CHAPTER 43

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AFRICAN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

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GERRIE SWART, JO-ANSIE VAN WYK, AND MARYKE BOTHA

Now is the time, I believe, for Africa to send its own tall ships across the waters, not to conquer, but to proclaim that Africa has found its will, that Africa has found its way and that Africa has earned its right to lead.

(Thabo Mbeki, 2006)

1 INTRODUCTION

A more holistic, in-depth, and incisive study of African political leadership has become an important part of scholarship in the study of political leadership.

This realization generates a number of critically important and related questions that the chapter will attempt to address: what is the state of the *study of* African political leadership? Which prominent scholars (internationally and on the African continent) have devoted significant time towards contributions in the field? Are there different approaches to the study of African political leadership that have been generated by scholars in the discipline? Has a sufficient amount of scholarship on African political leadership been generated to warrant speaking of different waves, schools, or traditions of scholarship in the study of African political leadership or is the study of African political leadership still in its infancy, consisting of only a few distinctive studies at present? It is essential to stress from the outset that this contribution will by no means represent an exhaustive account of the study of African political leadership. Instead a more modest objective which it will seek to achieve is to provide a primer on some salient and distinctive scholarship and studies already produced in various realms of African political leadership.

Most importantly, prior to commencing any further consideration of the aforementioned issues and questions, is the conceptualization of African political leadership: Is there a distinctively 'African' political leadership? Are there commonly held views and

definitions of African political leadership? Are there particular traits, features and characteristics of African political leadership that significantly distinguishes it from any other leadership form?

2 Political Leadership: An Emerging 'African' Conception and Connotation?

This section offers a brief perspective on the current understanding and meanings presently attached to the notion of 'African' political leadership (given that there appears to be no authoritative or singularly distinctive definition of the concept at present). What perhaps had set 'African' political leadership apart from the rest of perceived mainstream political leadership practice studied and frequently cited elsewhere by leadership scholars was its marginalized status.

For Cartwright (1983: 285–97), leadership is better defined as government by persuasion rather than force. The essence of leadership is the ability to persuade others to comply voluntarily with one's wishes and involves voluntary compliance by those over whom it is exercised. It is the ability to obtain non-coerced, voluntary compliance which enables followers to attain goals which they share with the leader (Cartwright 1983: 19, 21).

The majority of political science research into leadership looks at leadership stories in a biographical and narrative way, from a Western perspective, particularly British and American texts (Lyn de Ver 2008: 11). This could be one of perhaps several factors that initially contributed towards African political leadership's marginalized status in overall scholarship on political leadership. This begs the question whether a distinctive 'African' conception of political leadership has had the opportunity to emerge from the seeming dearth of literature that has been produced on the subject overall in the realm of political science?

Richard Bolden and Philip Kirk (2009) address African leadership from an indigenous perspective, looking at the meanings and connotations that the concept of 'African leadership' has for Africans in their research. Bolden and Kirk (2009) continued their research focus with an exploration of new understandings of 'African leadership'. The development of an Afro-centric perspective on leadership (in the words of Bolden and Kirk, 2009) and further research on leadership in Africa that steps outside dominant methodological and empirical paradigms is deemed to be an essential undertaking. Bolden and Kirk's research led to the gathering of a diverse array of research findings related to the emerging understandings of leadership in Africa. This included a number of connotations attached to African leadership. Bolden and Kirk (2009: 76) observe that, given the vastness of the continent and the immense national, tribal, ethnic, and religious diversity, it could be argued that the term 'African leadership' may be too broad in its ontological status to say anything much about 'leadership', let alone any sense of a

distinctively 'African' leadership. The term did however evoke particularly strong reactions ranging from a sense of optimism to persistent negative connotations associated with the concept. For others the concept 'African leadership' evinced an overtly negative connotation with racist undertones and discrimination. Whatever the perspective, however, one salient issue that emerges is that the notion of 'African leadership' is frequently emotive. A distinctive 'African' conception and definition of political leadership therefore remains a work in progress, if it is to emerge at all.

3 Emerging Scholarship on African Political Leadership

What is the state of scholarship on African political leadership? Which prominent scholars (internationally and on the African continent) have devoted significant time towards contributions in the field? Are there different approaches to the study of African political leadership that have been generated by scholars in the discipline? Has a sufficient amount of scholarship on African political leadership been generated to warrant speaking of different waves, schools, or traditions of scholarship in the study of African political leadership, or is the study of African political leadership still in its infancy, consisting of only a few distinctive studies at present?

Studies on post-liberation African political leadership can be distinguished in several phases and schools. Scholarship on Africa's pre-liberation leaders was succeeded by several distinctive but overlapping phases. The first phase was approximately between 1958 (when Ghana became the first independent African state) and 1963 (when the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was established). This period focused on political leaders as the 'Great Men' and 'Heroes in History'. A second period focused on the leaders of coups d'état and military leadership which removed the generation of Africa liberation leaders. The third phase is distinguishable for the wave of democratization that swept through the continent. The fourth phases focused on failed and collapsed states. This scholarship focused on neo-patrimonialism and political corruption. The next phase focused on the 'new generation' of African leaders, whereas the final phases look at the post-new generation leadership in Africa.

Stella Nkomo (2006) succinctly probes what appears to represent the conundrum that is African leadership. Nkomo (2006: 10) from the outset observes the sobering reality that most leadership theory emanates from the United States, not even the 'West' and that approximately 98 per cent of existing research-based knowledge about leadership is based on US leaders and managers. It is US scholars who have dominated the development of leadership theory. Consequently Nkomo raises an important question: How has African leadership been portrayed in the literature and writings on leadership in the field of management and organization studies? (noting that the discipline of Political Science is not included by Nkomo). Nkomo observes that if one examines leadership

textbooks used in courses about leadership, there appears to be scant reference to African leaders in the examples discussed.

Former South African President Nelson Mandela, however, frequently features as an example of charismatic and/or servant leadership. At least two leadership books have been written about Shaka Zulu. The renowned leadership scholar, Manfred Kets de Vries (2005), uses Shaka's reign as the King of the Zulus to illustrate despotic leadership. The number of books on African business leaders, too, pales in comparison to the number of books written on leadership by non-Africans. There also appears to be only fleeting reference to Africa in management textbooks. In another body of literature, scholars point to Africa's glorious past as evidence that a unique and effective form of leadership existed in Africa. As Nkomo (2006: 10) observes, if one examines the practice of leadership and management in terms of pre-colonial African history, there appears to be ample evidence of leadership practices reflecting democratic values and cultural norms respecting humanity. A number of writers in recent years—most notably prominent business leader Reuel Khoza (2006, 2011) in South Africa—have called for the practice of African leadership, notably 'attuned leadership'. The core of their approach is 'Ubuntu'—or African humanism, arguing that a unique African leadership can be developed by drawing upon the principles of Ubuntu.

Nkomo (2006) concludes her analysis by stressing that a number of challenges have to be soberly confronted if a theory of African leadership is to be successfully advanced and to overturn current practice where Africa still appears to be predominantly a net importer of leadership theory and practice. Particular obstacles to be overcome are whether an encompassing term such as 'African leadership' should be utilized and how to genuinely advance beyond Western notions of leadership in post-colonial Africa. As Mangu (2008: 7) observes, 'probably terrified by the brutal nature of political leadership in most African countries, African social scientists in general, and political scientists in particular, have shied away from the debate on leadership on their continent'.

4 Surveying the Field

It would appear that the scholarship already generated on African political leadership is limited at present, but certainly proliferating at a rapid pace. This section will therefore focus particularly on distinctive studies that have been generated on specific themes and issues of salience in African political leadership. This will include a focus on the study of African political leadership vis-à-vis the following salient themes (a thematic overview) that includes: the emerging scholarship on pre-colonial leadership and ethical leadership, the scholarship generated on the study of African leadership types, the study of visionary and transformative leadership, the study of leadership traits and characteristics, the scholarship generated on the legitimacy question vis-à-vis African political leadership, and charismatic leadership in Africa. As mentioned earlier, this list is not

exhaustive and focuses on a few noteworthy studies. This section will therefore also identify some of the prominent scholars, both internationally and on the African continent that have devoted significant time towards contributions in this particular field, and whether they have developed distinctive approaches to the study of African political leadership.

Research on political leadership has been scattered. Some recent studies on political leadership in Africa focused on indigenous political leadership and institutions, traditional leadership, perspectives of leadership in African, Caribbean and Diaspora polities, warlords, former African presidents, neo-patrimonialism, African elites, recruitment, and succession (Van Wyk 2007: 5). These also include biographies and autobiographies of and by African leaders and make a significant contribution to the understanding of leadership and governance in Africa.

Scholarship focusing on *African leadership in pre-colonial times* is slowly emerging as a field of inquiry in its own right—one that is likely to elicit considerable research interest amongst African and international scholars alike. The focus on pre-colonial leadership studies has emerged in order to accord greater primacy to African leadership during this period in history, which appeared to have lacked dedicated scholarship in mainstream studies. Du Preez (2011) observes that Africans seem to be very slow or reluctant to seek leadership models in their own past, especially during the period just before and during the early phases of colonialism.

Another field of scholarly enquiry that has attracted particular attention and generated considerable interest within the overall scholarship that has been generated on African political leadership, is the focus on *leadership ethics in Africa*. Abiodun Salawu (2011) considers the leadership question in Africa and a possible panacea for it within the framework of the Paradigm of Ethical Development, which promotes an advanced and organized state of human social development brought about by the cultivation of mind for the higher ideals of the society. Salawu's contention is that African oral ethics is indispensable for inculcating in Africans, right from childhood, the values of good citizenry and leadership, necessary to create a Civilization (which is the essence of the Paradigm of Ethical Development). Osam Edim Temple (2011) focuses attention on what he terms the 'metaphysical' challenges of ethical leadership in Africa. Temple situates the challenges of ethical leadership within the province of metaphysics and argues that the challenges of ethical leadership in Africa are fundamentally metaphysical. Temple further explores at least three sources of metaphysical conflicts in Africa—the clan, the cults, and religion.

Kenyan scholar Ali A. Mazrui is considered to be one of the early pioneers of the study of *personal rule and leadership styles in Africa*. Most importantly Mazrui (2007) explores the typology of leadership in Africa in his essay, in particular the important influence of charismatic leadership at the time of independence. He further explores his typology with reference to the various categories of leaders—'mobilizational' leaders (such as Nkrumah, Nyerere, and Nasser), reconciliatory leaders (such as Nelson Mandela), a housekeeping style of political leadership (Kenya's political elite since the late 1980s), disciplinarian leadership (Nigeria's military leadership), a patriarchal form of leadership

(such as Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya and Félix Houphouët-Boigny of the Côte d'Ivoire, who was also a patriarchal leader who presided over the destiny of independent Côte d'Ivoire from 1960 until his death in 1993) (Mazrui 2007). Mazrui also explores the ascendancy of technocratic political leadership in his analysis, and explores Africa's embrace of personalistic and monarchical political leadership, where Hastings Banda of Malawi epitomized personalistic rule, while monarchical political leadership was literally attempted by Jean-Bédel Bokassa who was crowned emperor of his self-proclaimed Central African Empire. Another aspect of the monarchical tendency discussed by Mazrui is the emerging dynastic trend in succession. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Laurent Kabila was succeeded by his son, Joseph Kabila, while Hosni Mubarak and Muammar Gaddafi were seemingly grooming their sons Gamal Mubarak and Seif al-Islam el-Gaddafi respectively to assume the political throne before their violent overthrow in 2011. Van Wyk (2007) also undertakes a similar study to come to grips with the multitude of leadership types and traits that can be distinguished on the continent.

Rotberg (2004, 2006, 2009, 2012) is another influential scholar engaged in the study of African political leadership, specifically *visionary and transformative leadership*. Rotberg's scholarship is specifically situated in the study of African political leadership in multiple spheres of interest. One aspect studied in earlier scholarship produced by Rotberg is a focus on strengthening African leadership. Rotberg (2004: 14) observes that 'Africa has long been saddled with poor, even malevolent, leadership: predatory kleptocrats, military-installed autocrats, economic illiterates, and puffed-up posturers'. Such leaders use power as an end in itself, rather than for the public good; they are indifferent to the progress of their citizens (although anxious to receive their adulation); they are unswayed by reason and employ poisonous social or racial ideologies; and they are hypocrites, always shifting blame for their countries' distress (Rotberg 2004: 15). Rotberg (2006: 2) states that 'one result, after almost five decades of African independence, is a paucity of good governance and an abundance of deficient leadership'.

He contrasts this by focusing on the few but striking examples of effective African political leadership in recent decades. These leaders stand out because of their strength of character, their adherence to the principles of participatory democracy, and their ability to overcome deep-rooted challenges. Rotberg's appraisal of effective African leadership places specific emphasis on Botswana as one of the best examples of good leadership in Africa. In explaining the origins of Botswana's leadership success, Rotberg delves into another facet of importance to his study and contribution towards an emerging scholarship on African political leadership—*visionary leadership* (given that vision, minimally, is what accomplished political leaders are meant to provide). He notes that it is Botswana's history of visionary leadership, especially in the years following independence that best explains its success. Rotberg's scholarship also extends into the realm of good governance in Africa. In this realm Rotberg (2009) studies the measurement of effective governance in Africa, including a specific focus on The Ibrahim Index of African Governance (of which Rotberg was a key architect).

Rotberg (2012) focuses on the role of good leadership, with a specific focus on imaginative and excellent political leadership. He further argues that accomplished leaders

demonstrate a particular set of skills. Through illustrative case studies of leaders who have performed ably in the developing world—among them Nelson Mandela in South Africa, Seretse Khama in Botswana, Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore, and Kemal Ataturk in Turkey—Rotberg examines how these leaders transformed their respective countries.

Theron (2011) presents the study of African leadership from an alternative perspective in profiling the heads of state and government who have ruled sub-Saharan Africa since the advent of independence (approximately since 1960). The research reported in this paper sets out the initial findings of a project that aimed to capture the changing empirical characteristics of African political leaders (Heads of State) in the five decades from 1960 to 2010. The research draws on data contained in the database of the Developmental Leadership Program (DLP). The background details of African executive heads of states were entered into the DLP leadership database by collecting unexplored empirical data relating to the biographical details and characteristics of African Heads of State and Government. For the purpose of the study 158 presidents were selected. Theron's study provides statistical data on the types of rulers, their educational qualifications, their fields of tertiary study, the age at which they came to power, the number of years they spent in power, their career histories before becoming heads of state, their political backgrounds and how they gained and lost power (Theron 2011: 5). A number of equally insightful studies on South Africa, Botswana, Mauritius, and Zimbabwe have also been explored within the research currently being conducted by the DLP, which reinforces the widely-held argument that the study of leadership in Africa is growing in importance and significance.

A number of scholars have also delved more deeply into the *legitimacy of African political leadership*. The failure of African leaders to develop their own leadership style, different from that of their erstwhile colonial masters and their failure to genuinely improve their citizens' living conditions has prompted particular interest in the study of the legitimacy of African political leadership. One such study is undertaken by André Mbata B. Mangu (2008) who attributes the 'failure' of the 'first independence' and the development project to the state and leadership. His study in particular focuses on the state and leadership legitimacy, and their relationship with development in post-colonial Africa. Mangu's study in particular stresses the importance of the state and political leadership in achieving development on the continent and also provides reflection on the challenges to state reconstruction and leadership legitimacy as well as on their prospects under the African Union (AU), the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). Africa's development crisis in this study is seen as primarily being one of state capacity and leadership legitimacy—two interrelated aspects. The study further probes the importance of state and leadership legitimacy grounded on the principles of constitutionalism and democracy. Mangu's study also emphasizes the important and critical role of individual leaders in promoting democracy or sustaining democratic political systems during periods when democracy was on the wane in a number of African countries. Another critical element probed in Mangu's study is the interplay between leadership legitimacy, constitutionalism and life after the Presidency, and the factors that

often motivate incumbent African leaders in particular to cling to power beyond their constitutionally-mandated term in office.

Scholarship on *charismatic leadership in Africa* has also featured prominently amongst the scholarship generated on African political leadership. One such scholar, Eghosa E. Osaghae (2010) in particular explores the limits of charismatic authority and the challenges of leadership in Nigeria. As Osaghae observes, after independence the huge disappointments of the runaway gap between rising expectations and actual performance of governments reinforced the wherewithal of heroic leadership as opposition politicians, military adventurists, revolutionaries, strong men, and warlords capitalized on the frustrations of unfulfilled hopes and expectations to seize power and impose themselves on the people in the name of delivering 'strong' and redemptive leadership. The democratization or second independence struggles to liberate citizens and the state from the stranglehold of despots and authoritarian regimes marked another phase of the demands for exceptional and heroic leadership (Osaghae 2010: 408). Charismatic leaders emerge to champion popular causes, stabilize turbulent situations and restore the confidence of citizens. Osaghae further explores Nigeria's experience with charismatic leadership in particular and acknowledges the problems associated with charismatic authority, most notably the extent that charismatic authority has been conducive for the rise of strongmen and personality cults that equate the leader with the nation. Consequently, charismatic authority arguably constitutes an obstacle to the development and strengthening of rational-legal norms and institutions which are seen as the hallmarks of modern statehood. Osaghae's interest extends to addressing the reasons why the Nigerian elite has failed to provide the kind of leadership that matches the expectations elicited by charismatic legitimation (Osaghae 2010: 413).

5   Renaissance, Revolution, or Reversion? The Future Study of African Political Leadership

Mohiddin (2007: 28) correctly observes that, given the multifarious changes, challenges, and opportunities that have been witnessed in the world, there has never been a time in modern African history when the issue of leaders and quality of leadership have been so crucial. Mohiddin further argues that as the world is settling into the twenty-first century and globalization becomes inescapable, a new breed of leaders and leadership is needed in Africa. For scholars of African political leadership the task of coming to terms with the vast scholarship that is yet to be unearthed is equally challenging, and seemingly insurmountable given the vast expanse of the African continent. Yet simultaneously this reality holds even greater prospects for incredible growth, and the promise that the field will increase in prominence and importance in the near future. Consequently the research agenda should include some of the following key focal points.

First, Africa needs a new generation of democratic and corruption-free political lead-ers. Therefore, future studies on African political leadership should focus on democ-ratizing Africa's political institutions to sustain democracy and remain intolerant to corruption, nepotism, and minimizing the role of the military. Future studies could also focus on the role of the AU in assisting leadership development on the continent and sanctioning corrupt leaders. Moreover, leadership studies should be anchored in Africans' conceptualization of leadership in order to contribute to an improvement of the continent's leadership.

Second, the growing ascendancy in the realm of political leadership of Africa's 'Altruists' and 'Activists' warrants greater scholarly attention, alongside the present study of Africa's 'Autocrats' and 'Absolutists'—a worthy endeavour currently beyond the ambit of this present chapter. This study should include a more in-depth exploration of new and emerging leadership typologies of African leaders.

Third, the election of South Africa's Dr Nkosazana-Dlamini Zuma as Chairperson of the African Union Commission in July 2012 (the first African woman to occupy this esteemed position) and the stellar rise of Malawian President Joyce Banda who appears deeply committed to the radical transformation and advancement of her nation, fur-thers the trend and trails blazed by other prominent African women. These trailblaz-ers include Mozambique's Graça Machel, a prominent gender and children's rights advocate, first Education Minister of Mozambique and distinguished member of The Elders; Luisa Dias Diogo, elected Mozambique's first female Prime Minister in 2004; and President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia who was elected Africa's first female head of state in 2005 and who also was co-recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize 2011. These posi-tive gains, advancing greater gender equality amongst African leaders also signal the advent of a distinctively different kind of African political leadership worthy of further study and scholarly inquiry especially from gender scholars.

Fourth, scholars should also shift attention and focus to the study of 'hybrid lead-ership' in Africa and the emergence of the 'benevolent dictator', of which Rwanda's President Paul Kagame appears to be a prominent example. Dambisa Moyo in her ground-breaking work, *Dead Aid* (2010) warns that 'the uncomfortable truth is that far from being a prerequisite for economic growth, democracy can hamper develop-ment as democratic regimes find it difficult to push through economically beneficial legislation amid rival parties and jockeying interests'. In a perfect world, Moyo observes that 'what poor countries at the lowest rungs of economic development need is not a multi-party democracy, but in fact a decisive benevolent dictator to push through the reforms required to get the economy moving (unfortunately, too often countries end up with more dictator and less benevolence)' (Moyo 2010: xi).

Fifth, the study of political leadership in Africa requires an approach consisting of both country and regional case studies as well. While other studies of political lead-ership focus on specific countries or one specific country, the tendency is to consider African political leadership from a continental perspective exclusively. While this is one approach, it often does not allow the consideration and in-depth investigation of devel-opments in political leadership within a specific country or a specific region, which is

likely to yield further significant insights into the state of political leadership in Africa. Equally, comparative studies could also prove useful and insightful in this regard.

Finally another salient leadership enigma and conundrum worthy of more in-depth scholarly attention is the resurgence and surprising popular support of military coups on the African continent, despite the AU's uncompromising and tough sanctioning of unconstitutional changes of government. Since the establishment of the continental body and Lomé Declaration on the Framework for an OAU Response to Unconstitutional Changes of Government adopted in 2000 there has been a dramatic increase in coups d'états. This includes coups carried out in Mauritania (2005, 2008), Guinea (2008), Niger (2010), Mali (2012), and Guinea-Bissau (2012). The coup executed in Niger in 2010 (following President Mamadou Tandja's unconstitutional attempts to cling to power) had the express aim of turning the country into an example of democracy and good governance and received considerable support from the population. Africa's coup leaders were at pains to stress that military rule was a temporary, but necessary measure to clear up the morass of corruption, mismanagement and other malpractices they claimed had prompted them to intervene and restore honest and efficient government and national integrity (Meredith 2011: 219). The seemingly popular legitimacy accorded to contemporary military takeovers (albeit of short duration) in the face of unconstitutional acts by incumbents that threaten the very fabric of democracy in Africa has proven interesting. Another important dimension to this is whether the AU should automatically impose sanctions against such instances of 'beneficial coups' (consequently setting a dangerous precedent of protecting would-be autocrats)—and this is likely to be one of the most important fields of research and vigorous debate for scholars of African political leadership in the immediate future.

There exists very little doubt that the African continent's leadership malaise is in a period of major flux, towards achieving stable, responsible and accountable leadership of which the continent is in dire need. The onus is therefore upon scholars of African political leadership to vigorously study, evaluate, understand, and capture this important point in the history of Africa.

Recommended Reading

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