Chapter 13

From Negative Leadership to Healing Leadership: A Therapy Strategy to Remedy African Instability

Rais Neza Boneza
TRANSCEND International, Norway

ABSTRACT

Since their independences, the issues of leadership in African countries has been a challenging notion both practically and theoretically. After the long Cold War, regimes of strong states with one national party as an expression of power had priority. However, with the event of democracy in the 90’s, freedom created by liberal economies brought back the concept of leadership in Africa as a key element of sound management of the public affairs. Yet the issue of leadership is still unclear in African psyche due to historic legacies. The need to invent a new mode of governance that would not compromise the democratic process became evident starting in 1990. In this chapter, Mr. Rais Boneza explores the probable historical and political source of the leadership crisis particularly in Africa and gives a therapeutic attempt to remedy the direct and structural violence which resulted from bad governance. The leadership should inspire a certain sense of pride and dignity for the people whose conscience is still marked by major trauma: A restorative but healing leadership.

DIAGNOSIS: NEGATIVE LEADERSHIP

In the 60s, most of the African countries precipitately snatched their independences from the colonialists. Usually it was without a broad and unifying vision to reconcile the leadership and the popular emancipatory aspirations of the people. In this context, without considering the specificity of the continent’s history, the victory of emancipation was short-lived and aborted. The new government systems in place could not emulate the peoples’ aspiration of dignity or gain the ability to pilot entire nations to the achievement of true liberty. Post-colonial Africa has gone through extreme odds. Since 1960, roughly 40 wars have resulted in 10 million deaths and created more than 10 million refugees.

The independences became the perpetuation of colonialism as the new states’ leadership could only prevail under the approval of colonial powers. Most of the time, to become a leader in Africa, you must be loved or accepted by Washington, Paris or London. The leadership could not attend to the “Bien Etre” of the population but instead it had to please the former colonial and imperialist powers. The countries run as if they were still colonies. Today’s Africans leaders’ legitimacy is put in question because it is difficult to work with conscience for the realization of a vision imposed by others. In addition, the use of arbitrary violence to impose an alien vision on the people only aggravates the illegitimacy. Moreover, where there is domination, resistance is bound to emerge.

Political instability in Africa is endemic, cycling to endless violent crisis. It is a consequence of the violent creation of African states by colonial conquests, creation that was sanctioned by the International Berlin Conference in 1884-1885 (Förster, Mommsen, & Robinson (Eds.), 1988). Africa is a product of 500 years of struggle against a system that remains updated, sophisticated and globalized. It is a product of setbacks endured from slave trades, colonial conquests, resource-plundering, wars, dictatorial regimes, and neo-colonialism brought by contradistinction of the cold-war era.

The forms of structural adjustment imposed on the overall society by external forces give birth to a culture of violence, as Jean de La Fontaine in Fables (La Fontaine & LoMascolo, 2009) says: “The motive of the strongest is always the best. (Might is always right.).” Hence there is a rich tradition of corruption and clientelism.

It is clear that foreign interventionism forces push African governments to kneel to external powers even more than before their own people, which they are supposed to serve. If one looks at the history, one has the feeling that instability has always been caused by the difficulty of articulating national interests within the interests of exogenous powers. Africa’s leadership crisis is manifested by trends of corruption, persistent abuse of power, lack of respect for the Constitution, and failure to create an environment where the young generation can have the possibility to nurture with true competence, to make a commitment to social justice and to develop the necessary skills for peacebuilding.

While some first-rate political leaders spearheaded the struggle for independence, the nation-building process has not only failed to produce leaders of comparable stature, but it has also witnessed a decline in its achievements – aggravated by unethical leadership and bad governance (Adamoleku 1988, p. 95). This frustrates the legitimacy of the leadership and their power by creating a toxic leadership and oppressive institutions.

In his first official trip to sub-Saharan Africa as US President in July, 2009, addressing the Ghanaian assembly in Accra, President Obama declared, “Africa doesn’t need strongmen, it needs strong institutions” (Roth, 2010). It is only through positive leadership that Africa can create strong institutions. A wicked leader is the one who the people despise and the good leader is the one the people revere. The great leader is the one for whom the people would say: “We did it ourselves.” (Tzu & Lao, 1983). As in the Bible (Matthew 20: 25:27), Jesus says to his disciples: “…. You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave. The example of Jesus’ teaching preconizes a leadership where we serve others (Servant Leadership). Jesus submitted his own life to sacrificial service under the will of God (Luke 22:42), and he sacrificed his life freely out of service for others (John 10:30). He came to serve (Matthew 20:28) although he was God’s son and was thus more powerful than any other leader in the world. He healed the sick (Mark 7:31-37), drove out demons (Mark 5:1-20), was recognized as Teacher and Lord (John 13:13), and had power over the wind and the sea and even over death (Mark 4:35-41; Matthew 9:18-26). In John 13:1-17