

AFRICA'S TRANSFORMATIONAL POST-COLONIAL LEADERSHIP AND COLONIAL ANTINOMIES

Sir Quett Ketumile Joni Masire of Botswana

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a critical engagement of Sir Quett Ketumile Masire's eighteen years in power (1980–1998). Masire epitomises the kind of transformational political leadership that has sustained Botswana's political stability since independence. By presenting a discussion of Masire's political philosophy, his leadership style, and the underlying internal and external factors, the paper concludes by drawing lessons from his leadership style for the benefit of political leadership development in Africa. Most discussions about Botswana's leadership, its philosophy and style tend to conclude that Botswana is a 'citadel' of democracy in Africa without providing details of the various political factors that have contributed to the country's current configurations and its leadership style, which exists as a form of state capture.

INTRODUCTION

History is a clock that people use to tell their political and cultural time of day, it is also a compass that people use to find themselves on the map of human geography. History tells a people where they have been, what they have been, where they are and what they are. Most important, history tells a people where

they still must go, what they still must be. The relationship of people to history is the same as the relationship of a mother to her child (John Henrik Clarke, Film, 1996)

The insurmountability and importance of the issues facing the African continent and her leadership are aptly captured in the above quote. The historical locus of annunciation of these issues cannot also be downplayed. A temptation arises for one to offer a rather ambitious and quite radical disclaimer that when discussing the challenges Africa faces as researchers, scholars, policymakers and other interested parties; it is questionable to present the continent as having a leadership deficit. Further, we are bidden not to completely ignore the dialectical link between Africa's political leadership with the colonial past and its present global contra-flows in line with geopolitics and, in particular, Global West politics, as imperial designs. It will be argued that, Africa is no *tabula rasa* nor is a stand-alone continent divorced from historical occurrences or recent events, and so any attempt to understand, and probably debate on African leadership must be done within a complex historical context of entanglements. In attempting to present this complex historical locus, Botswana will be used as a case study.

This article will further argue that the historicity of African political leadership and its continuous yearning for a more democratic landscape depicts Botswana as a 'citadel' of democracy in Africa, with President Ketumile Masire as a major actor in this political discourse. Focus will then be on, Sir Quett Ketumile Joni Masire, the man, and his leadership, which spun over a period of eighteen years as President, and even beyond.

INTERPRETING AFRICA'S MALAISE AND THE MYTH OF LEADERSHIP DEFICIT

The thesis of a leadership deficit, let alone a crisis, as offered by the recent scramble to manage and manipulate Africa's future leadership championed by different leadership institutions, organisations and foundations is a myth. Its spectacles and projections are a product of external definition and description of African scenarios devoid of the continent's pronged entanglements, which include; precolonial narratives, colonial influence and postcolonial conjectures into the future. The paradox to Africa's leadership issues is that the continent has enough human capital for leadership, just as she has sufficient mineral resources to make her the richest continent, yet she still remains poor, and sometimes with visionless leadership, the causes and genesis of which have to be questioned.

Also, the challenge for Africa is to be able to clearly bargain and influence commerce from an independent and well-located standpoint, like other regions. This failure has reduced Africa's socio-political and economic standing to a continent gravely in need of both leadership and resources. And so, even the discourse of a leadership crisis rides on the same currency and has blurred the African realities to the extent of even failing to acknowledge Africa's proud history Africa.¹ It is also worth noting that Africa's tyrannical regimes have contributed to this discourse of leadership crisis by refusing to relinquish power.

This article will further present the thesis that the violence and dictatorial tendencies seen among most African leaders, while rooted, partly, within the modes of African gerontocratic designs, are also hinged on the fact of colonial interpellation; that is, following the violent colonial system, whose notoriety should be

¹Diop, C. A. (1974) *The African origin of civilisation: Myth or reality*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill.

credited for some of the structural arrangements that used to oppress the masses of Africa and had to be dismantled through violent liberation struggles. Therefore, I argue that, the vestigial colonial violence gave birth to its negation through structures of violence and violent means by which colonialism was dislodged. The struggle for liberation became synonymous with a situation where the oppressed elite challenged the colonial elite to remove their shoes for them to simply wear them and continue with all the inherited structures of colonialism.² It follows that the citizens who had been forced to exist under the yoke of colonialism, and only knew and understood the language of violence, found themselves with a new order of violence, honed and polished over the years of anti-colonial struggles. Their leadership as a product of society was groomed and nurtured through gerontocratic norms and the interpellation of violent colonial structures and only knew how to govern using spectacles inherited from colonialism. The dictatorial leadership that most of Africa now knows is the total summation of the Africa's colonial past conflated with Global imperial designs. This situation as a challenge of colonial antinomies tips the future of African leadership to continue hanging in the balance. What is worse is how the untouchable current crop of African leaders have polished and abused state security systems as structures for violently oppressing their citizens. As opposed to the Global West where violent oppression is exported, in Africa it is endogamous and is often imparted on the supposed citizens of the state; thus, giving impetus to the regeneration of a violent emergent crop of leaders.

However, it has been observed that while all these relics of colonialism continue to exist, Botswana has managed to present a slightly different face and mode of leadership; that is, the way it

²Ake, C. (2000) *The Feasibility of Democracy in Africa*. Dakar: CODESRIA.

conducts its politics and, partly, its leadership style. Given these differences, questions will be raised in a bid to understand the causal links to Botswana's continued presentation as the citadel of democracy and the difference with other African states. Furthermore, the notion of Botswana being a democracy together with her leadership being presented as democratic will be interrogated using the theses of 'authoritarian liberalism' and 'radical inequalities' respectively.³ It must be emphasised from the onset that while the democratic envelop remains a very desirable factor within the African political landscape, it stands externally motivated and defined. In other words, the external motivation of such a discourse continues to encourage arguments of bias and neo-colonialism. Of course, the fact of human rights records, constitutionalism, low levels of corruption, the holding of intermittent elections, and having clearly defined terms of office are some of the 'necessary' ingredients too, but we may want to acknowledge that the definition of key indices to determine democratic credentials remain too steeped towards external motivation. By implication, if any African state decides to oppose these Global imperial designs, possibilities of it being considered as recalcitrant and undemocratic also arise. These challenges have skewed the general perspective of Africa's leadership.

Furthermore, it can be argued that Africa's leadership, even the second and third generation, are products of external machinations. Examples here would include Mobutu Sese Seko who ruled Zaire (now, the Democratic Republic of Congo) for

³ Good, K. (1999) 'Enduring elite democracy in Botswana.' *Democratization* Vol. 6.1: 50–66. See also, Good, K. (1992) 'Interpreting the exceptionality of Botswana.' *Journal of Modern African Studies* 30.1: 69–95 (March).

thirty-two years with the support of the Global West,⁴ with his dictatorial tendencies known and often ignored as long as he fulfilled certain external interests. It also emerged later that Zaire had, during Mobutu's time, ratified the highest number of international legal instruments than most African countries, including very important human rights instruments, simply to impress the Global West. However, Mobutu's human rights record and corrupt tendencies remained a known fact. The same can be said of Zimbabwe, as aptly captured by David Lamb (1987) and Dinizulu Macaphulana (2010) in their presentation of Mugabe's close relationship with the British establishment in the 1980s.⁵

Botswana, however, emerges differently in its human rights record, despite the Basarwa issue, which has been around for a while.⁶ Botswana's democratic credentials, unlike other African states, are further supported by the fact of their different handling of political opposition parties; that is, instead of harassing, intimidating and arresting political opponents, they simply buy them out of opposition, thereby weakening them. The culture of buying political opponents can be traced as far back as the era of its founding fathers, especially through the use of traditional powers derived through ascriptive ways. The current president, Seretse Khama Ian Khama, corroborated the latter in his remarks while addressing supporters of the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) in Francistown on 3 May 2010 regarding the split and

⁴ Refer to French, H. W. (1997) 'Anatomy of an Autocracy: Mobutu's 32 year reign.' Found in: <http://partners.nytimes.com/library/world/africa/051797zaire-mobutu.html> (accessed: 12 March 2013).

⁵Dinizulu Macapulana's paper titled: 'Mugabe, Tsvangirai: UK's 'men in Harare.' The paper can be accessed on the following link: <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/opinion-2361-Curse+of+the+UKs+men+in+Harare/opinion.aspx>

⁶Good, K. (1992) 'Interpreting the exceptionality of Botswana.' *Journal of Modern African Studies* 30.1: 69–95 (March).

challenges he was facing that: ‘I am a president and a paramount chief; I don’t need a faction.’⁷

Botswana, however, like any other African state, cannot be left out of the discourse of the failure of the post-colonial African national project, in particular the leadership issues. Nonetheless, through the former president, Sir Quette Ketumile Masire, Botswana, the state whose politics have not been critically assessed within the rigours of a much-nuanced scholarship, will be presented under the temporary microscope in the following sections. It will also be argued that, while it is generally accepted that Sir Ketumile Masire was officially in office as president for 18 years, he also had another two years in which he was managing the presidential wheel from the sidelines during the first phase of President Festus Gontebanye Mogae’s turn up to 2000.⁸ Masire now basks in the glory of being an elder statesman and is a member of the Global Leadership Coalition and the African Forum. He is also credited for establishing and actively leading the organisation of Frontline States, and then engineering its transformation and ultimately the formation of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), which he chaired for 16 years. He was also at the helm of SADCC’s transformation from a regional ‘coordinating conference’ to a regional development-focused body in which the spirit of collective community ownership is being celebrated, and the desire

⁷ More information on this issue can be obtained on the following website: http://www.gov.bw/cgi-bin/news.cgi?d=20100503&i=Resign_from_parliament_-_Khama

⁸ This information was obtained through the interview the author had with Sir Ketumile Masire on 12 March 2010, in which he confirmed that he was literally in power for 20 years, with the last two having been set aside for him to take Mr. Mogae through the leadership ropes. While this may be understood in other terms by the very imaginative, it also presents another interesting dimension in Botswana’s leadership style – the aspect of leadership grooming.

to find lasting pan-African development solutions in the post-colonial era is strong.

During his presidency, Masire played a pivotal role in Zimbabwe, for example in his continued communication with the Zimbabwean leadership and in providing refuge to thousands of Ndebele refugees fleeing the Gukurahundi genocide in the 1980s.⁹ Upon retirement, Masire led and participated in a number of peace mediation efforts. These include leading the negotiations between warring parties in the DRC, the crisis in Lesotho, and the recent attempts to neutralise the course of events between the monarchy and the political space in Swaziland. In view of all these efforts, Sir Quett Ketumile Masire views himself as a ‘political fire-brigade.’¹⁰

However, before turning to the challenges of the post-Seretse Khama era and the waning euphoria of the independence period, let us look at the ideological positions that most of the founding leaders of Africa found themselves in.

AFRICA’S POST-COLONIAL ORDERS AND THEIR IDEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Any attempt to conceptualise Africa’s historical challenges in a bid to conjecture on futuristic projections cannot be considered enough without seeking to understand the ideological summations upon which most African nation-states were founded. Also, given

⁹ Information on this was obtained from some of the previously declassified documents now found in the Botswana National Archives. The most notable ones are when he created a delegation which constantly met with their counterparts from Zimbabwe to discuss the killings that were taking place in Matabeleland. At some point he was under pressure to hand some of the former members of ZAPU to the Zimbabwean authorities, which he declined to do. Then another letter dated 15 July, 1983 addressed to the then Zimbabwean Prime Minister, Robert Mugabe, confirms Masire’s communication and participation in seeking a solution to the issue of the Gukurahundi genocide.

¹⁰ This quote was taken from the transcript of the interview the author had with Sir Masire in March 2010.

that the era of the late 1950s to the late 1980s was marked by radical pro-liberation shifts, a need arises to try to understand the continent as a way of emerging with a grounded theory on its leadership. It is on that note, therefore, that post-colonial ideological orders of signification become important.

And so we must quickly observe that Africa's first-generation leaders depicted certain monarchical tendencies, partly because of their failure to cause an interlock between the indigenous leadership paradigms and their political offices. This failure in most cases was also evidenced in the citizens' often exuberant discourses, in which they failed to understand the shifts from the pre-colonial paradigmatic orders of leadership. These leaders were assigned those roles by ascription to the new political order whereby a leader had to be elected. This failure to interlock the two paradigms –that is, the indigenous and the modernised paradigm – often led to the constant canonisation and reification of leaders, in most cases by the ethnic communities from which they came. For example, Seretse Khama, the founding father of Botswana's nationalism and the first president, was an heir to the *Bangwato* throne – one of Botswana's largest nations.¹¹ As a result, his transformation into the role of head of the entire state of Botswana instead of only the Bangwato also posed a challenge to other ethnic groups within the state, in particular those who had often had ethnic rifts with the Bangwato group. The daunting challenge was for Africa to develop a new image,¹² which had to be carried within the contours of ideology as a way of catching up.¹³ Most first-generation leaders faced a challenge as they departed from the indigenous models that most of them considered backward and saw no need to integrate them into their modernised

¹¹Williams 2007: 3.

¹²Ayittey 2000: *passim*.

¹³Nkrumah 1973: 401.

political structures. As a result, strong intellectualised ideologies, most of them with a Westernised import, were coined.

A slight detour into these ideologies would illuminate this discussion. Four ideological positions emerge here,¹⁴ the first being socialism, which was practised in different versions by the likes of Kwame Nkrumah, Ahmed Sekou Toure, Modibo Keita, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Julius Nyerere and Kenneth Kaunda. The main threat to this was the attempt to create an egalitarian society, with the state being the mechanism of attaining it. Second, the ideology of ‘political pragmatism,’ with its prime movers being Felix Houphouet-Boigny, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Hastings Kamuzu Banda and Daniel Arap Moi. The premise of this ideology was the declaration by its proponents as ‘non-ideological’, but pitched economic growth and prosperity as their key goals. This pragmatic worldview was quite statist and not different from the populist socialist views, but was, however, advanced for different reasons, mostly for the preservation of elite privileges. Their notion of centralisation was ‘delineated not in a social or political way but in an administrative sense. It nevertheless was as deeply ensconced in the political attitudes of pragmatists as in those of self-proclaimed socialists.’¹⁵

Then military nationalism became the third ideology. This ideology was ‘supplied by the first batch of military leaders who burst onto the political scene in the late 1960s and early 1970s.’¹⁶ These leaders were clearly dictatorial, and included the likes of Idi Amin, Jean-Bedel Bokassa, Mobutu Sese Seko and Gnassingbe Eyadema. Most of their major challenges were that they were not central to the dislodging of colonialism, and so their mindsets were often influenced by the insecurities and inadequacies of seeing

¹⁴Ayittey *ibid.* See also Chazan, N. *et al.* 1992: *passim*.

¹⁵Chazan *et al.*: *Op cit.* 156.

¹⁶Ayittey: *ibid.*

themselves as not being entirely accepted due to their lack of contribution to the liberation struggles in their countries. They therefore exercised full control of national resources and encouraged statist monopolies. These leaders were 'bereft of intellectual content' and 'replete with contradictions;' thus with a tendency to address key issues haphazardly, often to exercise their brute force.¹⁷

Then Afro-Marxism became the fourth ideology, which became the official state policy for countries like Angola, Mozambique during Samora Machel's time, and the Congo during Fulbert Youlou's time, then later transferred to socialism (commonly referred to as 'scientific socialism') during Alphonse Massamba-Debat's reign, and again returning to Afro-Marxism during Denis Sassou Nguessou's early years in office. In Ethiopia, Afro-Marxism became the official state policy during Mengistu Haile Mariam's reign. It has been observed that Afro-Marxism,

. . . attributed the malaise of African economies to the lingering effects of imperialism and the continuing machinations of neo-colonialism, both within and outside Africa. It envisaged the creation of a totally new social order, in which private ownership of the means of production would be abolished and the state would become the supreme patron of economic destiny.¹⁸

While these ideologies were known for their strong prime movers, in terms of the leading figures that purveyed them, they were not cast in stone. And so states could shift from different ones

¹⁷Chazan *et al.*: *Op cit.* 158.

¹⁸Ayittey: *Op cit.* 60.

depending on the leadership at the time. However, it was very common that the leadership often stayed in power for a much longer period, as seen in the case of most founding fathers of Africa. Some of them had to be forcibly removed from power by irritated masses, as happened with Nkrumah in Ghana, while others left through death's door, as happened with Seretse Khama. In the case of Botswana, however, a slightly different political project was coined as part of state policy, one that was different from most African states. The new political leadership embarked on a much more traditionalised system of local government in which chiefs controlled powers through a traditional court or *kgotla*. Masire's rise to power did not mark a sharp departure from Khama's policies. Masire somehow vacillated between the second ideology of 'political pragmatism' and that of 'authoritarian liberalism' dressed in the respectable garb of 'social democracy.' As stated above, he considers himself to be a 'political fire-brigade,'¹⁹ a position which he says firmly locates him within the ambit of social democracy. This is aptly captured in his book, *Very brave or very foolish: Memoirs of an African democrat*²⁰ and further corroborated by Susan Williams in her book: *Colour bar: The triumph of Seretse Khama and his nation*.²¹

As part of his residual policy agenda, Masire is credited for working closely with Khama to create a viable economic structure for the young state of Botswana at the time, but one that was partly hinged on the traditional leadership systems while at the same time disparaging it in favour of the new elite approach, probably for its economic trappings. And so a villagised elite emerged, which captured the state and placed animal husbandry at

¹⁹Masire, Q. K. J. (2006) *Very brave or very foolish: Memoirs of an African democrat*. Gaborone: Macmillan.

²⁰*ibid.*

²¹Williams, S. *ibid.*

the core of agricultural activities while acting as a political footstool for the political elite, which is also very tribalised and traditionalised. As a result, during Masire's time Botswana emerged as a state that had been captured by former traditional cattle farmers. Cattle rearing is the activity that most Batswana continue to be involved in, and one which forms the gist of their agricultural activities.²²

SIR QUETT KETUMILE JONI MASIRE: FOUNDING LEADER AND STATESMAN

It is often a big challenge to attempt to offer a brief background of a leader who was in office for almost two decades. In case some critics assume the choice of defining him as inappropriate, it is worth highlighting from the outset that part of this attempt to understand Masire, the man, his works and political life is a product of my direct engagement with him, and also the author's own analysis as a result of his engagement with different people who witnessed Masire's term in office. Further, in his assessment of Masire's leadership the author has tended to view his leadership as part of a collective approach; and is informed by the wisdom that a leader is a servant of many. This, at least, is the dictum in most African societies, and it certainly is among the Batswana.

Ketumile Masire was born on 23 July 1925, among the *Bangwaketse* people in the town called Kanye. He was the first child of Joni Masire and Gabaipone. The surname 'Masire' means 'the protector,' shortened from *Masira phepho ya borwa*, which means 'the protector against the cold from the South whose chill gets into the marrow of one's bones.'²³ However, the irony is the coincidence of the name 'Masire' and the circumstances its

²²Good 1992: 77

²³Masire: *Op cit.* 01.

beholder found himself in later – that is, being the son of a headman with an influential position in the village, and going on to become one of the illustrious leaders of Botswana and Southern Africa, and of Africa’s elder statesman. As such, his name deserves to be placed within its rightful historical context - the name ‘Ketumile’ means ‘I am well known.’

In his book he presents a cartoon of Botswana allegorised as a helpless malnourished child left in the bush surrounded by wild animals and snakes taken from the *Punch* magazine (3 August 1966: 169), depicting the political climate he had to protect his people from, as a symbolic reference to his name. Further, the cartoon presents the disjunctures caused by a departing British coloniser who merely deserts a helpless Botswana, in the middle of the bush and surrounded by hostile colonial states in the period 1964/5. Masire presents these as the challenges that a newly independent state had to face, being amidst hostile and firmly colonised, rabidly racist states like apartheid South Africa, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), and South-West Africa (now Namibia).

Masire considers himself and others who agitated and demanded independence from the British colonisers to have been ‘very brave.’²⁴ Also, during an interview with him, he stated that ‘most people often referred to us as very foolish for daring the British and demanding independence in the midst of very hostile colonial states that surrounded us.’ But the general prelude to the background of one of Botswana’s illustrious sons makes it clear that Quett Ketumile Masire’s names were a prophecy to the leadership positions that would later be part of his life, notwithstanding the loss of his parents at the age of 21 and having to assume the position of breadwinner at a young age. These unfortunate circumstances even forced him to temporarily shift

²⁴*ibid.* 30ff.

the course direction of his life and plans, as he had to venture into teacher training instead of studying directly towards a BSc degree in Agriculture. He eventually completed his teacher training in 1949 at Tiger Kloof and became the headmaster of the new Kanye Junior Secondary School. It was around that time that he also trained as a journalist with the Trans-Africa Correspondence College. Then in 1958 he became the key leader and editor of the *Africa Echo* and the new *Naledi ya Batswana*. His interest in journalism took him to the echelons of *Therisanyo (Consultation)*, the mouthpiece of the Bechuanaland Democratic Party, which was later transformed into Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), and has been the current ruling party ever since. It was then that Masire was able to drive the party's engine whose task was to play the role of political re-awakening.

Masire rose from being the editor of the party's main information-churning engine, *Therisanyo*, to the position of secretary-general of the party, and was then catapulted to the vice-presidency from 1966 to 1980. Following the death of Sir Seretse Khama in 1980, he assumed the presidency, a position he held until his retirement in 1998.²⁵ While this is a short-circuited version of the otherwise very long, eventful and illustrious career of Quett Ketumile Joni Masire, it does provide some information on the man he later became – a global statesman.

On the domestic scene, Masire prides himself of being the visionary steward who led a peaceful nationstate with very hostile neighbours still reeling under the colonial yoke – Namibia and South Africa. The World Bank placed Botswana's real income per capita growth rate as the highest during Masire's term of office; thus making it one of the highest ever reached by one of the countries of the Global South from 1965 to 1999. Transparency

²⁵Williams *ibid.*

International also ranked Botswana as having the lowest level of corruption in Africa, and it also has a celebrated history of holding multiparty elections, first in 1965 and 1969, and thereafter every five years. Owing to Botswana's economic stability and peace, the country became the steward of the Frontline States, an organisation that provided diplomatic assistance and other services to the liberation movements. Botswana further led the establishment of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) and its ultimate transformation to Southern African Development Community (SADC).

In 1981, Botswana was affected by drought, which was to last for a period of almost seven years, the driest of all being 1983 and 1984. It was then that the programme of cattle improvement became suffocated. However, this crisis provided Masire with an opportunity to plan for the future by refining the country's famine relief programme. Masire says he achieved this by instituting a new labour-based relief scheme in which villages and district councils came up with projects such as road building, dam construction and land clearing.²⁶ Locals would be employed in these projects for a few months, payment for which was sufficient to sustain them during the famine. The success of this programme earned praise for Masire's leadership, and even an award of US\$100 000, which he shared with Burkina Faso.

Masire, working with Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia and Tanzania's Julius Nyerere, was instrumental in coining the term 'Frontline States' in the mid-1960s to the 1970s and its leadership. In emphasising his role, he adds: 'I've been told I was the one who coined the name "Frontline States" for the group.'²⁷ In 1980 Masire's leadership became even more instrumental within the

²⁶Masire *ibid.*

²⁷*ibid.* 275

southern African region leading to the formation of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) for which Masire took the mantle of chairmanship. Thus he adds, 'during the early 1980s, Botswana provided the lion's share of leadership and staff for SADCC.'²⁸ This organisation was formed mainly with a task to encourage trade and development among newly independent regional member states. While it had the economic side to focus on, as a solidarity grouping of states, it sought to escalate efforts to help in the liberation efforts in other countries like Namibia and South Africa. However, while the SADCC embarked on these efforts through the able stewardship of Masire, confrontational engagement with apartheid South Africa was avoided, thus showing Masire's ways of engaging in soft diplomacy as a 'political fire-brigade.' He claims that this was due to the different regional obligations he had and being mindful of the challenges at home, in particular, the ripple effects of diplomatic efforts in the region and how they could ricochet, and end-up affecting the citizens of Botswana. As a result, Botswana traded with South Africa, although on a reduced scale, but it is reported that although only half of Botswana's regional overseas trade had passed through South Africa around 1981, the figure had increased to around 85 per cent by 1985.²⁹

The challenge of trade routes, considering that Botswana is a landlocked country, had dealt a big blow to her diplomatic position towards apartheid South Africa, thus requiring a strategic mastering of relations. This meant that while Botswana still harboured and continued to support South Africa's liberation fighters and their efforts, in the open the leadership of Botswana

²⁸ *ibid.* 276

²⁹ For more information on this, please refer to the following article: Wolf, G. (1994) 'Masire, Quett 1925 President of Botswana.' *Contemporary Black Biography*. Michigan: Thomas Gale Publishers.

had to discourage any violent tactics employed from their borders as attempts to liberate South Africa. However, as Masire puts it, this position was reached after weighing all options.³⁰

MAPPING BOTSWANA'S CULTURAL COMPLEXITIES AND THE POLITICS OF MARGINALITY

Botswana, an Anglophone country, presents an interesting case of state capture like most other southern African nation-states. First, like most African states, there exists a system of ethnic coercion, with the leadership style and its continued influence on the social etiquette clearly rooted in the traditional way of life. As stated above, the state was captured by traditionalists who, while they are into cattle rearing and other forms of economic activity, place more emphasis on traditional forms of life that are encapsulated in the spirit of *ubuntu* or *botbo*. To further buttress this position, it is worth noting that, to date, Masire, one of the longest-serving leaders in the region, is still hailed as a successful farmer. He even attests that he is one of the successful farmers and that he was born into that farming system.³¹ It must be added that Sir Seretse Khama, the first president of Botswana, also a traditional paramount chief of the *Bangwato*, was a farmer.³² Furthermore, Botswana still grants certain legal duties to traditional chiefs and the powers to run traditional or customary courts commonly known as *kgotla*.³³ Even more interesting is the fact that Botswana's fourth president, Khama Ian Khama, continues to emphasise some of the values as espoused in the traditional

³⁰ This information was obtained during the author's interview with Sir Quett Ketumile Masire in March 2010. He was very open and candid on this and many other issues.

³¹ Masire *ibid*.

³² Williams *ibid*.

³³ Boko, D. G. (2000) 'Fair trial and the customary courts in Botswana: Questions on legal representation.' *Criminal Law Forum* Vol. 11.4: 445–460.

teachings through his ‘four Ds’: ‘democracy, development, dignity and discipline.’³⁴ Emphasis is placed on discipline and dignity, while democracy continues to be used loosely as a general catchphrase.

State capture by the traditionalised elite has continued to influence Botswana’s politics and economic trends. However, while the traditional systems are encouraged, especially the *kgotla*, as legal institutions with different ethnic chiefs playing central roles, ethnicity is the much-feared factor in Botswana’s nationalist politics in the same way as it is feared and criminalised elsewhere in Africa, thus making Botswana’s leadership style not different from the rest of Africa in many ways. It is clear that the reasons for all this are in defence of Botswana’s nationalism, thereby presenting another case of a ‘patrimonial autocracy,’³⁵ but Botswana’s ethnic composition is diverse and quite complex, and definitely not composed of a single ethnic group as others have wrongly suggested.³⁶ The state is characterised by a wide array of ethnic groups that include *baNgwato*, *baKgatla*, *baTswana*, *baKwena*, *baKalanga*, *baSarwa*, *baKgalagadi*, *baBirwa* and *baHerero*, to mention but a few. There are more than 26 other languages spoken in the country, from which 11 have been identified as belonging to the Basarwa linguistic group and completely different from *seTswana*.³⁷

³⁴ For more information on this, please visit the state of the nation address by His Excellency Lt General Seretse Khama Ian Khama, President of the Republic of Botswana, to the Opening of the Fifth Session of the Ninth Parliament on ‘Empowering the nation through democracy, development, dignity and discipline.’

³⁵Hodgkin 1961. See also; Wallerstein 1960 and Young 1997: 4–14.

³⁶Dowden 2009: 53.

³⁷Information on the case of Botswana’s multicultural and multilingual nature was obtained from the United Nations Economic and Social Council report (2005). This was on the right to education, and was compiled by the special rapporteur, Vernor Muñoz: Mission to Botswana (26 September to 4 October 2005). The report can be accessed on the following website: <http://www.universalhumanrightsindex.org/documents/838/842/document/en/text.html>

However, according to the United Nations Economic and Social Council report Botswana's linguistic situation 'can be described as moderately complex' – a euphemism for 'colossal and confusing'.³⁸ The complexities referred to herein are due to the tacit behaviour as encouraged by the leadership alongside their nationalist ethos in presenting *seTswana* as the only language spoken, even by other ethnic groups.

The linguistic composition of Botswana as a nation-state provides a case of the politics of identity transformation and ethnic coercion following the power of the state and in particular the media as a tool that caters for the hegemonic nature of this form of nationalism.³⁹ This 'received' and constructed identity is commonly known as being a *Motswana* and has transcended various phases of acceptance. It has now shifted from being a cultural identity to a form of traditionalised identity, as it is also seen as a form of professing patriotism. The latter presents an example of postcolonial 'prebendal politics',⁴⁰ with its roots hinged on some form of patrimonial autocracy—a situation where the elected leadership profess being 'people driven' but ends up patronising the electorate. In the case of Masire's leadership, which was traditionalised and inherited from Seretse Khama, a traditional *kgosi* ('paramount chief'), prebendal politics became a common feature. At the core of Masire's political leadership were cultural

³⁸ *ibid.* 06

³⁹ This critique was taken from an analysis given by a colleague and friend, Dr Sethunya Mosime, University of Botswana, who is also a *Mostwana* by political identity and a *Kalanga* by ethnic identity and belonging. In her assessment of the case of Botswana, she could only describe it as one of Africa's manifest cases of the politics of ethnic accommodation which serves as a form of social re-engineering clustered in the cause for belonging.

⁴⁰ Mbembe, A., (1992) 'Provisional notes on the postcolony.' *Africa: Journal of International Institute* 62.1: 3–37. See also, Mbembe, A. (2001) *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

values that often explained and rationalised elite clusters coupled with deference.⁴¹ Thus confirming the state of ‘elite democracy’ in a state captured by ‘cattle-barons’ and also reinforcing the Weberian concept of legitimation in which the ‘law of the small numbers’ matters.⁴²

In Botswana when one reaches eighteen years they are allowed to apply for a national identity card, commonly referred to as an *omang* in SeTswana,⁴³ which means ‘who are you?’ At the back of their national identity card a political identity of being a *Motswana* is then prescribed as a response to the *omang* question. This form of identity acts as a notch of patriotism and also affirmation of belonging and being a citizen of Botswana as a state. There is no clear explanation on how this identity was arrived at, but it has become common knowledge that people from Botswana identify with it as a way of expressing their citizenship and patriotism. When asked, they are quick to identify themselves by saying: *ke Motswana*, which means, ‘I am a Motswana.’ This identity is stated for everyone even though they may be Kalanga, Herero or Mosarwa, *etc.*

Botswana, like other African countries, presents a striking case of state formation through coercion where other ethnic groups had to be pressured by the ruling elite to accept a form of

⁴¹Good 1999: *ibid.*

⁴² Refer to Good, K.: *ibid.* and also, Good, K. (1992) ‘Interpreting the exceptionality of Botswana.’ *Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol. 30.1: 69–95 (March). Good, K. (1996) ‘Popular participation in Botswana.’ *Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol. 34.1: 53–77.

⁴³This information was obtained from colleagues at the University of Botswana in March 2009 during my field. It was later confirmed by another Motswana colleague in March 2012.

identity that has remained fictitious to this day.⁴⁴ When critically analysed this case mirrors Botswana's leadership style and ethos.

CHALLENGES AND FAILURES OF MASIRE'S LEADERSHIP

Many of the older generations saw Masire as corrupt in the way that he often took advantage of government resources for personal projects such as his farms. Along with some big local farmers, at some point he had loans from the National Development Bank written off, an issue which attracted vitriolic criticisms, but as stated above, Masire has to be understood within the spectacles of the epoch he was in office – when Seretse Khama died, with the euphoria of independence beginning to die down, but with the diamond boom which had just started. As a result, Masire in many ways ushered the first wave of Botswana's liberalism. And was successful in managing the diamond boom with minimum corruption and sound financial planning.

However, due to his welfarist and rural development policies, especially poverty alleviation and agricultural policies started by Seretse Khama, Masire is often blamed for perpetuating the dependency of the masses on the state, thereby killing the spirit of *ipelegeng* – self-reliance. Further, it is argued that through a project under the banner of the Accelerated Rural Development Programme (ARDP), approved by cabinet in November 1973 more focus was on the provision of infrastructure and 'basic needs in the countryside rather than direct encouragement of production there.'⁴⁵ As a result, the state ended up preferring to further certain projects due to their visibility as a way of harnessing political capital during election time, and with more resources allocated to

⁴⁴Saugestad, S. (2001) *The inconvenient indigenous: Remote area development in Botswana, donor assistance, and the first people of the Kalahari*. Uppsala: NORDISKA Afrikainstitutet.

⁴⁵ Good 1992: 77.

the livestock sector. By 1982-6 domestic cereal production was as low as 10 percent of the domestic requirement.⁴⁶

However, compared to his predecessor, Seretse Khama, who to most people featured prominently as a ‘Mosaic’ leader given his traditional role as a *kgosi*, Masire emerges as the most important leader in Botswana’s early period of independence. He stands out as a ‘managerial’ leader. Compared to Festus Mogae, he was more conservative and risk averse in terms of taking economic risks that could have boosted diversification of Botswana’s economy –that is, if one is to take neo-liberalism as a good thing. He is credited for formulating policies that were later embraced by successive leaders regarding the mining and marketing of diamonds. One research participant added that ‘Masire could also have more aggressively demanded diamond beneficiation earlier⁴⁷ than having to leave it to successive generations. He was also a kind of moralist, and was slower than Mogae in driving HIV/AIDS related projects, an accusation he accepts by saying:

During my time in office, our failure to deal with HIV/AIDS in an effective way in the early days of the disease arose from judgemental errors. It is one of those I wish I had handled differently, and it is perhaps my greatest regret. The pandemic is now threatening to destroy so much of what we have accomplished, economically, socially and politically.⁴⁸

Furthermore, Masire’s major criticism, as already stated above, directly feeds into Kenneth Good’s thesis on ‘elite democracy’ or

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ This said raised by one of my research participants in July 2012.

⁴⁸ Masire *Op cit.*: 237

‘authoritarian liberalism’. And to capture this scenario, Good further argues:

[t]he president of Botswana is not elected directly by the people but is chosen from among the members of parliament, an electorate which has averaged in size around 35 people. Presidential candidates are not required to run for parliamentary election, but the President nonetheless becomes an ex-officio member of parliament with the right to speak and vote in parliament.⁴⁹

As a result, Kenneth Good writing during Masire’s time in office warned that Botswana had long been viewed as a ‘shining light’ of democracy in southern Africa but with a predominant party system, where extensive powers were concentrated in the hands of a presidency that was not directly elected by the people and with a record of official discouragement of free expression, thereby causing a weak executive accountability. Masire was also often accused of trivialising ordinary people’s concerns by providing less than useful responses to their concerns. Another respondent narrated a story of how people often complained about Masire’s responses whenever he was challenged; ‘. . . he would tell an old man complaining about poverty that he was surprised at the amount of human dung that his convoy had to negotiate, so that to him was a sign that people must be having plenty to eat.’⁵⁰ Most people seemed to find these off-hand remarks lacking in taste.

This failure of communication between the executive and ordinary citizens further led to deep inequalities of property and

⁴⁹Good 1999: 51.

⁵⁰Information on Masire’s responses to challenges by people in the villages was obtained from one research participant in August 2012.

income,⁵¹ an issue that posed more problems for Mogae's leadership. Good therefore saw Masire's system as a form of democracy restricted to the legitimising political elites through elections, with a marked high-growth economy and its eventual accompanying ideology of rewards to those making the biggest contributions, with others waiting patiently for their crumbs. This approach was influenced by the kind of democracy in which the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) encouraged a 'predominant-party system'.

During Masire's time, the predominant-party system reinforced elitism and centralised political power.⁵² As a result the executive was shielded from any possible accountability. This non-accountability of the elite, legitimised by the pre-eminence of the presidency and facilitated by the dominance of the governing party in parliament, increased the state of elite democracy. Added to the extensive presidential privileges that Masire enjoyed was the extended term of office in which he led with no term limits whatsoever. This process continued until 1998 when amendments were effected to the party's constitution. Further, Masire's government became engrossed in image making and expanded military expenditure, which by the 1990s had reached 6 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP).

It has been further observed that while Botswana during Masire's term had achieved rapid growth with stability since independence, largely through interrelations between an open-market economy and a system of elite democracy,⁵³ another underlying factor for the growth and stability was the successful blending of traditional or indigenous knowledge and modern knowledge systems. Contributing to the economic growth was the

⁵¹ Good: *ibid.*

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ *ibid.*

marked diamond boom, which Masire managed to harness with limited corruption. For example, Botswana registered a fast rate of economic growth between 1995 and 1996 with per capita income averaging 9 800 pula (about US\$3 000).⁵⁴ In 1996/97, economic growth achieved was around 6.9 percent, and foreign exchange reserves were kept very high with a very low debt–service ratio. Diamonds contributed around 80 percent of export revenue.⁵⁵

However, agriculture, which constitutes the major source of livelihood for most Batswana, fell to around 3.8 percent of the GDP between 1995 and 1996, thus implying that the government had contributed around 17 per cent of the GDP, making it the country’s largest single employer, with mining accounting for only 8 400 people by 1996. In view of all these developments, Botswana’s paid workforce totalled 234 000, with central and local government employment figures pegged at 86 000.⁵⁶ Unemployment figures remained high, which Good interpreted as the stunting of the development of a working class that could invigorate Botswana’s trade union and ultimately assist in pushing the democratic envelop. As a result, during Masire’s time Botswana enjoyed a small and very constrained civil society, with a largely passive parliament made up of members of parliament harbouring more self-interests than democratic ideals.

COLONIAL VESTIGES AND THE CONTINUATION OF GLOBAL LEADERSHIP CONTRA-FLOWS

Botswana, unlike most African states, enjoys relative peace and a marked form of social, economic and political stability, but it has been noted that various other ethnic groups like the *Basama* and the *Kalanga*, for example, continue to register their discontent with

⁵⁴ Good 1999: *ibid.*

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ *ibid.* 55

the general state of affairs. This is seen partly as a result of unfulfilled government promises that have continued to linger since independence.⁵⁷ The birth of Botswana as a state, as was naturally the case with most former colonies, followed governance systems that had been used by the departing colonial administrators. It will also be noted that, as in most other African states, even among the independent constitutions that were created, most of them tended to be formed following clear assurances given at a conference to mark the shift of leadership.

For most former British colonies, conferences had to be held in Britain as the 'mother country.' In the case of Botswana it was at Lancaster. Even their constitution like in most postcolonial states was handed down to them from the colonial metropolis, London, like a book of rules in a 'suzerain treaty', - granting independence with one hand and taking away its true emancipatory meaning with the other, thereby frustrating the actualisation of independence in reality. At this juncture it may be necessary to further highlight the dearth of critical decolonial literature that discusses the lines of delineation between independence, emancipation and liberation.

From the foregoing it is noteworthy to emphasise that in Botswana, like in other African postcolonial states, the vestigial colonial antinomies include a centralised system of governance and bloated government structure characterised by marked levels of bureaucratic constipation. A broader assessment of the entire African continent reveals similar traits, thus eliciting a question: If most postcolonial states inherited most colonial structures, including the social and political infrastructure (like certain laws), why then should it be difficult to draw parallels and possibly

⁵⁷ This information was taken from the author's interview with Sir Ketumile Masire in March 2010.

lessons learnt from colonialism in terms of the violent dictatorships that continue to dog most African states as part of diverse leadership styles? It is also worth noting that these forms of inheritance as residual social infrastructure have further exacerbated the old colonial stereotypical views about weaker ethnic minority groups. In Botswana the case of the *Basarwa* continues to be an albatross hanging around the neck of the state's human rights and development record. By the early 1990s the population of the *Basarwa*, which totalled 30 000, and that of 14 000 *baKgalagadi* presented a special case of the radical inequalities and disjunctures that continued to dent Botswana's exceptionality in Africa.⁵⁸ This exceptionality is not because they are unique or exotic. Rather it is because they personified among the vulnerable groups the actual vagaries of rural capitalism and would also show how other groups might go eventually 'towards having no access to resources.' The *Kalanga* are also not an exception. These developments are due to the fact that the departing colonial administrators gave power to the dominant ethnic groups, as stated above, with Seretse Khama a clear heir apparent of the *Bangwato* people leading the new independent state.⁵⁹

The situation presented above also meant that the new leadership, while it inherited the colonial systems of administration and governance, it also infused into the new system of governance a form of leadership based on the imaginations of the pre-colonial arrangements, most of them gerontocratic practices, thereby creating a successor state. As a result Botswana during Masire's time witnessed marked levels of traditionalised authoritarianism, inherited from Khama, and was masked as deference for cultural

⁵⁸ Good 1993: 80. For more on this issue, see also: Saugstad 2001: *ibid.*

⁵⁹ For more information on this, *ref.* Williams *ibid.*

and traditional values, leaders and elders. The latter also add to the expanding list of similarities that Botswana has with other African states – that is, being partly established as a successor state while at the same time having inherited almost everything from the departing colonial administrators. This issue will be revisited in the discussion later on violence and wild forms of dictatorship as colonial antinomies in most African countries. However, it would suffice to highlight at this juncture that due to this form of leadership style, Botswana inherited two forms: one from the colonial administration, and the other from the pre-colonial traditional arrangement, which is extremely gerontocratic.

Furthermore, Botswana as a state was captured by a particularised class and group of people of very marked interests – cattle rearing. In addition, most state captors happened to be modestly educated. Having said this and given the object of this article – African leadership – this thesis on ‘state capture’ to the southern African region will be expanded upon, probably to arouse further scholarly engagement on the subject. A cursory look at leadership within the region would show how various groups of people captured their different states.

As stated above, in Botswana the state was captured by traditional cattle barons who in their practice of cattle rearing have tended to influence what one would refer to as Botswana’s socio-economic and political life. A snippet of regional trends would show that in neighbouring South Africa, which controls the economic locus of the region, former Robben Island prisoners and exiles captured the state. Even the narration of the liberation ethos within the corridors of Commissioner Street tends to be punctuated with references to life in exile, and Robben Island. While these groups might have come from different backgrounds, they all had one thing in common – having collectively fought against apartheid. In Zimbabwe the state was captured by a group

of radicals, most of them intellectuals with a tendency towards a particular tribalised ethos – Shona tribalism. In Swaziland traditionalists also captured the state. These forms of state capture have continued to have an impact on leadership issues within these countries as discourses of power continue to be confined within these groups.

The arguments on state capture presented above provide the basis for the argument that Africa neither has a leadership crisis nor a leadership deficit. Even to perceive the challenges that Africa faces as a result of leadership deficit is to miss the point. Rather, the duty of Africa's academia, present and future, is to interrogate, engage and decode those spectacles that have been used to put African problems down to offshoots of leadership challenges – what has been caricatured in some circles as Africa's leadership crisis.⁶⁰ Given the challenge of having to decode these spectacles it could be argued that Africa, in fact, has an abundance of human resources for leadership. However, global forces external to Africa that continue to quarry for potential leaders tend to provide a major challenge to Africa's leadership development as they have always toed, entrenched and in some cases revived age old colonial stencils of leadership grooming. Further, it can be claimed that while Africa is not completely divorced from the incessant global flows marked by the titanic rise of new media and interconnectivity, a need remains for a leadership that is locally developed – one that is not influenced by the agendas of big business, big foundations or Western-inspired institutions. Otherwise this is merely a new form of colonisation of the African lifeworlds. It should be acknowledged that the trend of 'cherry-picking' young promising Africans for leadership training

⁶⁰Bayart, J., Ellis, S. and Hibou, B. (1999) *The criminalisation of the state in Africa*. Oxford: James Currey.

programmes is an old practice. As Frantz Fanon trenchantly posits:

[t]he European *elite* undertook to manufacture a native *elite*. They picked out promising adolescents; they branded them, as with a red-hot iron, with the principles of western culture; they stuffed their mouths full with high-sounding phrases, grand glutinous words that stuck to the teeth. After a short stay in the mother country they were sent home, white-washed. These walking lies had nothing left to say to their brothers; they only echoed.⁶¹

While the trend has been an ongoing challenge for Africa's home-grown arrangements to counter it, this has been continuing unabated, given the global phenomenon of new interconnections emanating from the widespread use of information communication technologies. Indeed, it should also be celebrated for its advantages in that the product might be a broadminded person, as the African adage has it that 'travelling broadens the mind'. However, its discontents deserve to be unmasked. There is a yawning gap for academics, researchers and policymakers to investigate. It is here that Africa's future leadership gets distorted in that the process of elite manufacture tends to present a leadership, which is marginal and one-dimensionally minded. Again, the models used tend not to be any different from the old ones used during colonialism. The modest difference is that this time around the new prospective leaders are treated as 'equals' amid often patronising activities and showered with praises, then dispatched back to Africa as chirped servants of global imperial

⁶¹Fanon 1968: iv.

designs. But the underlying factor is that they receive invitations and nominations to be part of what is always aptly captured as the global leadership ethos. However, the latter, if deeply interrogated, presents a further Westernised neo-colonial leadership ethos whose semiology remains hinged on Western depictions of 'good' and 'bad' leadership, its episteme and philosophy. In these depictions, case studies of bad leaders are usually presented as African leaders, past and present. But what is not further espoused is that from the first to the third generation of Africa's leaders, all of them were products of Western or these institutions in one way or another.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing it can be gleaned that in most African states, leadership continues to come from 'dominant' ethnic groups. This then poses a challenge in terms of harnessing the diverse human resources at the disposal of the continent, but it does not translate into leadership deficit. Further, a closer analysis of the Botswana situation as a complex case of both promise and inequalities presents, on the one hand, a positive outlook whose value can translate into lessons to learn, while on the other hand there are glaring ideological shifts that project Botswana as a state with marked 'authoritarian liberalism' and more influence from the Global West. The latter becomes evident when analysing Masire's liberal capitalistic policies and the attendant inequalities seen in the case of the *Basarwa* who continue to be an albatross to Botswana's exceptionality. Further, it can be concluded that Western-sponsored foundations and leadership institutions that placate young Africans from their societies for leadership training firmly located within Western paradigms continue to conjure global imperial designs of identifying potential leadership from dominant

ethnic groups, thereby not helping the continent to develop beyond capture by small ethnic-inclined cliques.

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