

Leadership in Pre-Colonial Africa: A Case Study of Sundiata Keita (Mari Jata) C. 1217-1255 and Mansa Musa Keita (Kankan) C. 1312-1337 of Mali

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Abstract: Africa is one of the continents in the world that is bedeviled with leadership challenges since the colonial era. Prior to the colonial era, African states that were independent and sovereign of each other had visionary leaders who piloted the affairs of their domains to enviable heights. These crop of leaders were determined to protect and preserve the territorial integrity of their kingdoms. In recent years, leadership is categorized as one of the bane of Africa underdevelopment. This paper therefore examines leadership in pre-colonial Africa with reference to Mansa Sundiata Keita and Mansa Musa of Mali Empire. The researchers generated the needed data through primary and secondary sources of information. The interdisciplinary approach was also adopted in generating data for the study. As regards theory, the trait and transformational leadership theories were adopted to guide our study. From the analysis it was observed that the pre-colonial societies of Africa had good leaders who were committed to empire building, development, rule of law, equity and fairness amongst others. Furthermore, the paper revealed that Mansa Sundiata and Mansa Musa were visionary leaders who contributed through their selfless service to the growth and development of Mali Empire. Both leaders made significant impact that could serve as lessons for modern African states. The paper therefore recommends nostalgia by modern African leaders to the pre-colonial era and to emulate the leadership qualities of our past heroes.

Keywords: Leadership, Pre-colonial, Africa, Mansa Sundiata, Mansa Musa.

1. INTRODUCTION

Africa is grappling with leadership challenges since the colonial era of her history. Prior to the colonial period leadership in most African Kingdoms states and Empires was characterized by commitment, dedication, passion, equity and fairness selflessness, rule of law, abhorrence of corruption amongst others. Pre-colonial African leaders were determined to protect her citizenry (subjects) against external aggression and to ensure development and equitable distribution of resources.

However, during the colonial era, the contact African societies had with European powers instituted greed, corruption, exploitation, racial (ethnic) discrimination, marginalization, uneven development and above all class distinction and struggle. The Amalgamation of kingdoms, states and the introduction of alien administrative structures and policies marked the genesis of leadership problems in Africa. European powers used alien system to incorporate African leaders to the administration of the colonial states. This again entangled the hitherto selfless leaders into the corrupt administrative system of the colonial governments.

As the educated elites felt they were not incorporated into the colonial administration they agitated for equal representation and later self rule. In their effort to participate in the colonial administration, they were caught in the web of corruption, ethnicity, greed, marginalization, nepotism, domination, selfish service, exploitation, racial and class segregation amongst others. The more they made effort to pull out the deeper they involved in the corrupt practices of the colonial government.

After independence, one would have expected African leaders to build egalitarian and corrupt free societies. On the contrary, African leaders in the early years of independence inherited the colonial state and all the administrative structures that were anti-people. They took over the leadership of their independent states and continued in the acts of exploitation, corruption, greed, ethnic sentiments, nepotism, exploitation, selfish service, class struggle amongst others. This has over the years resulted to the underdevelopment of African states, making Africa the home of underdevelopment, weak political, economic and social structures and a continent.

This was not the case of the pre-colonial states of Africa. In ancient Mali Empire, Mansa Sundiata and Mansa Musa provided leadership that accelerated the growth and development of the Empire. Both exhibited qualities of leadership that are worthy of emulation by modern African states. It is against this background that this paper examines leadership in pre-colonial Africa with emphasis on Mansa Sundiata and Mansa Musa of Mali and the lessons modern African states can derive from their experiences. The work employed the use of primary and secondary sources of information to generate data for the study. The trait and transformational leadership theories were adopted to guide our study.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper adopts two theories; traits theory by Gordon Allport and transformational leadership theory by James Marcgregor Burns and Bernard M. Bass. The trait theory propounded in the 1930's-1940 believes that people are either born or are made with certain qualities that will make them excel in leadership roles. That is, certain qualities such as intelligence, sense of responsibility, creativity and other values puts anyone in the shoes of a good leader. The trait theory of leadership focused on analyzing mental, physical and social characteristic in order to gain more understanding of what is the characteristic or the combination of characteristics that are common among leaders (Ritzer, 2000). This theory in relation to our study on pre-colonial leadership in Africa, brings to lime light the leadership styles of Mansa Sundiata and Mansa Musa of Mali. Both leaders exhibited intelligence sense of responsibility, creativity, charisma, military prowess, dedication to duty and other values. They were either born as in the case of Mansa Sundiata or made as in the case of Mansa Musa. The individual qualities they acquired made them to succeed as leaders in ancient Mali Empire.

On the other hand, the transformational leadership theory propounded in the 1970s states that a person interacts with others and is able to create a solid relationship that results in a high percentage of traits that will later result in an increase of motivation both intrinsic and extrinsic in leaders and followers. This implies that inspirational nature and charismatic personality's rules and regulations are flexibly guided by group norms. These attributes provided a sense of belonging for the followers as they can easily identify with the leader and its purpose (Ritzer, 2000).

In the case of Mali Empire, both Mansa Sundiata and Mansa Musa created a solid relationship with the followers which motivated them to follow. They provided an enabling environment for societal growth. They allowed the rule of law to prevail and also provided the basic necessities of life. The result was a cordial relationship between the leadership and followership which is a mirage in Modern African States.

The Emergence of Ancient Mali Empire (800-1550):

The founders of Ancient Mali Empire were Mandingo a Negro group from Mandinke, which was situated around the Senegal and Niger plateau region of present day West Africa. The Mandingo people were formally part of Ancient Ghana Empire. This corroborates with the fact that in history the fall of one kingdom, is the rise of another. The region occupied by Ancient Mali Empire was predominantly savannah with two major seasons (rainy and dry seasons) with the later (dry season) being the longer due to absence of numerous creeks and rivers that could necessitate high rain fall. The two seasons enhanced agricultural and other economic activities in the empire. The Ancient Mali Empire was very rich in mineral resources such as gold, salt and copper. It is therefore not surprising that Ancient Mali Empire was a wealthy state and a major centre of commercial activities (Webster & Boahen, 1972, Michael, 2017).

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At the zenith of its power, Ancient Mali Empire extended to the Atlantic Ocean and incorporated an estimated 40-50 million people. The administration of such a vast territory was formidable and relied on the establishment of a government sensitive to the diversity of the land, population and culture and accepting of the indigenous rulers and their customs (www.africa.si.edu, 2016).

It is pertinent to note that the Mandingo people lived in small scattered villages during the period of Ancient Ghana's greatness with agriculture as major economic activities. The nature of the environment encouraged long dry season, this in turn made the region to be prone to drought. It was during one of such drought that the king of Mandingo accepted Islam so that prayers can be offered to Allah to release rain. This led to the establishment of Islam as a state religion in Ancient Mali Empire.

The rulership of the Empire started with Nare Fa also known as Maghan Kon Fatta. Nare Maghan who ruled Kangaba in Mali died and was succeeded by his son Dankaran Touman instead of Sundiata that was prophesied to be king. Sundiata and his mother were later forced out of the throne by king Sumaguru of Susu. The oppressive rule of Sumanguru of Susu made the Mandingo people to seek for Sundiata whose fame and military prowess has gone far and wide to come to their rescue. It was this encounter that led to the emergence of Sundiata who liberated the people and established Ancient Mali Empire (Stride and Ifeka, 1986, emphasis ours).

Political Organization and Administration of the Empire:

The Ancient Mali Empire was very vast. Its vastness cannot be compared to any other West African state within and outside the Sudan. The larger area it covered prompted the kings to adopt a decentralized system of administration throughout the state.

The kingdom was divided into villages, county and provinces. The Mansa was the spiritual and political head of the empire. He controlled the central authority and provinces directly. The king appointed the *Dyamani-tiguis* (province master) and was subject to his oversight. He had the powers to appoint and demote the provincial governors. Although the provinces picked their governors through elections, customs or hereditary, the Mansa had the absolute powers to control the affairs of the provinces (Davidson, 1977).

At the village level, village heads were in charge of their affairs but report to the provincial governors. To exercise his powers across the empire, the Mansa appointed councilors and palace officials some of whom were hereditary while some were by appointment to supervise the affairs of the villages and provinces. However, the vassal states (conquered territories) were indirectly ruled through the control of traditional rulers by Mansa's officials (Stride and Ifeka, 1984). The people paid annual tributes and taxes to the Mansa as a mark of loyalty. Any governor or village head that failed in this responsibility incurred the wrath of the Mansa.

The Economy of Ancient Mali Empire:

According to O'Sullivan (1980), the Mali Empire flourished economically because of trade which was the major source of wealth for the empire. The availability of gold mines made traders from North Africa to visit Mali regularly for business transactions.

With the well-organized tax system, the empire collected taxes for every ounce of gold, copper and salt that entered its borders. Other economic activities include; agriculture, local manufacturing and artisanship. The empire also generated income through payment of annual tributes; war spoils, tolls and gold nuggets. The availability of gold, salt and copper made the empire to be very wealthy. The Mansas fought and conquered gold, salt and copper deposits in order to increase the wealth of the empire. Stride and Ifeka (1984:60) opined that there was no standard currency throughout the empire, but several forms were prominent by regions. The major forms of currencies were gold dust and nuggets, salt and copper.

In order to increase the wealth of the state and to ensure hard work, the kings adopted payment according to revenue generated. The officials were paid according to the revenue they collected. The officials were awarded gold, bracelets, necklaces but the highest award was a pair of trousers. The wider they were the more distinguished and honourable the wearer (Stride and Ifeka, 1984). These awards promoted hard work in the state. Those that were found wanting were dismissed and punished accordingly. In modern African states, similar awards are available but the process of selection has been abused. Political office holders are mostly beneficiaries while those working hard to develop the nation are neglected.

There should be proper way of selecting awardees for excellent performances and punishment for corrupt practices – Hall of Fame and Hall of Shame should be put in place.

The Emergence of Mansa Sundiata Keita as a National Hero:

Prince Sundiata (Sundiata Keita) also known as Mari Jata was born in 20th August, 1190 as the first son of the second wife of King Nare Maghan named Sogolon. Before his birth, prophesy said Sundaïta will be a great ruler but to his parents dread and astonishment, the prince did not have a promising future due to his inability to talk and walk fast. Sundiata according to Stride and Ifeka (1986) did not walk until he was seven years old. However, Sundiata did gain use of his legs and grew strong, commanding respect from his people but his father did not live to see him.

When Maghan died, his weakling son Dankaran Touman succeeded him as king but the powers of the state were in the hands of the Queen mother. This implied that the Queen mother was the “*de facto*” ruler while her son the king was the “*de jure*” king. This arrangement led to serious conspiracy, hatred and oppression in the palace. Let us not forget that prophesy was spoken concerning Sundiata been a great king and the Queen mother (first wife of King Nare Meghan) was not pleased with that. Despite Nare’s wishes to respect the prophesy and put Sundiata on the throne, the son from his first wife Sassouma Berete (Queen mother) was crowned the king. She hated Sundiata and humiliated his mother as a result of the prophesy that Sundiata will reign as king over her son (Buah, 1972, Michael, 2017). As soon as Dankaran Touman took over the throne, he and his mother forced the increasingly popular Sundiata into exile along with his mother and two sisters. This was a calculated attempt by the “*de facto*” and “*de jure*” rulers to subvert the will of God which was spoken through prophesy that Sundiata will reign as king (Niane, 1995). It is however expedient to state that the will of God cannot be subverted by any man. Attempts can be made but the will of God which is good will prevail over that of man which is bad. This was the true picture of what played out between Sundiata and his brother with the Queen mother at the centre stage.

As earlier stated, Sundiata eventually gained his legs and speech and developed into a youth with awesome strength, wisdom and skills. He became a good fighter and a hunter which made him the envy on one hand and the handsome groom of the entire kingdom on the other hand. This did not go down well with the Queen mother who vowed never to see them alive. Sundiata and his mother were chased out of the kingdom and they settled at Mema (Stride and Ifeka, 1971). In Mema, their fortune changed as Sundiata became a famous warrior and a lover of many who respected him because of his charisma and bravery. His charisma, bravery, diplomatic skills and military prowess prompted the king of Mema to appoint him his army commander and later Viceroy. The king who was childless named Sundiata his successor. This was to fulfill the prophesy that was said about Sundiata that he will reign as king. However, the prophesy was not for Mema but for Mali Empire. This corroborates with the adage that says “destiny can be delayed but cannot be denied” (Michael, 2017).

As the Sumanguru’s oppressive rule in Kangaba – Niani escalated, the Queen mother was killed and Dankara Touman ran away in 1230 C. This is to say the Queen mother and her son could not rule the people and protect them from the Susu king. In C. 1230, the determination to regain independence by the Kangaba people made them to search for a strong and capable ruler in the person of Sundiata. After many years of oppression, Sundiata was sought out by the Kangaba (Niami) delegation and begged to combat the Sosso and free the kingdom (Boahen, 1976). This was an opportunity fashioned by God for the prophesy to be fulfilled. This attest to the fact that events and circumstances in a state can lead to the emergence of a king with a divine mandate as in the case of Sundiata.

Sundiata who saw the invitation as an opportunity to return to his kingdom and liberate his people mobilized his army and used diplomacy to persuade Mandingo kings to join force with him against the Susu rulers. With the wide acceptability by other kings and his well equipped army and military prowess, Sundiata invaded the Susu people and in C. 1236 he conquered Sumanguru’s army. He captured Susu and in C. 1240 destroyed Kumbi (Stride and Ifeka, 1971). This victory resulted to the fall of Kangaba – Niami kingdom and the emergence of the Ancient Mali Empire. Sundiata was declared “*Faama of Faamas*” and received the title “Mansa” which translates to mean “emperor”. At the age of 18, he gained authority over all the twelve kingdoms in an alliance known as the “Manden Kurufaba”. He was crowned under the throne name Sundiata Keita becoming the first Mandinke emperor and the name Kieta became a clan/family and began its reign (Niane, 1995).

Achievements of Sundiata Keita and Lessons for Modern African States:

The biography of Sundiata has brought to limelight the fact that “there is ability in disability” and that “no condition is permanent”. Judging from the background of Sundiata, one could easily conclude that he was an initial disappointment to his family and that the prophesy was not from God. However, his later years become remarkable as he rose from been a cripple to a strong army commander, diplomat, leader, emperor, warrior with charismatic qualities that earned him the first Mansa or ruler of Mali Empire.

After the war, Sundiata established the Ancient Mali Empire through the wielding of small chiefdoms. He allowed their kings to rule them under his supervision, which created federating units with semi autonomy over their cities with special title and honour to each king. This to a significant extent improved the peaceful co-existence in the state and reduced revolts form vassal states. As a diplomat, he encouraged dialogue, tolerance, unity and peace through the granting of some level of autonomy to conquered territories. This approach to governance is what most African leaders have failed to emulate.

Sundiata after his victory also deem it necessary to build a new capital. He chooses Niami a state near the Niger confluence as his new capital. The idea was to have a more peaceful and secured territory that will be devoid of easy access by aggressors and invaders. He encouraged agriculture, (growing of cotton) controlled the Wangara Gold Fields and diverted the trade to Niami. He was conscious of the fact that vibrant economy is the hallmark of wealth and as such encouraged agricultural activities, salt and gold production, trade and local industries. This eventually resulted to diversification of the economy which is a “mirage” or an economic slogan in Africa. African leaders must as a matter of urgency emulate the economic policies and strategies of Sundiata by encouraging agriculture and local manufacturing. This will promote economic diversification which is a panacea for sustainable economic growth and development.

Furthermore, Sundiata made excellent laws that sustained peace, equity and justice. He emphasized on the rule of law (equality before the law by all citizens irrespective of position class or ethnic attachment). To this end, defaulters were punished according to offences committed irrespective of their class or status in the state. Since peace is paramount to the corporate or overall existence of the state, Sundiata through the rule of law promoted peaceful co-existence. This attracted North African merchants and Arabic scholars to Niami. The wealth and prosperity of ancient Ghana Empire was transferred to Mali Empire as a result of relative peace, sound economic laws, policies and rule of law. He established a corruption free society. To achieve this, he led an exemplary lifestyle anchored on contentment and devoid of greed. This is also missing in the leadership of modern African states. Injustice, corruption and greed are the order of the day. African leaders must emulate Sundiata.

In the area of military, Sundiata was mindful of the circumstances that brought him to power and as such, setup an outstanding army, well equipped and disciplined. This was to prevent external aggression and maintain law and order in the state. Sundiata did not use the military as in the case of most African leaders to fight his perceived enemies. He was a just and upright man with a fair sense of judgment considering his background. He was fair to all classes of people in the kingdom.

His death in 1255 was mysterious. There is however very little information regarding the cause of his death but at present, the generally accepted cause of Sundiata’s death is drowning in the Sankarani River where a shrine that bears his name still remains today (*Sundiata-dun* meaning *Sundiata’s deep water*) (Boahen, 1976). Before his death, he conquered a vast area, laid the foundation of Ancient Mali Empire and increased the wealth of the empire (Niane, 1995). He surmounted all the obstacles and challenges of life and emerged one of Africa’s finest and outstanding past rulers. Against all odds, Sundiata became a force to reckon with in African history. It is therefore imperative for us to conclude by saying, “there is ability in disability” and that disability is not a barrier on the pathway to success. With divine intervention, one’s destiny and stolen mandate can be restored and when such occur, we should live for humanity as in the case of Sundiata.

Ancient Mali Empire after Sundiata:

After the death of Sundiata, ancient Mali Empire witnessed the reign of other Mansas. He was succeeded by his son Mansa Uli who reigned from 1255 -1270 and conquered Bambuk and Bondu. His reign ended in serious political disputes, dynastic struggle and misrule. There were 21 known Mansas of the Mali Empire after Sundiata (Mari Djatai) and probably

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about two or three more yet to be revealed (Wikipedia.org, 2016). The following according to Ajayi and Crowder (1989) and Ajayi and Espie (1979) were rulers of Mali Empire:

- The Keita (Djata lineage, 1250-1275)
 - i. Ouali Keita I 1250-1274
 - ii. Ouati Keita (Wati) 1270-1274
 - iii. Bory Keita 1274-1275
- The Court Mansa's 1275-1300
 - i. Mansa Sakoura or Sakura 1255-1300
- The Kolonkan Keita lineage
 - i. Mansa Mamadi Keita 1300-1309
 - ii. Mansa Abubakiri Keita II 1310-1311
- The Laye Keita lineage
 - i. Musa Keita I (Mansa Musa) 1312-1337
 - ii. Mansa Suleiman Keita 1341-1360
 - iii. Mansa Mari Djata Keita II 1360-1374
 - iv. Musa Keita II 1374-1387
 - v. Maghan Keita II 1387-1389
- The Obscure lineage 1389-1545

According to Fage (1969) the empire lasted until 1670 after the conquest of Niami and of all the rulers that reign after Mansa Ouli, the son of Sundiata, Sakura the chief of slaves in Mali (1285-1300) made significant impact. Mansa Sakura a slave chief usurped the throne of Mali. He conquered Gao the capital city of Shongai and expanded the territory of the empire. However, Sakura was killed on his way back from Mecca. As clearly stated, other Mansas ruled Mali Empire up to its collapse but for this study, we shall examine Mansa Musa (1312-1337) and his contributions to the growth and development of Mali Empire.

Mansa Musa Keita (Kankan) 1312-1337:

According to Levtzion and Hopkins (2000:39), the first ruler from the Laye lineage was Kankan Musa Keita also known as Mansa Musa. Mansa Musa was one of the first truly devoted Muslim to lead the Mali Empire. He attempted to make Islam the religion of the nobility but kept to the imperial tradition of not forcing it on the people. He also made Eid celebrations at the end of Ramadan a national ceremony. His devotion, dedication and commitment to the Islamic faith made him to study Arabic and could read and write very well. Mansa Musa is one of the greatest and powerful rulers of Ancient Mali Empire. He fought wars of conquest and expanded Mali's supremacy to Timbuktu and Gao in 1325 and later Walata and Taghaza (Hallet, 1974).

Achievements of Mansa Musa and Lessons for Modern African States:

The first major achievement of Mansa Musa was the Spread of Mali's fame and prestige abroad. Mansa Musa as earlier stated was a devoted Muslim who through his pilgrimage to Mecca between 1324 and 1326 spread the fame of Mali abroad. His visit to Mecca was described as a lavished of wealth (Stride and Ifeka, 1984). Accounts of how many people and how much gold he spent vary. According to Niane (1995) and Stride and Ifeka (1984), he carried with him sixty thousand courtiers and servants and three million worth of gold. He was very generous and extravagant wherever he entered for a Friday *Jumat*. He paid for the building of a new mosque; he spent so much in charity and gifts that he had to borrow gold to pay back home. He gave out so many alms and bought so many things that the value of gold in Egypt and Arabia depreciated for twelve years. When he passed through Cairo, historian al-Maqrizi noted "the members of his

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entourage proceeded to buy Turkish and Ethiopian slave girls, singing girls, and garments, so that the rate of the gold dinar fell by six *dirhams*” (Wikipedia.org, 2016).

According to Alagoa (2006) Ibn Khaldun an Arab scholar described the grand pilgrimage of Mansa Musa consisting of over 12,000 slaves thus;

“He made a pilgrimage in 724/1324. At each halt he would regale us (his entourage) rare foods and confectionary. His equipments furnishings were carried by 12,000 private slave women (*Wasaf*) wearing gown and brocade (*dibaj*) and Yemeni silk. Mansa Musa came from his country with 80 loads of gold dust (*tibr*), each load weighing three *qintars*. In their own country they use only slave women and men for transport but for long journey such as pilgrimage they have mounts”.

This journey advertised the power and wealth of Mali throughout the Islamic world and Europe. This extravagant lifestyle is a true picture of present day African leaders. For a leader to have embarked on a pilgrimage with such amount of wealth and borrowed money to return home was madness. He was a corrupt leader who did not consider the implications of such journey to the economy of the empire. No wonder the empire suffered serious financial challenges after his reign which among other factors contributed to the fall of the empire.

He developed friendly relations with North Africa and this sustained the wealth of Mali. The friendly relations encouraged trade and diplomatic ties between Mali and North Africa. This was a welcome development and worthy of emulation by African leaders as no state can develop in isolation. African (West African) leaders should establish strong trade relations with other African states to promote economic growth and development. The ugly trend in South Africa (Xenophobic attacks) where citizens from other African states such as Nigeria are attacked on daily basis is not healthy for the continent. African leaders must create friendly relations with their neighbours to promote peaceful co-existence and sustainable development.

Mansa Musa propagated Islam in Mali. He made Islam a state religion and Islamic laws and tenets were observed throughout the empire. Furthermore, he encouraged and promoted Islamic education. His subjects travelled overseas to study while Islamic scholars from North Africa and Saudi Arabia were employed in Mali. Timbuktu became a famous centre of Islamic scholarship in the world (Stride and Ifeka, 1984). It is imperative to categorically state that “by the end of Mansa Musa’s reign, the Sankore University had been converted into a fully staffed university with the largest collections of books in Africa since the library of Alexandria. The Sankore University was capable of housing 25,000 students and had one of the largest libraries in the world with roughly 1,000,000 manuscripts (Fage, 1969).

This was a major achievement of Mansa Musa as he was conscious of the fact that education is the bedrock of every society. He did not only build the university, he staffed and equipped it to a global standard. The university was a major source of foreign income earning for Mali. In Modern African States, the universities are hardly ranked among the best in the world. African students travel overseas to study while our universities are underfunded. If Mansa Musa could build and equip the Sankore University with over one million manuscripts, why can’t modern African states do same? The lesson of history is to serve as compass to the future, therefore African leaders should emulate the legacies of Mansa Musa. In the area of religion, Mansa Musa did not use religion to destabilize his empire as in the case of most African states that leaders use religion to divide their countries. Religious sentiment is the order of the day in African states and politics is mixed with religion making it very volatile. If this trend continues, so many African states will be thrown into serious religious crises in the near future.

According to Stride and Ifeka, (1984) and Tageepera (1979) Mansa Musa also promoted architecture as he employed the services of experts to build magnificent structures in Mali. Prominent among them was Es-Saheli who built a magnificent palace for him. He consolidated on the efforts of his predecessors to build a strong and formidable empire. The level of civilization of Mali Empire could be summarized by the records of Ibn Battuta as thus;

“The Negroes possess some admirable qualities. They are seldom unjust, and have a greater abhorrence of injustice than any other people. There is complete security in their country. Neither traveler nor inhabitant in it has anything to fear from robbers or men of violence” (Alagoa, 2006 and Davidson, 1977).

When Ibn Battuta arrived in Mali in July 1352, he found a thriving civilization at par with virtually anything in the Muslim or Christian world (Hamilton, 1929). If this description of Mali Empire is anything to go by, then what went wrong that today Africa is described as a backward part of the globe? Our leaders must rise to the challenge of building nations that can compete politically, economically and socially in the League of Nations. African states have all it takes (human and natural resources) to develop. All we need is strong and dedicated leadership and followership as in the case of Mali Empire. At this juncture, it is expedient to highlight the factors that contributed to the rise and fall of Mali Empire.

Factors that contributed to the Rise of Mali Empire:

The power vacuum created by the fall of Ghana Empire provided ample opportunity for the emergence of Mali Empire. Other factors that contributed to the rise of the empire are; the brilliant and able leadership of Sundiata, Mansa Musa and other notable leaders of the empire, Leadership and followership are fundamental to the growth and development of empires and theocratic system of government anchored on Islamic laws. Islam was a major factor of growth in Mali Empire. Islam also served as a uniting force. Furthermore, the use of diplomacy, equity and fairness to control the vassal states which reduced tension and struggles for independence, the adoption of the rule of law and effective maintenance of law and order in the state, robust economy anchored on trade, agriculture, local industries and other sources of wealth such as annual tributes, taxes, war spoils, the diversified nature of the economy sustained growth and development of the empire, outstanding and well equipped military. The leaders were conscious of security and protection of lives and properties in the state. They were also mindful of external attacks and revolt hence the establishment of an outstanding army at all times. Well organized and structured political system with well defined roles such as village heads, provincial governors, task collectors, and the king also contributed to the rise of the kingdom (Stride and Ifeka, 1984).

Factors that Contributed to Weakness and Eventual Collapse of Mali Empire:

Dynastic struggles and political instability within the empire, secession disputes usually result to instability and revolts especially by vassal states, absence of clearly defined secession procedure in the state which created room for instability at the end of each rule and the personal ambition of some royal men and servants to usurp power. The emergence of Sakura as Mansa was due to his ambition and the opportunity created due to absence of clearly defined secession procedure. The weakness of some Mansas to rule the state which prompted vassal states to revolt and struggle for independence e.g. The Bamana Jihad, Manden division amongst others, struggles by vassal states to regain freedom which was as a result of excess taxation and decline of imperial wealth and power e.g the fall and sack of Niamey in 1670, internal struggles, disunity and poor economy weakened the powers of the state to withstand her enemies, Royal bankruptcy and corruption also contributed to the fall of the empire. For instance, the ostentatious living and extravagant lifestyle of Mansa Musa and other kings negatively affected the economy of the state (Buah, 1974, Fage, 1969, Stride and Ifeka, 1984).

3. CONCLUSION

The case of ancient Mali Empire as examined shows that leadership is very vital in the overall development of any society. At inception, the political struggle and manipulations that led to the emergence of Dankaran Touman as the *de jure* king and the Queen's mother as the *de facto* king led to leadership failure in the state and also provided the opportunity that led to the conquest of the Mandingo state by Sumanguru (the Susu king). As the people yearned for leadership, they found Sundiata fit. He was invited and through his military prowess and diplomatic skills, he conjured the Susu king and established the ancient Mali Empire. He provided leadership for the kingdom by uniting all the smaller principalities; ensuring equity and fairness, rule of law, abhorrence of corruption and greed and above selfless in the pursuit of his vision. Mansa Musa built on the already established Empire and made Mali one of the renowned kingdoms of the time. However, he had shortcomings especially the lavished pilgrimage to Mecca that crippled the economy of the state. His consciousness of the fact that education is the bed rock of every society made him to build one of the best universities.

Modern African states and leaders are grappling with issues of leadership which is identified as one of the factors militating against the development of the continent. African leaders should therefore learn from the experiences of Mansa Sundiata and Mansa Musa of Mali. They should abhor corruption, ethnicity, greed, marginalization, class struggle, nepotism, religious bigotries, and exploitation of the weak by the strong, inequality, abuse of the rule of law. They should embrace unity, peace, equity and fairness, rule of law amongst others. Strict adherence to the above will lead to unimaginable sustainable development of the continent.

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