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Charisma and politics in post-colonial Africa

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Abstract

This paper examines the interaction between charisma and politics in Africa. Two broad groups of charismatic political leaders are discussed: those who came to the fore during the era of independence struggles and saw themselves as an embodiment of their nation states and having a transformative impact over the societies they led, and those who emerged largely in response to the failure of the first group or the discontent of post-colonial delivery, and sought political power to enhance their own personal interests. In both instances, the leaders emerged in a context of a crisis: the collapse of colonialism, the disintegration of the one-party state model and economic collapse.

Keywords: charisma; leadership; colonialism; one-party state; democracy.

1. Introduction

The concept of charisma entered the lexicon of the social sciences more than a century ago and is credited to German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920). Weber considered charismatic authority as one of the three ideal-types of authority, the other two being traditional and legal-rational authority (Epley, 2015). The term charisma often refers to an extraordinary quality of a leader and person's ability to create emotional dominance over a mass of people. Weber defines charisma as 'a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman or exceptional powers or qualities' (quoted in Jentges, 2014: 5). In its pure form, charisma is associated with heroic deeds, extraordinary courage, and performance of miracles or possession of special powers of mind or oratory. Charismatic leadership is not only about what a leader embodies, but also what he is perceived to be. In other words, charismatic authority rests on followers' belief that a charismatic leader possesses extraordinary powers or qualities that allow him or her to overcome existential crises or deliver on his vision (Schweitzer, 1974; Breuilly, 2011). In this paper, I take a broad definition of charisma to cover both individual or personal qualities and the role of followers who perceive the leader as possessing extraordinary qualities.

The concept of charisma originates from Weber's study of religion, and features prominently in the study of fundamentalist protestant Christianity (Cohen, 1972; Humeira & Lehmann, 2012). In recent years, however, it has also found currency in sociological and political analysis (Wolpe, 1968). There are, for instance, a considerable debate on the efficacy of charismatic leadership to nation building, and a growing literature that recognises charisma as an essential explanation for the development of authoritarian rule (Bretton, 1967; Apter, 1968; Iijma, 1998; Breuilly, 2011). In the context of developing countries, charismatic leadership emerged in conditions of distress or during times of crisis, dislocation or struggle for liberation from colonial rule. In Africa, we can identify two phases in the emergence of charismatic leadership. The first phase involves the leaders who led the struggle against colonial rule, inspired by a vision for a better future. The second phase, often a reaction to the governance deficits created by first generation of leaders, is a leadership opposed to one-party, one-man and military dictatorships. Both sets of leaders emerged under conditions of extreme repression and demonstrated extraordinary courage to challenge an entrenched system, were inspirational to their followers and were endowed with exceptional oratorical skills, which emotionally connected them with their supporters. While charismatic leadership plays an important role in the short to medium term in mobilising the masses for a particular cause, it tends to be transitory and soon loses its legitimacy. Failure to meet popular expectations and, in particular, the mutation of charismatic leaders into personality cults or unaccountable dictators have led to mass disillusionment resulting, in some cases, in their removal from office (Osaghae, 2010; Breuilly, 2011; Rotberg, 2012).

There is nothing novel in the assumption that social and political processes can be explained in terms of the qualities and actions of individual 'heroes' or charismatic figures. However, the concept of charisma has serious limitations when applied to African politics. Derived as it is from the idea of 'religious devotion', with very few exceptions (Hoffmann, 2009), charismatic leaders rarely institute transformative politics nor contribute to economic development of their countries. This paper discusses the rise of charismatic leadership in Africa and contrasts the two phases of charismatic leadership and their influence on politics in post-colonial Africa. Following the introduction, section two reviews the literature on charisma and its relevance to explaining African politics. The third section discusses the phases of charismatic leadership in Africa, its relevance to democracy and lessons for post-colonial Africa. The final section concludes.

2. Charisma and politics in Africa

While there is considerable debate in the literature concerning the meaning of charisma or charismatic leadership, there is a general consensus that the concept refers to unique or exceptional qualities that make an individual stand out in society. Jentges (2014) observes that charisma refers to 'an extraordinary quality of a leader and a person's ability to create emotional dominance over masses of people.' According to Weber, followers accept the charismatic leader because they perceive the leader as possessing a certain extraordinary 'gift'. The 'gift' of charisma, while seldom specified, includes attributes such as courage, oratorical skills, and strong convictions towards an ideal.

The literature on charisma attributes four personal characteristics to charismatic leaders. These are: (a) high levels of self-confidence; (b) dominance; (c) strong convictions and (d) inspirational leadership (Bretton, 1967; Dow, 1969; Schweitzer, 1974; Iijma, 1998). When the possession of these qualities exceeds what is normal in society, the individual is considered extraordinary, superhuman or even exceptional. However, as Rotberg (2012) has argued, charisma can only be best understood as highly individualised qualities that are organically linked to followers. In other words, charisma is relational. This means that for a charismatic leader to flourish, he or she needs followers who have an emotional attachment to the charismatic figure. Rotberg (2012: 419) has observed that the 'magnetism, fame, heroism or celebrity status' that a charismatic figure imposes on society can be both misleading and confusing. In this case, the adulation of a leader is not necessarily indicative of charisma, nor is popular appeal. It is only when charismatic leaders work together with their followers that they can achieve transformative goals. As argued by Rotberg (2012: 419-20):

> …charisma is best understood as the inspirational component of the bond between leaders and their political or organisational followers that allows them to act as if they are genuinely inspired to maximise what they presume or are led to believe are their own interests.

According to Weber (1978), followers of charismatic leaders tend to show complete personal devotion to them or their authority based on the leader's convictions, courage or idealised vision of the future. This 'complete devotion' has also led followers to assign messianic or saviour status to charismatic leaders. Thus, it is not uncommon for founding leaders of national liberation or independence movements to be labelled messiahs or God-given leaders. The first generation of African nationalist leaders, such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, were revered figures, assigned larger than life status as the 'saviours' of their countries from colonial rule (Apter,

1968 Breuilly, 2011). Bretton (1967) makes the point that Nkrumah had a Christ-like figure to which Ghanaians looked for redemption. In Zambia, at the height of the one-party state, Kenneth Kaunda was likened to God on earth. There was, for example, a common dictum among members of the governing United National Independence Party (UNIP) that 'In heaven, it is God in charge; on earth, it is Kaunda.' In this sense, charisma rests not so much in the relevant individual's recognition of the qualities that others find exceptional but 'in the perceivers of [that] charisma that is, in the society, rather than in the personality of the object of their adulation' (Kershaw 1998 xiii).

Charisma, however, tends to be transitory and is not sustainable in the long term. Weber (1978:143) contended that charismatic authority was 'inherently unstable' as it tends to disappear with the downfall or death of a charismatic leader or becomes routinised and institutionalised into legal-rational or traditional rule. He maintained that it was virtually impossible to sustain charismatic authority. Osaghae (2010:407-8) posits that charismatic leadership is predicated on the delivery of promised public goods. Failure to meet popular expectations, and in particular when charismatic legitimation develops into personality cults and unaccountable authoritarian rule, leads to loss of legitimacy and followership. As argued by Jentges (2014:8) 'when performance which re-invigorates a leader as charismatic becomes rare and when claims by followers asserting their leaders' charisma become less frequent, charisma disappears and is lost.'

In order to sustain charismatic authority, some leaders have tried to institutionalise it in government. This has been achieved through three methods – development of personalised ideologies, creation of one-party states, and adoption of populist policies. In Africa, several leaders who were considered charismatic during the struggle for national independence devised in office personalised ideologies designed to sustain their popularity with the masses. Davidson (1994:29) has described these beliefs as 'political religions'. They include Nkrumaism in Ghana, *Ujamaa* in Tanzania and Kaundaism (or Humanism) in Zambia, among others. These were ideologies of legitimation that tried to emphasise the indispensability of the founding leader and prescribed an idealised social system that would address social and economic problems. The second method aimed to transform personal charisma into what Weber described as the 'charisma of office.' Often, this involved the creation of one-party states, in which the leader and the party were perceived as one and the same thing. Through one-party states, charismatic leaders institutionalised their rule and routinised it in government. In countries such as Zambia and Tanzania, the sole ruling party was also the government. The famous formulation was 'the party and its government', where the party and government were inseparable both in

theory and in practice, and the charismatic leader was the leader of both. Criticism of the party or government was perceived as criticism of the leader.

Third, charismatic leaders adopted populist policies aimed at alleviating poverty, hunger, unemployment, provision of universal education and health care. These populist policies were part of the struggle for independence or were used to delegitimise incumbents for their failure to deliver on their promises. In Nigeria, Kenya and Malawi, leaders of the independence movement, such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, Jomo Kenyatta and Kamuzu Banda, respectively, adopted capitalist policies and actively transferred personal charisma to charisma of office (Sender and Smith, 1986). In Mozambique, charismatic Samora Machel transferred his personal charisma to the propagation of Marxist socialism as a way of delivering on people's expectations (Wuyts, 1989; Serapicio, 2011;). Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe attempted to establish a socialist system based on collectivisation of agriculture. Leopold Senghor of Senegal, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Zambia's Kenneth Kaunda propagated variants of African socialism, widely seen as based on the creation of an egalitarian society (Hatch, 1976; Akyeampong, 2017).

There are several examples elsewhere where charismatic leaders have successfully transformed their personal charisma into charisma of office. Some of the examples include Mao Tse-Dong in China and Fidel Castro in Cuba, who were able to sustain their personal charisma through the adoption of transformative policies for their parties and government. The achievements of their governments were not always attributed to them personally, but to the collective leadership of their ruling parties and government. But in contrast, charisma of office was a reflection of personal charisma as the leader and the institutions (state and party) tended to intertwine. Arguably, the leader personified the party and its policies were also considered to reflect the leader's own thinking as opposed to a collective ambition or aspirations of party members and leaders.

The most recent theorizing on charisma has tended to point to its limitations as a legitimating political force (Osaghae, 2010; Rotberg, 2012; Jentges, 2014). Charisma, with its emphasis on individual qualities, has potential to create personality cults. Charismatic leaders have often ended up being dictators, as they come to love the reverence and adulation they receive from their supporters and followers. They become intolerant to dissent and criticism and to competitors from within their ranks. Early charismatic leaders, from Nkrumah in Ghana and Nyerere in Tanzania to Kaunda in Zambia, ruthlessly crushed opposition to their rule and established one-party states (Osaghae, 2010; Sishuwa 2019). Sylla and Goldhammer (1982) observe that the main challenge

confronting a charismatic leader is succession. The duo notes that ‘to speak of a mode of succession is really to speak of a mode of legitimation of power, for any mode of succession necessarily corresponds to some mode of legitimation’ (Sylla & Goldhammer, 1982: 11). They suggest that democratisation provides an institutional framework for the ‘routinisation’ of charisma, which involves the institutionalisation of rule through legal-rational means in the party, public policies and laws. The imposition of one-party states across several African countries in the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s represented the attempt by the continent’s charismatic figures to manage succession wrangles within nationalist parties and perpetuate their stay in power.

3. Charismatic leadership in Africa: past and present

A period of social upheaval or oppression that causes distress and dissatisfaction among a segment of the population is generally acknowledged as the typical environment within which a charismatic leader will arise (Friedland, 1964; Willner & Willner, 1965). Colonialism developed a repressive system that was highly resistant to change. The reaction by the majority of subject people to the repression and subjugation was for generations dominated by fear (Mamdani, 1996). So, the solutions devised by ordinary individuals for their ultimate concerns in life were usually conservative, not aimed at dismantling the system. Charismatic leaders, on the other hand, even in the face of threats of repression and imprisonment, offered answers to the problem confronting the people. Because their problems turned out to be widespread, the charismatic leaders' individual solutions to the people’s ultimate concerns met the standards of many others in the same society. This was especially the case when the charismatic leaders offered radical solutions to colonialism, such as immediate self-government or independence. Their strong convictions of the attainability of their vision of an alternative society inspired multitudes of people to follow and support them and they were perceived as extraordinary individuals.

Contradictions and eventual breakdown of the colonial system was precisely the appropriate socio-historical moment that was necessary for charismatic leaders to emerge. Several studies of charisma (Friedland, 1964; Willner and Willner, 1965; Apter, 1968) have been carried out within the context of the breakdown of authority in the latter years of the colonial system. It is debatable whether charismatic leaders played a role in bringing an end to colonialism or whether colonialism collapsed on account of internal contradictions at home (Young, 2001; Babou, 2010). However, what is clear is that charismatic leaders were important catalysts in hastening the granting of political independence.

In Africa, conditions of oppression and subjugation of subject peoples over decades provided the impetus for nationalism. Some of those who championed an end to colonial rule and demanded political independence were considered to possess extraordinary personal qualities of strong convictions to an ideal, courage, self-sacrifice and eloquence (Adamolekun, 1985; Comaroffs & Comaroff, 1997; Brecher, 2016; Cabbuag, 2016). They were prepared to go to prison to face the colonial repressive security forces in the pursuit of their goals. The courage with which they held their convictions in the face of repressive regimes earned them messianic or 'saviour' status and inspired many in their societies to follow them (Breuilly, 2011; Bryman et al., 2011).

Two generations of charismatic leaders can be identified in Africa. The first comprised charismatic leaders who fought colonial rule and prosecuted the struggle for national independence and political freedom generally. The second generation of charismatic leaders consisted of those who emerged in the wake of the failure of the first generation of leaders to deliver on the promise of independence, and in the wake of autocratic rule and the deterioration in living conditions occasioned by economic mismanagement. The main distinction between the first generation of charismatic leaders and the second was on the possession of a transformative vision (Strange & Mumford, 2002). While the first generation of charismatic leaders emerged from crises occasioned by colonial rule and were inspired by a desire to bring about social and political transformation, this was not the case with the second generation of charismatic figures.

The first generation of charismatic leaders were often anti-colonial, anti-imperialist and against forms of external domination. Its luminaries included Ghana's first president Kwame Nkrumah, Senegal's Leopold Senghor, Tanzania's Julius Nyerere, Congo's Patrice Lumumba, and Zambia's Kenneth Kaunda. These leaders were revered by many in their countries, pulled massive crowds to their pre-independence rallies, and generated emotional followership. There were at least four characteristic features that the first generation of charismatic leaders had in common. These were: (a) strong personal magnetism and dominant leadership style; (b) use of religious, especially Christian, symbolism in their political speeches; (c) highly idealistic vision of a future society and emphasis on attainment of high goals; and (d) personalised struggle for national emancipation. The application of these qualities and features helped de-legitimise colonial rule and arguably accelerated a decolonisation process, that might otherwise have taken decades, to one measured in years.

3.1 The gift of the gab

The use of strong oratorical skills was a common feature of almost all charismatic leaders. Tiger (1964) notes that Nkrumah was a charismatic leader whose oratorical and organisational abilities shot him to political prominence. In Tanzania, Nyerere's charisma was partly explained by his exceptional eloquence and persuasiveness, which earned him the revered title of *Mwalimu* (meaning teacher in Ki-Swahili). Specifically, Bienen (1967) describes Nyerere as a charismatic leader given his powerful use of words. Others in different degrees moved multitudes of people to join the struggle against colonial rule. But the power to move the masses was not the only quality that these charismatic figures possessed; they also had a magnetic and dominant personality. When they spoke, crowds got excited into frenzy akin to spirit possession (Abarbach, 1996). Others have even suggested that these leaders commanded a reverence similar to that given to prophets or spiritual leaders (Apter, 1968 Iijma, 1998;). They embodied popular aspirations and possessed the language to articulate them to the masses. From Nkrumah to Kaunda, the people viewed these nationalist leaders as possessing extraordinary qualities, which made them almost super-human.

3.2 The messiah

The use of religious symbolism was evident in all the early charismatic leaders. Nkrumah persuaded his compatriots to seek first the political kingdom and the economic freedom would follow (Apter, 1968 Mulfils, 1977). Their speeches often took the form of sermons, where they talked of political freedom in terms of salvation and presented themselves as the messianic figures talked about in religious texts, such as the Bible. They cited biblical texts that justified and rationalised their struggle for freedom and independence. Iijma (1998) illustrates how Nkrumah effectively utilised Christian symbols to stamp his charismatic authority on the people as the one chosen by God. In Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda likened himself to a religious leader and ensured that public meetings started with prayer. Kaunda, with a deep-rooted Christian background, also regularly wept at public rallies and addresses when emphasising the cruelties of colonial rule and, in doing so, linked himself to many Zambians, most of whom were Christian. So, in their public pronouncements, these nationalist leaders used Christian symbols as a way of generating the messianic syndrome, which was essential in motivating many people in their societies to participate in the nationalist struggle.

The early African charismatic leaders, such Nkrumah, Nyerere and Kaunda, used the Christian religion to mobilise the masses and present themselves as prophets who predicted the end of colonial oppression and the messiah the people were waiting for (Sylla & Goldhammer, 1982; Abarbach, 1996; Iijma,

1998). The people responded by referring to them as God-given leaders who had come to offer them redemption from colonial subjugation (Bretton, 1967). Their most enduring influence on the collective psyche of the colonised people was the hope they created that they would succeed in ending colonialism and establishing a system in which political freedom would culminate in the enjoyment of political, economic and social rights.

3.3 Imagining a utopian society

The early generation of Africa's charismatic leaders provided an idealised vision of a future society. They professed an ability to create a society free of oppression in which African dignity would be restored. They romanticized independence to a level where people were convinced that colonial oppression would be replaced by an egalitarian society free of exploitation, where citizens would enjoy equal opportunities. Leading figures of this cohort, such as Nkrumah, Nyerere, Senghour and Kaunda went on to articulate political philosophies embodying these visions of an alternative society. While most of these visions were framed in socialist imaginations, the visions of others, such as Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya and Kamuzu Banda of Malawi, were based on notions of freedom where individualism and enterprise would be promoted. They argued, for example, that Africans would be able to engage in economic activities that were hitherto an exclusive preserve of white European settlers (Sender & Smith, 1986).

A common feature of the utopian futures that the charismatic African leaders envisaged was the lack of detail about their political policies and the structural factors underlying economic inequality in their societies. As Larmer (2013: 2) has argued, colonists were criticised not because of identified weaknesses in their policies, but because they did not have the nation's interests at heart:

> African nationalist campaigning sought to portray colonial administration not only as dysfunctional and unpopular, but also to depict colonial officials as inherently unable to reflect the wishes of African people. Whereas previous generations of moderate African leaders, both chiefly authorities and educated elites, had appealed to the colonial administration's better nature and ability to intervene to improve people's lives, late-colonial nationalists asserted that foreigners were incapable of understanding African grievances, which could only be effectively addressed by an authentic government of indigenous rulers. This continued right up to the moment of independence and was not incompatible with the fact that nationalist leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah and Kenneth Kaunda took up senior

> positions within late colonial administrations, operating as ministers and working alongside colonial civil servants….
>
> All this was possible because many nationalist parties existed primarily as electioneering vehicles, rather than as institutions capable of debating and agreeing policies. Leaders were frequently not held to account for the positions they adopted and adapted for particular purposes. The lack of national media and the limited penetration of literacy in English or French meant that both local and national leaders were able to tailor their electoral message for mostly rural constituencies, utilising local idioms and discourses and making locally specific promises, thereby raising expectations of rapid post-independence development that were un-costed and, in retrospect, unrealistic. Such promises were in my view vital to the success of nationalist parties in mobilising popular support, made at electoral rallies held in the 1950s and early 1960s, which raised expectations of socio-economic change and linked these to the prospect of national independence.

The sources of many of the thwarted expectations of independence in several African countries, and the populist figures that emerged in the wake of independence, are to be found in the late-colonial era. A particular source is the unrealistic promises that were made by the charismatic nationalists during the struggle for independence.

3.4 The personal embodiment of their nation states

The final characteristic feature of early charismatic leaders in Africa is to be found in the personalisation of the struggle for political emancipation. Because of their dominance, these leaders personalised the struggle. They appropriated personal credit for the attainment of independence and there was a perception that, without them, independence would never have been attained. For example, Nkrumah declared that: 'This nation is my creation. If I should die, there would be chaos' (Carter, 1960: 134). In Senegal, Leopold Senghor argued that the President was the personification of God. In other words, the masses elected God through the people (Meredith, 2005:165). This discourse, which was so dominant in immediate post-colonial Africa, was predicated on two premises. The first was that the attainment of independence was as a result of personal sacrifice and leadership of the charismatic leader. The second was that the charismatic leader, without whom the newly independent state would not survive, was indispensable. If anything, this latter argument tended to equate the nation with the leader and the ruling party as an embodiment of the leader. It was against this background that the early charismatic leaders were later to create one-party rule (Meredith, 1984; Meredith, 2005).

In addition to the characteristic features outlined above, some of the early charismatic leaders also possessed high moral and personal integrity. They were exemplary in their leadership and resisted temptations to use their positions for personal gain. Hatch (1976), for example, notes that Kaunda and Nyerere possessed extraordinary integrity and personal moral discipline that were unusual on the continent at the time. On Kaunda, Greg Mills (2011:173) writes that he was 'a man of great integrity and parsimony in his economic dealings and policies, and generally did not exhibit self-interest.'

The second generation of charismatic leaders was more externally oriented and lacked genuine vision for economic transformation. This latter leadership was largely created by elites within their societies in conjunction with international institutions or actors. Many of the successor African leaders who have assumed the reputation of charismatic figures were simply a product of an elite-constructed political strategy to install a messiah-like figure to fit a larger cultural narrative that 'history is made of great men' (Jentges, 2014:8). This latter set of charismatic leaders often emerged following periods of authoritarian rule and general deterioration in economic conditions. With the exception of Jerry Rawlings in Ghana and Thomas Sankara in Burkina Faso, who came to power through military take-over, most charismatic leaders, who graced the political stage after the founding leaders, were propelled to power by the special circumstances of authoritarian rule and the perniciousness of one-party states.

In contrast to postcolonial scholarship that has devoted much time to the study of the charisma of African leaders who led their countries to independence and their efforts to establish viable and stable nation-states, there has been a dearth of literature on the leadership styles and attributes of those who replaced them. Much work was devoted to circumstances that led to military take-overs in the immediate post-independence period and the nature of military rule in those countries where this phenomenon was prevalent. But after the reconfiguration of the world system following the collapse of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War in the late 1980s and early 1990s, almost all countries in Africa adopted multiparty systems. The adoption of multiparty democracy and economic liberalisation came as part of the conditionality of multilateral organisations, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Importantly, some members of the elite emerged to champion the return of their countries to multiparty democracy from either military rule or one-party dictatorship. A few of those who led pro-democracy movements possessed charismatic qualities. Some of the charismatic leaders who emerged leading a pro-democracy movement, or what Huntington (1994) has referred to as the 'third wave' of

democracy on the continent, include Frederick Chiluba of Zambia, Laurent Gbagbo of Ivory Coast and Morgan Tsvangarai of Zimbabwe, among others.

It is plausible to argue that the second generation of charismatic leaders in Africa arose out of the discontent with post-colonial delivery, but the general paucity of charismatic leaders in this period also reflects the institutionalisation of politics across much of the continent since the 1990s. There are at least three characteristic features common to these latter African leaders. These include extraordinary oratorical skills; courage to challenge authoritarian one-party, one-man rule; and a reformist agenda that lacked long-term transformative visions for their countries. In much of Africa, the pro-democracy movement was a mass movement, that was inspired by donor conditionality to developing countries, to liberalise their political and economic spaces. While poor economic conditions of the people and the need to end authoritarian rule rank among the leading motive forces for pro-democracy movements, the elite who led the campaign often had short-term goals – access to state power to fulfil short-term economic gains. Apart from Jerry Rawlings and Thomas Sankara who embarked on a transformative vision of their countries after coming to power, most of the charismatic leaders who emerged after the collapse of military and one-party rule were only strong on rhetoric, but weak on action. Late Zimbabwean opposition leader, Morgan Tsvangarai, emerged from the country's labour movement to oppose Mugabe's personal rule. He was a fearless champion of political freedom and condemned repression and economic decline. Tsvangarai was a charismatic leader who took personal risks and sacrificed himself to lead the opposition Movement for Democratic Change in a country not accustomed to criticism and political opposition. He is widely believed to have won Zimbabwe's 2002 presidential elections and was seen as having been robbed of victory in the 2008 elections, which he had won in the first round. However, like most charismatic leaders who emerged after the departure of the nationalist leaders, and despite his charisma, Tsvangarai lacked a transformative vision and was a reformist leader (Hudleston, 2005; Nyanda, 2017).

In Ivory Coast, Laurent Gbagbo was the first democratically elected leader (in free and fair elections) after the death of founding leader, Houphouet-Boigny (Tadjo, 2011). Gbagbo had been a critic of the one-party state, and had organised strikes and student demonstrations during the early 1980s. Gbagbo was arrested several times for dissident activity. After a brief period in exile, he returned home in 1988 following the return of multiparty democracy and immediately assumed the leadership of the Ivorian Popular Front. Gbagbo used his charisma, especially his eloquence, to charm his followers and was elected president after defeating a military ruler, Gen. Robert Guei, who later fled the country. In office, Gbagbo was to face rebellion and civil war due to his style of leadership. He was removed from power in 2011, after refusing to concede

defeat to Alassane Ouattara in the elections held in 2010. He was indicted for war crimes and sent to the International Criminal Court (ICC), but was recently acquitted by the ICC (Corey-Boulet, 2019).

Frederick Chiluba, on the other hand, emerged from the Zambian trade union movement, which he had led continuously for more than 15 years, starting in 1974 soon after president Kaunda declared the country a one-party state (Sishuwa, 2011). Fiery and eloquent, Chiluba's magnetism was palpable during the subsequent campaign against the one-party state and Kaunda. He had a dominant personality and excited the imagination of thousands of followers with his fearless attack on Kaunda and promises of a better Zambia after UNIP's ouster. Chiluba defeated Kaunda and UNIP in elections held in October 1991, with an overwhelming majority of almost 75 percent of the national vote. In office, Chiluba creatively used religion to legitimise his rule. For example, when assuming office, he declared Zambia a Christian nation in order to boost his support among evangelical Christians (Clifford, 1998; Phiri, 2003). Chiluba's charisma gradually faded as his promises of repairing Zambia's economy proved daunting and, by the time he left office, many commentators referred to his rule as a 'lost decade' and the country's democracy as having regressed (Rakner & Svåsand, 2005; Sishuwa, 2016). Like Adolf Hitler in Germany, Chiluba was a creation of an elite-led coalition that, despite his tainted legacy as a labour leader, presented him as a fearless advocate of the workers, the poor and under-privileged. This claim proved misplaced following his assumption of presidential office. As Kimenya and Moyo (2011) correctly observe, 'Chiluba will be remembered as a champion of democracy, who easily abandoned the principles of good governance to serve his own self interest of amassing power and wealth.'

Both Gbagbo and Chiluba were propelled to power based on their personal charisma and strong oratorical skills. But they lacked a transformative vision of their respective societies, they adopted neoliberal economic orthodox policies as a panacea to the poverty and inequalities in their societies, and they were preoccupied with the acquisition of personal wealth (van Donge, 2008). In Ivory Coast or Cote d'Ivoire, as it is popularly known, the emergence of Laurent Gbagbo did little to ameliorate the poverty of millions. If anything, among other charges, Gbagbo was accused of embezzlement and armed robbery (Campbell, 2011; Piccoli, 2012).

The experience of both the first and second generation of charismatic leaders suggests that the concept of charisma is not useful in post-colonial politics. There are many African charismatic leaders who played significant roles in struggles both for political freedom from colonial rule and for democracy, but still led their nations in wrong directions. Africa is replete with examples of

colorful and romanticized ideologies ranging from pan-Africanism to negritude, authenticity, humanism, African socialism and many others in between. However, these 'political ideologies' have turned out to be political religions or mere slogans meant to legitimise the leader in power. There are many continuities between the old and the new charismatic leaders. Both, for instance, occupy a central role and epitomise the nation or the struggle. They also encourage the cultivation of personality cults, which promote hero worship and sycophancy.

The personalisation of power that arises from charismatic leaders promotes unaccountable leadership and has often led to the erosion of democratic ideals. In the era of the dominance of the neoliberal doctrine, the absence of original solutions to Africa's problems is germane. A reliance on the West for ideological direction and stamp of approval characterise the current supposedly charismatic leaders on the continent, a development that may be traced to the role that the International Financial Institutions played in their creation. The politics of old, which hero-worshipped the founder leader and assigned him the status of 'Father of the Nation', has continued with a penchant for intolerance against criticism and organised opposition. Competition for office, especially in political parties, is highly circumscribed, and often the president goes unopposed or is declared sole candidate by design. This is because the syndrome of equating the leader and the party as one has continued. Instances of opponents being blocked from competing for office, suppression of opposition protests, muzzling the media, and limiting democratic space are on the increase and are no different from the era of one-party dictatorship. While certain criticism may be considered as constructive and aimed to build, criticism generally has been misconstrued as unpatriotic, seditious or even treasonable. Instead, African leaders have tended to place a premium on blind loyalty, as though they are royal dynasties that value their own preservation and power above all else.

This unquenchable thirst for personal recognition (hero worship), an enduring legacy of the earlier set of charismatic leaders, has not only imperiled democracy; it has also hindered development in Africa. Instead of cultivating commitment and trust to democratic values and principles, African leaders have demanded loyalty from the people, and have almost always sought re-election, sometimes over and above the constitutionally prescribed term limits, even when they have not delivered on their election promises. Elections themselves were routinely rigged, constitutions were tampered with and oversight institutions were undermined to give the political leaders in power an upper hand (Cheeseman & Klaas, 2018).

There have been a few cases where a highly charismatic figure has assumed power and maintained their charisma. With the exception of Nelson Mandela

who used his extraordinary personal charisma to unite the racial groups in South Africa following his election to the presidency in 1994, most present-day leaders promote divisive and exclusionary politics, which centre on preserving themselves in power. Although his colleagues in government constantly challenged him, Mandela, perhaps Africa's most prominent charismatic leader since 1990, warmly tolerated dissenting opinions. He was able to do this, unlike other African leaders, because he used his experience of long incarceration that lasted 27 years to reconcile the nation. Mandela had the moral authority to campaign for racial harmony, and came to symbolize freedom and national unity (Southern African History Online [SAHO], 2015).

The literature on the advent of charismatic leadership in Africa is characterised by a remarkable focus on charisma as the bond between the leader and his or her followers; the forum for charisma is the mass rally, akin to an evangelical church service. Mandela's ability to put together a coalition of disparate interest groups demonstrates a distinct use or role of charisma, in post-colonial Africa, in how leaders manage elites, including how they put together and maintain coalitions. Mandela, for example, was not a great public speaker, but many people agree that face-to-face, he was irresistible. In competitive, non-authoritarian African contexts, we tend to think of coalitions as forged through hard-nosed, opportunistic pursuit of self-interest, with elites haggling over the distribution of rents. But perhaps charisma matters within elite politics beyond the individual case of Mandela, a prospect that opens up a rich and potentially revealing area of further study outside the scope of this paper.

4. Conclusion

This paper has examined the concept of charisma and its efficacy in late-colonial and post-colonial Africa, the rise and fall of charismatic political leaders on the continent, and the historical conditions under which such figures emerged. The paper has demonstrated that in 20th century Africa, two broad groups of charismatic figures emerged. The first group comprised nationalist leaders who came to the fore during the era of independence struggles. Many later assumed positions of 'Father of the Nation' and saw themselves not simply as an embodiment of their nation states but also as having a transformative impact over the societies they led. Notable among these were Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, Patrice Lumumba (Zaire, now present-day Democratic Republic of Congo), Kenneth Kaunda (Zambia), Julius Nyerere (Tanzania), Jomo Kenyatta (Kenya), Samora Machel (Mozambique) and Robert Mugabe (Zimbabwe). The second group emerged largely in response to and in the wake of the failure of the first group of charismatic figures and their 'nationalist project'. The era of Structural Adjustment Policies saw a dramatic narrowing of political ambitions. The leaders who came to the fore reversed the nationalist project, realigned their

societies towards the West, and sought political mobilisation and power to enhance their own personal interests and secure material enrichment. Examples of this cohort are Frederick Chiluba in Zambia, Laurent Gbagbo (Ivory Coast) and Jerry Rawlings (Ghana). The paper has shown that in both instances, the figures emerged in a context of a crisis: the collapse of colonialism, the disintegration of the one-party state model and, lately, economic collapse. It concludes that charisma and charismatic leadership has had a negative influence on African politics as it has encouraged the growth of personality cults, personalised and unaccountable leadership, and corruption.

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