

Ghostbusting

Bhekinkosi Moyo notes with concern the return of some of Africa's ghosts and hopes that they can, once and for all, be put to rest

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Africa has made tremendous political and economic strides over the last years. And yet, rather unceremoniously, there is a resurgence of Africa's ugly past, particularly in the political and governance arenas.

No doubt there are many challenges confronting the continent (security, the global economic melt-down, environmental concerns and disease, to name but a few), but more disturbing is the return of Africa's ghosts to hinder the consolidation of development and good governance. Two of the ghosts haunting Africa that need urgent exorcising are the return of the military and the misuse of religion.

The military is back – from Mauritania to Madagascar; Guinea Bissau to Guinea Conakry. The recent months have awakened us to the realisation that Africa's unhappy spirits were never laid to rest in the first place.

The declaration of a coup in Madagascar by Andry Rajoelina early in January prompted the AU to move their annual Heads of State Summit from Antananarivo to Sirte, Libya. Mauritania is also no stranger to coups – indeed it would appear that the international community's condemnation and the suspension of the country from the AU has not deterred renegade army generals from staging further coups.

When Lansana Conté – Africa's veteran strongman – died in December 2008, Guineans thought the worst was over. But no sooner had they breathed a sigh of relief when Captain Moussa Dadis Camara toppled the government and established a governing council that will rule until December 2010. Paradoxically, some sections of Guinean society have pinned their hopes on the military following decades of misrule and underdevelopment.

In Guinea Bissau, the assassinations of the former defence minister, Hélder Proença, and presidential

candidate Baciro Dabo – following the gruesome murder of President João Bernardo Vieira – upped the political ante. And in Gabon, peace is unlikely to follow President Omar Bongo's death.

Clearly these are signs of the looming dangers in Africa's political landscape. If not cleansed, these demons will further damage the image of Africa, with serious implications for the investment and business environment.

A friend once asked if soldiers go to church. I could not answer him. But what I can say is that in some countries, religion – particularly Christianity and Islam – are being abused once again. In some countries there seem to be unwritten rules that if the president is Christian, then the deputy president ought to be Muslim, and vice versa.

The rise of religion in politics manifests itself through different ethnicities. So powerful are these that they decide who gets elected, and who does and doesn't get appointed to certain positions in government.

Although religion has always been politicised, its influence is on the increase once again. Some churches invite presidential candidates to campaign at their pulpits and, as history will attest, some religions have backed politicians even to the extent of pursuing undemocratic practices.

The return of the military and the dangerous mixing of religion and politics are demons that must be exorcised immediately if Africa is indeed to progress towards sustainable development and a situation where her citizens will be free from fear and want.

Political and religious leaders must rise to the challenge and curb these resurgent forces. The current global economic downturn and governance recession present opportunities for Africa to walk in union towards an integrated value system and work ethic. These living ghosts must die – never to rise again.

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