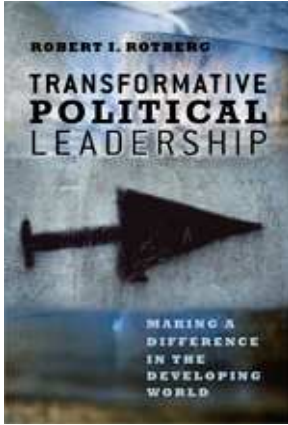


## Robert T. Rotberg's *Transformative Political Leadership: Making a Difference in the World*



A review of *Transformative Political Leadership: Making a Difference in the World* by Robert T. Rotberg (London, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012, pp. 217. ISBN: 13978-0-226-728995) by Uzoechi Nwagbara (uzoechin@yahoo.com) of Greenwich School of Management, London, UK.

*Transformative Political Leadership: Making a Difference in the World* is a book by Robert Rotberg, a seasoned and world acclaimed authority on political leadership particularly in developing countries. Rotberg's contribution to leadership studies – particularly political leadership in developing countries – is well-known. He is responsible for the creation of sterling leadership institutions in Africa and around the world, most notable is the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, which was inaugurated in 2006 to help foster good governance and wholesome leadership in Africa. With over two dozen books on leadership and governance, Rotberg, is President emeritus of World Peace Foundation and a leading expert on transformational leadership. Rotberg served as director of Harvard University's programme on Intrastate Conflict, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution (1999-2010); he is no stranger to how leadership can advance good governance, transformational leadership and ethical politics that would bring needed change in Africa, developing nations and the rest of the world.

Warren Bennis, a leading authority on leadership, once stated in his *On Becoming a Leader* (1989) that "leadership is like beauty: it's hard to define, but you know it when you see it" (p. 1). Similarly, in their article "Romancing Leadership: Past, Present and Future", published in *The Leadership Quarterly*, Bligh, Kohles and Pillai (2011) corroborated the idea that the phenomenon of leadership is a mystery. Although every *au courant* leadership scholar appreciates that leadership is enmeshed in definitional welter, but there is no gainsaying the fact that whenever good leadership is at work, we notice it. To this end, in Rotberg's *Transformative Political Leadership: Making a Difference in the World*, he makes a conscious effort to educate his readers that good leadership can be used to transcend inept governance and selfish political experimentation. The style of leadership that comes with positive change, transformation and good governance dovetails with what Rotberg called "committed leadership" (p.1). In fleshing out this leadership style, Rotberg stresses the importance of positive leader-follower dynamic, which is a harbinger of transformative leadership. In this frame, political leadership particularly in developing countries should be viewed by leaders as mere service, not an opportunity to pursue selfish ends. So, political leadership

[...] is a strategy for turning visions into reality and charting a way forward to a promising future, access to improving prospects, and a programme for ensuring economic growth and material and human uplift ... (p. 1).

The above leadership style chimes with selfless political leadership that Mandela echoes in *Conversations with Myself* (2010) that characterises his leadership architectonics in South Africa. It is a leadership paradigm that stems from the Greenleafian servant-leadership schemata, that is, service to the people, as well as a dogged responsibility by a leader to empower, defend, and fend for his followers.

In corroborating the dialectics of people-oriented as well as transformative politically leadership, Rotberg extends the confines of this mode of governance by making allusion to great and popular world leaders like Franklin Delano Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, Mohandas K. Gandhi, George Washington and Winston Churchill, whose selfless service to humanity give their leadership style the stamp of trust, transformation, motivation, morality, legitimacy, social capital and “the enlarged enterprise” (p. 35), a metonymy for “extended enterprise” or stakeholder relationship. This pattern of leadership is in consonance with social justice, equity, service, fairness, collective participation and collegial leadership. Also, in contrasting transactional (anti-people) *modus operandi* of leadership to transformational/transformational (pro-people) political leadership, Rotberg says “when responsible leaders translate their vision into comprehensive ... programmes of action ... such political leaders usually operate in a manner that is called *transformational* as contrasted to *transactional* (p. 22, original italics). It is in the spirit of transformative leadership style that political leadership in developing nations can transcend the “Big Men” (p. 29) syndrome “that turns democrats into despots” (Rotberg, 2003, p. 32).

Under the rubric of service to humanity and giving leadership a human face, Robert Rotberg’s avers thus:

Leaders even help signally to guide their people into or out of poverty... Leaders help to overcome geographical, climatic, and resource limitations ... Research shows a predisposition for and against taking up the leadership baton. Some were born to lead – born with ‘an innate set of skills that makes us good candidates for directing a group of people towards a goal’. Moreover, research reveals that genes predispose not only to lead but also to whether the ambition to lead is achieved, and sometimes at what level (p. 7).

It is the confusion about what constitutes good leadership that the book intends to clarify both theoretically and practically. Thus, the book is intended to transcend various theories and persuasions on good political leadership in developing nations ranging from traits theory, behavioural theory, contingency theory to “New Theories of Leadership” Hay and Hodgkinson (2006, p. 145). With the above in mind, leadership as articulated in the book under review is about vision of better life for a leader’s followers.

In order to achieve good, transformational and visionary political leadership, Rotberg has identified key issues used as barometer for gauging transformative leadership in developing countries; they find expression in the following factors: then nature of political leadership, governance arrangement, political culture and inclusive political participation process.

The above analysis sings from the same songbook as Claude Ake's (1981) dissection of building and empowering people in Africa – particularly Nigeria through building people-centred and populist-oriented political structures.

*Transformative Political Leadership* is a book of 217 pages with 7 chapters excluding sections on Introduction, Notes, Pages and Indices. Apart from the prefatory note that offers a taste of the concept leadership in the context of good governance in developing nations, the book starts with a theoretical and foundational discourse on political leadership demarked within the nodal points of governance, political culture and political institutions. As a book on the nature of (political) leadership in developing countries, Rotberg takes us on a roller coaster of Africa's macabre political leadership landscape by using Nelson Mandela of South Africa and Seretse Khama of Botswana as case studies; he uses Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore as examples to navigate the grisly Asia's political leadership topography; and Kemal Ataturk of Turkey is used to instantiate the Euroasian facet of study in exemplary and transformative leadership style.

To this end, Rotberg uses Mandela's unparalleled leadership qualities, which are pinned down to "consummate inclusionist" (p. 40) hypothesis to compare other political leadership models in Africa that are rather premised on pauperising the people. This is in sync with what Claude Ake, the foremost African political economist, called the democratisation of disempowerment. In the same train of thought, Rotberg uses the phrase "resolute democrat" (66) for Seretse Khama of Botswana to show Khama's commitment to bring democracy in his country. The phrase "systematic nation-builder" (p. 91) is used for Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore to depict his sterling leadership style that unites rather than divides; and for Kemal Ataturk of Turkey, Rotberg, considers him as an "uncompromising moderniser" (p. 119), whose political leadership should be emulated for a modern and better Euroasian politics.

Although a powerfully written book by one of the world's greatest writers on political leadership, the book is punctuated by sanctimonious adumbration of leadership purism. The book fails to appreciate that sometimes, what constitutes good political leadership is contingent on social facts at hand, which can derail a leader's vision of transformative leadership. Be that as it may, the book is another add-on to rare books on political leadership in developing countries.

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