

THE INSULTING PATERNALISM ON AFRICA

HAMA TUMA

We will never justify but we can understand the smothering paternalism of the whites like the unmentionable actors and singers who have nominated themselves the voice of Africa. We are not even supposed to have the capacity to speak for ourselves and thus egocentric white businessmen masquerading as do gooders speak and act on our behalf. As I said, these are the off springs of the colonialists, with the right color, religion, name and money. It is when a black imitates them that it becomes jarring, annoying and suffocating. The Mo Ibrahim crude show comes to mind.

Mo Ibrahim is a Sudanese born British multi billionaire. He got rich from selling his mobile phone firm and making a US \$ 1,5 billion net profit. Many times wealth brings arrogance (which rhymes also with ignorance in many instances) and Mohamed Ibrahim got the notion that he could be the grandmaster of African politics and development paths. And as custom has it, he set up a foundation. The officials presentation of this foundation is as follows:

"The Mo Ibrahim Foundation was established in 2006 with a focus on the critical importance of leadership and governance in Africa. By providing tools to support progress in leadership and governance, the Foundation aims to promote meaningful change on the continent. The Foundation, which is a non-grant making organization, focuses on defining, assessing and enhancing governance and leadership in Africa".

And so, the Foundation, which has the likes of Egypt's El Baradei in its prize committee, awards a prize of achievement in good leadership and

governance to "democratically elected but out of office ex presidents". This year the former president of Namibia has gotten the prize (US \$ 5 million to be paid over ten years and US\$ 200,000 a year for life) after being praised as a worthy leader. What remains is for a category of commendable African leader to be included in the Oscar and César or Cannes ceremonies. A sad show that actually is insulting to Africa. If elected, and that by itself is a big if, the president is supposed and expected to serve his term respecting the Constitution of the land. No prize needed and none expected under normal circumstances. Is there a prize for good governance and achievement in leadership awarded to leaders of the Western countries? to China? The Mo prize insults Africa by saying lo and behold there is one capable and good person amongst this corrupt lot. Mo Ibrahim and his foundation have a criteria that blends well with the words and choices of the Western capitals, the IMF and the World Bank, the same quarters that hail the dubious double digit economic growth in poverty stricken places like Ethiopia. In other words, the leadership prize, patronizing as it is, is just a pension plan, perhaps a pat on the back to those who had to leave power after at least a decade of rule that can be said democratic often only relatively. As for democratic elections, this animal and Africa still remain foes like a hyena and a donkey.

No doubt, there will be many who would praise Mo Ibrahim and his assumption that he and his prize committee can give leadership prizes and know who has been good to any given country in Africa. Wealth breeds delusions, the likes of Gates and others think they know what is good for Africans who are, if truth be told, considered as babes who need a keeper, a guide, preferably white. If Mo thinks he can bribe presidents into being good and democratic to get his leadership prize his naivety is unsurpassed. African thieving and corrupt presidents would laugh at him. If Mo Ibrahim thinks it is better to pay a huge pension to individuals rather than to give this same money to development schemes then he is as misguided as those who praise our dictators as democrats. In the end, an Africa proverb has put

it as follows: "the hand that receives is always under the one that gives." Paternalism defined colonial and neo colonial attitudes of the West towards Africa even though hard times deprived, for example, France of pretensions and delusions of grandeur. The British Empire is no longer but the mission is not abandoned, missionaries have been replaced by NGOs and Foundations. Mo Ibrahim's prize is enveloped by such haughty assumptions, to say the least. Give the "darkies an incentive, a few millions if they behave well as we say".

Actually, Africans know what is best for them, who their democratic leaders are. Noble laureates are only just that and we cannot forget that the likes of Kissinger got this prize. Africans should be left alone to determine their destinies, to be helped only when they ask for help and not for some wealthy actors, singers or wealthy foreigner to decide on their fate. Given the possibility that leaders can play a negative or positive role in the life of a party or a country, the main thing is the overall system, the collective condition. Elections are farce in most of Africa but even they were not so would that mean democracy is in place? What must be examined is the condition of the people, the existence of the rule of law, the condition of women and minorities, the rights of children and the working people, the sovereignty of the land. Take Djibouti, Ethiopia and other darlings of the West and one is prompted to ask more than have free and fair elections taken place, is there economic "growth" and other questions that the patron West will answer with an unashamed yes so long as the regimes serve it with zeal. The drone and foreign military bases in Djibouti and Ethiopia speak more than concerns for democracy and good governance. Leadership prizes serve no purpose other than to illustrate paternalism and disdain for Africa and, perhaps, the need to award some egos some importance at a world level. Africa gave Mo Ibrahim his wealth and he is giving back a tiny part of his profit to selected individuals who do not actually need his money.