, in the main, seized with political short-termism in which personal interest preponderated

¹Pepetela’s *Mayombe* dramatizes how leaders in the MPLA had to contend with tribalism and La Guma’s *In The Fog of the Season’s End* like *Mayombe* has Coloured guerrillas.

over national long term goals. Transformational leadership should entail "...a willingness to compromise in order to reach an understanding regarding what is to be done..." (Kiros, 2001:174). This implies bringing about the re-alignment of hitherto divergent individual interests to the will of the organisation, in this case the country. Achebe decries the leaders' propensity to live in a false world of unrealistic expectations, demagoguery and sloganeering when no effort is made to conjure up a society that inspires the ordinary citizen through planning and innovation. If anything, this leadership smothers aspiration and innovation as antithetical to proper government. Achebe (1984:10) says as much when he opines that Africans are what they are "only because their leaders are not what they should be." In order to create an aura of mystery around their misty leadership, these leaders, especially in Zimbabwe are apt to forestall those that can best run the affairs of government by saying politics should be left to politicians. In this perverted discourse, they alone hold the monopoly to narrowly define who a politician is and what qualifications go into being one. This is meant to fence them off from the technocrats who set objectives and find ways of achieving them with those that they lead.

Transformational theory of leadership as proposed by western theorists alongside what African critics of African politics such as Mazrui say, will be harnessed in our attempt to search for, and critique, African transformational leadership. Commenting on the prevalent tendency in the study of African political thought to overly rely on written political ideas, Mazrui (2002) decries the presupposition of overrating written at the expense of oral traditions. Mazrui (2002:97-98) argues, "because of this assumption, there has been relative disregard of the oral tradition in political thought, and an almost complete obsession with political writers and the written speeches of political leaders." He goes on to remind that, in fact, there are three key sources for the study of African politics and thought, viz, oral tradition, written source and overt political behaviours. This current research looks at oral sources such as *Sundiata* and *Nehanda*, fictionalised political behaviour in *A Man of the People* and *The Last of the Empire* and makes cross references to actual African political leaders and their behaviour. African history is replete with leaders, who, instead of promoting cultural continuity in African politics of leadership, cause discontinuity through a wilful 'saladisation' of ideologies incongruent to Africa and the creation of coercive personality cults. Such leaders, despite their "iconic standing in the minds of their citizenry and/or the global community have abused their positions and lapsed into varying degrees of megalomania and despotism ..." (Daniel, 2006:29). Among the list of these metamorphosed first generation of 'fathers of the nation' Daniel identifies Kamuzu Banda, Kwame Nkrumah, Sam Nujoma and Muammar Ghaddafi (p.29). In contrast, there were leaders like Nelson Mandela, leaders who didn't

need the checks and balances of constitutional institutions to inform their leadership. Daniel (2006:29) defines Mandela's conception of leadership thus:

...to Mandela, power was not something one sought as means to accumulating great wealth or personal aggrandisement. His conceptualisation of power was that it was a gift to be deployed as a force of good. To Mandela, those blessed with power and authority had the duty and calling to use those gifts in the cause of the greater good of the greater number.

This explains why Mandela's presidency was energised by the vision of "Rainbowism" – the vision of a multiethnic and multicultural society where race was not the defining parameter in imagining citizenship. He therefore tried to inspire and share the vision with South Africans on the need to collapse the Apartheid veil. While our proposed view of transformational nationalist leaders and our African examples from pre-colonial Africa seem to coincide with Mandela's views, post modern Africa's curse is that such views are no longer respected.

Transformational leadership in Africa may be difficult to achieve because of some leadership models used by the nationalist leaders. Mazrui (2002:102) identifies one of them as the elder tradition consisting 'patriarchy' and 'gerontocracy'. According to him the 'patriarchal' model "focuses attention on a single father figure (supposedly) commanding general allegiance and respect" while gerontocracy is "a concession to age." Africans generally used to place a high premium on age as a manifestation of wisdom and an immediate link between the dead and the living. These elder leaders project themselves as the custodians of the values of the nation in the past, present and future. According to Southall et al. (2006:274) these leaders set up an "iconic status" around themselves. In Zimbabwe, this finds dramatization in the cult of personalities awarded to the nationalist 'Big Man' where Joshua Nkomo, a long time nationalist and second Vice-President was called 'Father Zimbabwe' and Simon Muzenda, first Vice President was seen as the Soul of The Nation' and Robert Mugabe, current president as 'the Protector of the Nation.' The latter guards the nation from pillage and 'rape' by outsiders. Hence the emphasis on the discourse of sovereignty and patriotism. The tragedy with the elder tradition of leadership is that it tends to ossify because the leaders tend to look more at the past than the future. In this way, the present and future are held hostage by past glories. This is why Fanon (1961:135) says that:

Every time he (the leader) speaks to the people he recalls his often heroic life, the struggles he has led in the name of the people and the victories in their name he has achieved, thereby intimating clearly to the masses that they ought to go on putting their confidence in him.

Could it be that this approach to leadership fails to realise

that constantly looking back unnecessarily disturbs one's march into the future? This is why most young people have been alienated by their leaders which has led to violent protests in Libya, Tunisia and Cote d'Ivoire. The feeling that the people should forever be grateful for the heroics of the leader without persuading or convincing them what is there for them in the present and the future presents problems for the birth of transformational leadership in Africa. This leads to the "For Life Syndrome" which is the tragedy of Africa. It leads to uncalled for ruptures and categorisations into 'born frees', seen as ignorant, and those who saw the liberation struggle who are seen as 'authentic'. Under such circumstances, organic transformational leadership where unity of purpose is the catchword, is impossible.

The warrior approach to leadership privileges the 'gwara' (party line) discipline over palavering to 'rule', than to lead or manage a people to a promised land. It is often coercive and brutal in enforcing this discipline. Mazrui in Kiros, (2001:103) observes that:

The warrior tradition also thinks itself as action-oriented, seeking to achieve results by physical exertion or the threat of physical action.

This form of leadership model has an implacable fear of those that articulate a concrete vision and rally people around them. Accordingly, the discourse of violence is used to keep people docile and governable. Fanon (1961:135) observes that under this type of leadership "... the vocation of the people is to obey, to go on obeying and be obedient till the end of time." This can be seen in the number of people killed or injured each time there are elections in most African states. It is meant to foist upon the people a moribund leadership that has run out of ideas.

The sage tradition frames leadership in terms of teacher (with the supposed knowledge he/she has) and student (in need of being tutored into political interpretive adulthood). The teacher determines the parameters of national discourse and ideology. The sage tradition collapses the whole nation into a classroom where the leaders educate the citizens on what is and is not proper. In Zimbabwe, this is seen in the manner Party ideologues churn out, via state broadcast, the philosophies of the Dear Divinely provided Leader. Dr Chivaura, Professor Mupeperekwi and Professor Mararika always take pains to lecture the whole captive nation on partisan intellectuality, in the service of ZANU PF.

It is in a context where the emerging African leader had before him, not only models from African traditionalism but also from the Western fraternal twins of capitalist democracy and socialist 'elite dictatorship' to choose from that this paper seeks to situate itself by proposing that African problems of leadership are, partly, problems of morality, inconsistent character and, those of their followers. African leaders, therefore, could benefit by

studying the models of transformational leadership as espoused by Burns (1978) and Bass (1985). Burns (1978:4) notes that a transformational leader not only "recognises and exploits an existing need or demand of a potential follower" but also "looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower" while Bass (1985:14) reiterates that a transformational leader goes beyond attending to the transactional needs of his followers to courting his or her followers' highest actualisation needs, first recognized by Maslow (1954).

THE PAST IS NOT WITHOUT EXAMPLES

The paper recognizes that Africa has not been without examples of visionary and charismatic leadership. It intends to invoke D.T. Niane of Mali and Yvonne Vera of Zimbabwe's eponymous oral masterpieces *Sundiata* and *Nehanda* to critique Africa's wait for the messianic leaders as well as the spiritual and superhuman nature of all enduring leadership. Perhaps, it will be asked why researchers interested in the study of transformational leadership would choose to analyze *Sundiata* and *Nehanda*. It is the researchers' contention that these two writers want to remind contemporary readers that if they care enough to look back to their apparently not so glorious historical past, they may find that they have not been utterly without remarkable, organising leaders, both men and women. Africa has not always lacked clear-sighted and perceptive leaders, leaders pragmatic enough to know when to lie low and when to throw the spear. Even more, Africa has not always been "strewn with the debris of the false hopes of emancipation" (Idahosa, 2004:3), a characteristic of 21st century Africa.

Sundiata and *Nehanda* bring into focus what Weber pontificated in 1968 when he said that charisma involves an extraordinarily gifted person, a social crisis, a radical solution to a problem, followers believing in the exceptional abilities of a leader because of his perceived transcendent powers and the validation of a leader's extraordinary gifts through repeated victories (Rafferty and Griffin in Pierce and Newstrom, 2008:394). Bass (1985) reiterates that charisma is the generic component of transformational leadership and further states that charismatic leaders inspire and motivate followers through emotive communication that arouses followers to perform beyond both self interest and expectations. According to Burns (1978), transformational leaders use their personal values, vision, commitment to a mission and passion to motivate and spur others to action. This triggers admiration and trust in followers, moving them to offer maximum effort or performance. What continues to be emphasised is the apparent transformation of attitudes, beliefs and values of followers such that followers appreciate that their action is much more valuable than whatever material benefits the leader may

award them in recognition of their performance. Thus, transformational leaders do not necessarily gain followers' compliance through rewards but by stimulating the most ideal spot of their followers – self actualisation. The question is, therefore, do we have transformational nationalist leaders in Africa? If probable, what are the possible dimensions of such transformational nationalist leaders? How have they produced their effects? Our paper offers insights from the arena of African politics as represented in African novels. It offers insights into African leadership using the perspective of what Africa had in pre-colonial and what Africa lacks in postcolonial contexts basing on the effects and outcomes such leadership reaped. For instance, are today's followers satisfied with their leaders as those of yesteryear were, by their pre-colonial exemplars? Do today's leaders inspire as much trust as Sundiata and Nehanda did? How can postcolonial leaders encourage citizens to behave during nationally, politically, or culturally critical times?

Sundiata's is a griot's story of transformational leadership in one "very hierarchical society of Africa before colonization" (Niane, 1986: vii). An African foundational text, *Sundiata* tells of how the originally one, united black people of Mali had only broken into tribes as population increased. This paper does not discuss the inevitable divisions accompanying population booms and emergence of clan leaders but, rather, the emergence of a greater, unified and more peaceful empire under the heroic and visionary leadership of Sundiata. As Burns (1978:4) suggests, all transformational leaders begin from recognising and analysing the needs and demands of their followers before transforming those potential motives into exploitable gunpowder, albeit not necessarily for the leader's personal gains but for the transcendental, common good. Researchers on nationalist transformational leadership would ask, what are the existing problems in Mali? What motives do the Keitas, Kamaras, Djallonkes, Mandingoes and Kondes (tribes) have in seeking out Sundiata? Why do they turn to Sundiata and finally, how does Sundiata transform their separate fears of vassalage and dispersal, first, into a desire for independence and, ultimately, into the actualized ideal of a united peaceful empire?

Having realized that the council of elders' decision to overrule their dead king's wish in preference for the queen, Saussouma Berete's evil plans had brought them neither peace nor prosperity but continued misery and oppression, the persecuted people of Nianiba (capital of Sundiata's father) turn to their destined leader. At the time Sundiata had been exiled, the kingdom of Mali, together with all friendly kingdoms quickly fell under the tyrannical rule of the libidinous king, Soumaoro Kante, who beheaded all conquered kings, demanded absolute vassalage, tributes and grabbed all beautiful princesses and women for himself. In short, he humiliated and frustrated all the peoples of Mali and surrounding kingdoms. They knew no peace and freedom during

Soumaoro's reign, since Soumaoro, drunk with his sense of invulnerability with fetish powers, ruled with diabolical impunity. Here then, were various people needing a saviour and leader to rally around, one who would restore their humanity and dignity. That man was no other than Sundiata, a fighter whose bow "nobody could bent" (Niane, 1986:37). In exile, Sundiata had conducted himself with astonishing strength and a fearlessness befitting a king, all of which positively affected people's attitudes and belief in him. He was friendly to all warriors, lucid in mind and quick to solve military puzzlements. After hearing of his heroic exploits and after realizing that Sundiata was their anointed redeemer, emissaries from Mali come to beseech him to deliver them from the sorcerer king. Sundiata becomes their saviour through destiny and in deed.

"Whatever rank you may hold here, leave all these honours and come and deliver your fatherland. The brave await you, come and restore your rightful authority to Mali. Weeping mothers pray only in your name, the assembled kings await you, for your name alone inspires confidence in them" (Niane, 1986:45).

As Mandjan Berete's beseechment testifies, even in pre-colonial Africa, transformational leaders were considered a rare gift from gods. Sundiata's birth had been foretold and predestined. Similarly, regards Nehanda's awaited birth, we are told "the departed had come to deliver a gift to the living, to shape the birth of voices" (Vera, 1993:3).

Heroic transformational leaders are popular for their military prowess, organization and vision. In *Sundiata*, the battle of Taban gave "hope to all the peoples of Mali" (Niane, 1986:49) and is comparable to the battle on top of the mountain engineered by Nehanda in *Nehanda*. Both leaders are believed in and are viewed as saviours, redeemers and nationalist architects before whom everyone voluntarily prostrates. As Sundiata accepts leadership over Malians at Sibi, he declares his vision and mission thus:

"I salute you all, sons of Mali, I salute you Kamandjan. I have come back, and as long as I breathe Mali will never be in thrall - rather death than slavery. We will live free because our ancestors lived free. I am going to avenge the indignity that Mali has undergone" (Niane, 1986:56).

He vows to redress the destruction, the dispersal, the exile and the vassalage associated with Soumaoro's reign. His people's experience at the hands of outsiders is comparable to Nehanda's people's under white colonizers. Nehanda exhorts her people to fight to redeem their land, destiny and identity in, "Is death not better than this submission? There is no future till we have regained our lands and our birth. There is only this moment, and we have to fight till we have redeemed ourselves" (Niane, 1986:66).

Sundiata's behaviour is in keeping with the transformational leadership principles of individualised attention. Through extolling the virtues and strengths of each king he nudges them to outdo themselves. All kings (commanders) perform "great feats" befitting leaders who inspire confidence in their followers, for example, splitting a great mahogany tree with one stroke of a sword; piercing a tunnel through a mountain of Sibi with a sword etc. (Niane, 1986:59). These exemplary feats kindle confidence in the armies and instil a readiness to right the wrongs and injustices meted out to their peoples by Soumauro. Sundiata's and Mali's destinies were intertwined so Sundiata had to only provide his leadership and the people would create a just Mali together with him. Malians, kings inclusive, had endured so much dishonour and insolence that Sundiata had only to articulate his comprehensive vision of a peaceful empire, his retributive mission and courageous determination to guarantee followers, together with whom, "from the east to the west, from the north to the south, everywhere his victorious arms have established peace" (Niane, 1986:74). Because of his principled leadership, he secures the freedom and liberty of Mali, establishes the roots of the constitution of the united Mali empire. Twelve kings swear allegiance to him, surrendering their kingdoms in a demonstration of their selfless dedication to a common goal. According to Maxwell (1993:139), where there is a unifying visionary leader "individual rights are set aside because the whole is much more important than the part." But in a sign of good leadership, and trust in the kings that transcends the transactional carrot and stick, he returns a kingdom to each who had given it up to him. Through his tactful approach he achieves national unity between the Keitas, Mandingoes, Kondes etc. Sundiata thus manages to establish peace and prosperity, rights, laws and prohibitions, trade, friendship and surfeit.

Following his triumph, Sundiata manages to rebuild Niani to unprecedented levels of peace and prosperity, the missing link between past and present-day leaders. "Djata's justice spared nobody. He followed the very word of God. He protected the weak against the strong and people would make journeys lasting several days to come and demand justice of him. Under his sun the upright man was rewarded and the wicked one punished" (Niane, 1986:81).

However, the powers of Soumauro indicate that all wasn't romantic in pre-colonial Africa. Even Sundiata had flashes of vaulting ambition. For example, he itched to outdo his adolescent model and prototype, Alexander the Great "both in the extent of his territory and the wealth of his treasury" (Niane, 1986:48). Such incidents show the crisis in some of these foundational texts, including Niane's foregrounding of the exploits of the Keitas (Sundiata's tribe), in the creation history of the kingdom of Mali despite the narrative's attempt to focus on Sundiata's generosity of giving back the kingdoms which are part of the discourse of nation building. A similar crisis obtains in *Nehanda* where Vera inadvertently

celebrates, in her anti-colonial narrative, only the Shona's 1896 *chimurenga*² uprisings at the expense of an equally important, simultaneous *umvukela*³ by the Ndebeles inspired by spirit medium Ngwali and Mkwati.

Shona fighter: *Tell us great spirit. Shall we be successful in the hills?*

Nehanda: *You must continue to fight. You must not rest. Your power shall be granted by the departed who surround you with their spirit.*

Nehanda delineates Zimbabwe's experiences of economic disinheritance, political subjugation and cultural desecration at the hands of the British colonisers. Through the retelling of a dream, the story of Zimbabwe's colonization and occupation is related. It culminated in loss of land, livestock and mineral fields to outsiders. Readers do not need Freud's skills of dream interpretation to discern that, but, may be to determine the import. That this occupation comes in a dream is the unconscious' reminder to the conscious of the issues the conscious might not have wanted to be brought to consciousness. The dream, therefore, chides all Zimbabweans for having done themselves a disservice by exhibiting an apparent indifference to the aggression by the arrogant stranger. It is Nehanda who comes to interpret the nation's psychological nightmare. Vatete's story proves that the people needed a special kind of deliverer to spearhead the cleansing of the desecrated sacred lands so that ancestors could save the erring populace from drought and poverty. It is Nehanda again who explains their 'national' forgetfulness, chastising them for permitting 'a dancer dancing on your sacred ground' (Vera, 1993:23). *Nehanda*, therefore, is a story that equally blames the Shona for having allowed colonization to take root. It dramatizes the nation's self blame and its fear of retribution by offended ancestors thus indicating the great necessity for an interpreter to tell the people how to appease and reconcile with the departed. To illustrate the community's clueless predicament, Vatete notes "We did not dream, because we had no sight with which to feed our dreams" (Vera, 1993:25). Gradually though, and with Nehanda's emotive encouragement, her people begin to believe in themselves and their capacity to fight the invader.

Nehanda comes onto the Zimbabwean scene when the living, despite their knowledge that the departed and living coexist, are baffled and steeped in a morass of physical and spiritual inactivity and pathological complacency. Had Zimbabwe been an organisation then, it would have been in near liquidation or near swallowing-up by a more shrewd company. Before Nehanda's

² In 1896 the Shona of the central, eastern and southern parts of modern day Zimbabwe rose against the colonising, British settler forces, their war of resistance or rebellion is known as *chimurenga* in Shona.

³ At the same time the Shona rose against the settlers in the east, the Ndebeles to the western half of the country also rose and fought against the white forces in a related war of resistance called *umvukela* in isiNdebele.

nationalistic awakening, the mbira players and drummers, traditionally renowned for their abilities to commune with ancestors, could neither excite people to action nor clear thought. This poignantly indicated the need for a leader who would give these people a vision and an honourable mission in life. As she awakens, Nehanda symbolically “longs for a new language to seek wisdom, and new ways of seeing” (Vera, 1993:35). The thought exposes Nehanda as both a vulnerable human and a gifted superhuman. Destined with extraordinary insight, she has to interpret to her ‘sightless’ people the omens that come with the thick cloud of locusts, the rotten moon and the battle-scarred bodies (Vera, 1993:36). As a human being, Nehanda has great perception and foresight, particularly her realization that she should not continue to sacrifice her followers and their families. As soon as she realizes that the seed of revolution had been planted on “fertile soil” and that future resistance was guaranteed, Nehanda surrenders to the whites. But as the spiritually inspired leader, she has first to give vision to her people blinded by the “blindness rendered through words” (that is Christianity and western education) (Vera, 1993:37). The spiritual link presents Nehanda not as a self-imposed leader but one divinely chosen and one operating on the levels of the Usuman Dan Fodios or the Moseses of the Islamic and Christian religions, respectively. What seems agreed across cultures is that God manifests himself to the leader. What makes Nehanda the more apparently indispensable is that, her people, despite their realization that the white man is a conceited, dishonest dealer, still think he will leave though they do not know after “how many moons” (Vera, 1993:43). The *dare*, the highest think-tank and source of philosophical wisdom is also perplexed and testifies to the nation’s dangerous forgetfulness evident in the confession “We cannot remember how far we have walked. We cannot recall which proverb we once uttered to lead us into the future” (Vera, 1993:43-44). The people’s desperation for a leader is evident in their exhortation for the possessed Nehanda to tell them what to do in order to rediscover their honour and identity, “Tell us...Tell us...Tell us you who have seen the secrets of the departed. Help us find ourselves.” The people believe Nehanda holds the key to their being. She takes it upon herself to reveal the community’s origins and their destiny, that the hills framing the origins of the clan (Shirichena) are the same hills in which they performed their offerings and prayers for rain, the same hills housing the sacred caves, the same hills the white strangers had symbolically desecrated by seizing them first. And these were the same hills from which their first *chimurenga* had to be launched:

Here in this desperate valley where grass was once green I hear the birth of voices. It is hard and convulsive, like other births. The green valley is a place that holds hope and warmth. At the bottom of the hill, and then at the summit of the hill, not only would I see the wonders

and trials of the past time, but even I would be transformed (Vera, 1993:59).

This unmasking of their destiny involves awakening her followers from the undignified slumber that prevented them from seeing that their unbridled generosity and hospitality to strangers had been their undoing, their negligent forgetfulness had betrayed the land to acculturation and that ancestors demanded the blood sacrifice for atonement.

To show that Nehanda is an inspiring leader, she reassures her sorrowing followers, “I am among you. I carry the message of retribution. The land must be cleansed with your blood. You must fight for what belongs to us and for your departed. I will speak until the birds depart from the trees” (Vera, 1993: 61). Nehanda thus epitomises national consciousness and self-sacrifice, values she subsequently bequeaths upon her followers. In Maxwell (1993:5)’s terms, she is a real leader because “real leadership is being the person others will gladly and confidently follow”. In the history of Zimbabwean anti-colonial politics, Nehanda is renowned as an inspiring and empowering spiritual leader. She masterminded the first *chimurenga* uprisings in Mashonaland that spread across the whole country. Both the white pioneer forces and the black resistance forces believed in her organising and leadership prowess. This explains why, to mark her defeat, the white victors hanged her publicly in a street in Salisbury. But before she died, she symbolically empowered her apparently routed followers through her steely words that had the promise of a dignified future, “My bones shall rise.” In that utterance, Nehanda was disaffirming the indispensability of a leader yet affirming the vitality of a vision, commitment to that vision and unity of purpose if that mission is to be accomplished. With her invincible powers, we are told, she could have evaded capture. But she believed in a leader with the well-being of her followers at heart, not a leader who is so obsessed with success that she sacrifices her followers to attain a goal, no matter how golden. She knew when to stop, even when her speeches had “purged (followers) of their fears, (and) they (followers) are prepared to live and die” (Vera, 1993:81). Greenleaf (1977) in Maxwell (1993:139) talks about the importance of foresight for effective leadership and notes “There are abundant current examples of loss of leadership which stem from failure to foresee what reasonably could have been foreseen, and from failure to act on that knowledge while the leader has freedom to act.”

In Nehanda’s case, we see the example of a leader who leads from amongst her people, not a leader who is separate from the led. The latter is one who would be more concerned with the goal and himself/herself so much that he or she manipulates the followers’ trust and loyalty to the extent of culpable exploitation. Such leaders believe in the birth or recycling of more followers, not

other leaders. What Nehanda exemplifies is a leader who is interested in full self-actualisation of her followers, one who would at one time excitedly preach and articulate a vision, set the tone to achieve whatever mission, including encouragement of Kaguvi's rise (in the novel) and yet at others, postpone the mission in a desire to prepare the followers for their destiny. As Maxwell (1993:9) avows "a leader is great, not because of his or her power, but because of his or her ability to empower others. Success without a successor is failure." The democratic essence of this assertion finds expression in African politics in leaders such as Mandela and Nyerere, leaders who have been able to voluntarily relinquish power even when their followers still needed them and even when they had no challenger. Such a decision to step aside, hand over power to a successor, and in Mandela's words, maybe "lead from behind" is something Africa sorely lacks. What Africa often has are warrior leaders, gerontocratic leaders or sage tradition leaders (all versions discussed by Mazrui) who force down the throats of reluctant followers, tired or often-betrayed visions for the nation, and expect thankful unquestioning followership.

While Nehanda's narrative is commendable for Vera's attempt to inscribe female gender writing of history and for its righting of female participation in the *chimurenga* wars of Zimbabwe, it unwittingly falls into the embrace of ZANU PF's narrative of the nation, the latter which oftentimes celebrates the Shona dominated party's role in the liberation struggle at the expense of PF ZAPU and other contesting minority voices that gave their all in that war. What Vera achieves seems paradoxical. By insisting that the spirits that possess Nehanda are from her mother's people, Vera wrestles initiative from patriarchy to matriarchy, and by celebrating Nehanda more than Kaguvi, she is entrenching the role of the women and mothers in the struggle. But by suggesting that not everyone can be a leader, Vera's *Nehanda* just like Niane's *Sundiata*, ensconces that limiting view of the exclusivity of leadership which so troubles African nations today - the belief that there could be no better leader than the incumbent. This finds insidious dramatization in Zimbabwe in the fact that at various Party congresses, the incumbent leaders are never subjected to any challenge. Mugabe (ZANU PF) and Tsvangirai (MDC) are always conveniently endorsed by all provinces in the country as if there are no other competent leaders to wrestle power from them. While transformational leadership is premised upon a born gifted leader, it does not say leadership skills can not be acquired. Regrettably, *Nehanda* seems to enact what Mazrui calls obsession with tribality in African politics that is manifest in today's postcolonial discourses and exclusionist narrations of the nation:

An important initial premise of African tribality or ethnicism is the sacredness of one's ancestry. The

tendency to treat ancestry with deference and deep respect is a characteristic of the conservative turn of the mind (Kris Jeter). The tribal continuity is an important principle .because continuity between the past and the present is important, continuity between the dead and the living is also important. Revering ancestors is a form of respect for the past (Mazrui, 2002:98).

It is this totemic framing of the nation and leadership and the resultant chauvinism that leads to fragmented and dislocated aims, objectives and visions in a hybrid society like Zimbabwe.

A PARODY OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN A MAN OF THE PEOPLE AND THE LAST OF THE EMPIRE

A Man of the People and *The Last of the Empire* by Achebe and Sembene Ousmane (1981), respectively, can be regarded as metonymic novels. They represent object lessons on what transformational leadership is not. The two novels also capture the extent to which a particular followership helps to mould and frame a leadership that is divorced from and imperious to those they purport to lead. In the kind of leadership evinced by the two works of art is shown the genesis of afro pessimism and cynicism towards political leadership.

Chief M.A Nanga in *A Man of the People* is emblematic of the politics of opportunism in African political conduct. The manner in which he gets to power has nothing to do with an agenda or vision that he sells to the people but a function of toadying and groveling to the one who can appoint or disappoint, in this case the Prime Minister. One marvels at Mr. Nanga's lack of principle and the crass McCarthyism that he shows towards the accused Miscreant Gang. This elevation of mediocre candidates to national politics is what impels Odili to observe that in Africa to be a leader you had to be:

The smart and the lucky and hardly ever the best – (these) had scrambled for the one shelter our former rulers left and had taken it over and barricaded themselves in. And from within they sought to persuade the rest through numerous loudspeakers, that the first phase of the struggle had been won and that the next phase –the extension of our house–was even more important and called for new and original tactics; it required that all argument should cease and the whole people speak with one voice and that any dissent and argument outside the door and shelter would subvert and bring down the whole house (Achebe, 1966: 37).

The above quotation reflects the egregious lack of organic, transformational leadership. This type of leadership seeks to empower and valorise the followers yet chief Nanga and his ilk seek to peripherize and

marginalize them by using them as pawns for personal aggrandizement. Transformational leaders scan the environment for opportunities and devise strategies to take advantage of the proffered opportunities in the environment. The lack of innovation and imagination is captured by the fact that the leaders are not talking of fundamentally changing the foundation of the house to put it on a new footing but merely extending it on its faulty edifice. This shows what Pierce and Newstrom (2008: 428) describe as “pathologically destructive” leadership.

The leadership of politicians like Nanga is one characterized by consumerism and careerism. To be a national leader is to be in a position to flaunt wealth gotten through corrupt means, it is to be a shameless philanderer in the name of a bastardized and abused culture. Foxiness, and not clarity of vision for the nation characterizes chief Nanga. Pierce and Newstrom (2008:428) capture this when they say that:

Machiavellianism reflects a person’s general strategy for dealing with people. (Leaders) who have a strong Machiavellian orientation feel that the people are manipulable in interpersonal situations; as leaders, these individuals tend to employ manipulative techniques (and sometimes cunning, deception, and expedience) as an influence tactic.

Mr. Nanga is a past master at subterfuge as evidenced by the use of tribalism in order to dish out largess, use of demagoguery to mystify, bribery and coercive power to retain his parliamentary seat.

In *The last of the Empire* Sembene shows gerontocratic leadership. This is leadership by the aged and the putative assumption that this represents political wisdom. Leone Mignane is the president of Senegal and is around seventy and yet he surrounds himself with sycophantic young ministers who are not elected by the people. As in *A Man of the People* where the Prime Minister is glorified as “The Tiger” “the Lion”, “the One and Only” “The Ocean,” “The Sky”, the President in Sembene’s novel is framed as the “Venerable One”, “The Founder.” This is a reflection of the Big Men Syndrome in which these leaders personalize their positions without recourse to what people think. They deliberately create this aura of irreplaceability and indispensability in order to tenaciously hang on. This is a function of delusional narcissism. To operationalize this delusion, Leon Mignane stages a disappearing act in order to gauge the extent to which people fetishize him. The importance of this cannot be overemphasized because these narcissist leaders love histrionics, drama, power, prestige and manipulation. Leon Mignane’s delusional posturing occasions a coup, a testament of his failed gerontocratic leadership. Gerontocracy is a problematic leadership model because it fails to engage in introspection and the demands of those led. As a result it tends to ossify and petrify because it is fixed in the way things are done, for example Mignane

unilaterally decides who should the country’s friends be and what ideology to follow. It confuses the person and the post and personal whims as national policy.

This is possible because the Nangas and Mignanes of the African world hem themselves in with sycophants and deadwood as ministers to massage their king size egos. The result is that Mignane elevates his private birthday to a national event. Mignane and Chief Nanga refuse to let go because they hide behind the “Ediface complex.” This is the phobia that what they think they have bequeathed as their legacy will be erased and thus they feel obliged to hold on as long as is possible (Pierce and Newstrom, 2008:433). This applies to Mugabe in Zimbabwe who feels that the unity of his party will be destroyed and that the neo-colonialists will take over if he leaves. There is also the hovering fear of nothingness and obscurity once they give up leadership. Allied to this is the fear of reprisals for the various political misdemeanours during their tenure of office. However, the transformational model of leadership is important in so far as it looks at what the leader does but, unfortunately, it ignores the way in which followers can and do mould leaders to be what they are. In transformational leadership, “followers experience a sense of significance, motivation and commitment to leaders’ ideals” (Pierce and Newstrom, 2008:432). But Chief Nanga and Leon Mignane have no ideals that they represent except simply being there. The followers seem to have resigned themselves to be led by rascally individuals. In the two novels, the cynicism and ennui of the people makes them accept the charade of leadership offered by these politicians. There is evidence of leadership disaster as shown by high inflation and falling standards. The leader-follower relationship has given rise to “learned helplessness” (Pierce and Newstrom, 2008:428) in that the follower begin to think that they can do nothing to solve the political problems confronting them. In Zimbabwe this finds expression in finding blame with the South African mediators, with America because the people feel they cannot do anything. Followers also tend not to look at the larger picture but at personal benefit. In this way, followers are collaborators with mediocre leadership Africa experiences because followers cynically subscribe to the philosophy that no sensible man can spit out the juicy morsel that good fortune has placed in his mouth. It is because of the combination of the leaders and the followers’ dark sides that coups take place. This is what happens in both novels at the end.

CONCLUSION

In light of the foregoing, it is clear that what Africa needs is dynamic, creative and dialectical combination of focused and disciplined leadership and followership. The two can mutually reinforce each other to create a sense of mission and practical agenda to navigate Africa,

endowed with vast resources, out of the dystopia that defines it today. Africa has allowed the Strong Man, Big Man Syndrome of leadership to divert it from its march to Pan-African vision of prosperity. Countries can and should be run like business organisations with all that goes with responsibility, aims strategies and envisaged outcomes if they are to have any purposeful existential effects on its people. Megalomania and cynical followership are, therefore, the bane of African politics.

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