2 *Academic understandings of transformative leadership*

Tarryn De Kock and Sharlene Swartz

Overview

There are a number of ways in which transformative leadership as a framework and praxis encompasses and diverges from classical leadership theory, not least in that transformative leadership is concerned not only with how leaders behave, but also with the impact that they have on fostering social change and social justice. This chapter provides an overview of transformative leadership as a working concept, tracing its origins in scholarship and the contributions made by critical scholars in its development. Moving from a global to a regional focus, it then maps some of the key insights from African scholars concerned with leadership for social change and renewal. The review finds resonance between African theories of humanity and global theories and practices of transformative leadership.

Introduction

The notion of transformative leadership sits at the core of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program, which aims to ensure that a new generation of graduates takes its place in African and global society in complex and uncertain times. But what is meant by the term 'transformative leadership', especially given the many ways of understanding and operationalising leadership practices, programmes, and interventions? There are numerous ways in which transformative leadership as a framework and praxis encompasses and diverges from classical leadership theory. This review presents an overview of the landscape of academic literature on transformative leadership along with its allied ideas.

The parameters of this review

Using a range of accessible databases (JSTOR, EBSCOHost, ProQuest, Elsevier, SAGE, Taylor & Francis, Sabinet, and African Journals Online), a literature search was conducted between December 2020 and February 2021, initially limited to articles from 1950 to the present and then in a second sift, with further restrictions, for articles published in the past 25 years. The criteria used in the two sifts are described in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 *Criteria for review content*

Criteria	First sift	Second sift
Publication type	Journals, books, grey literature	Journals and books, with grey literature used only in a designated subsection of the review
Publication period	1950 to present	1995 to present
Location	Everywhere	Everywhere, with a special focus on the Global South and Africa
Content focus	Leadership theories Transformational leadership Transformative leadership	Transformative leadership
Search terms	Transformative leadership Leadership theory Forms of leadership Leadership philosophy Transformational leadership Education leadership Freire leadership Shields leadership	(same list as first sift with expanded search terms below) Leadership Africa African higher education leaders Transformative leadership in Africa Social justice leadership in Africa Progressive leaders in Africa

The first sift aimed at establishing a broad picture of the available literature on transformative leadership, as well as historicising it in relation to general leadership theory and key shifts in academic and social discourse. High-quality resources enabled an informal third sift to be done by sampling references from the bibliographies of the initial literature sample, and sourcing them from databases including journal websites, Academia.edu, and Researchgate.

The second sift sharpened the literature focus in at least two ways. First, the literature period was reduced to 25 years (1995 to the present), with a spotlight on literature from 2005 onwards, given the pivotal impact of Shields' 2010 paper (discussed below) articulating transformative leadership as a theory for education. Second, a deeper effort was made to find literature from the Global South, and from Africa in particular. This included expanding the search terms to include 'progressive', 'ethical', and 'social justice' forms of leadership. A paucity of literature on transformative leadership in Africa does not indicate its absence, but that a more nuanced approach to sourcing appropriate literature is required, given the continent's intellectual history of work on leadership and transformation.

In total, 93 articles and books were reviewed. Less than half made it through to the second sift, for reasons including poor conceptual clarity of the leadership theory in use, inaccurate understanding of transformative leadership, and lack of relevance to the main research focus.

It became apparent that 'transformational' and 'transformative' are often used interchangeably, especially in literature from the African continent. Linguistic and theoretical differences may inform how scholars deploy these terms as

conceptual categories. This was one of the factors influencing the decision to expand the search terms for the second sift, and to mine the source bibliographies for additional literature.

Academic scholarship on transformative leadership

It is useful to define leadership before differentiating transformative leadership from other theories. Amanchukwu, Stanley, and Ololube (2015) developed a general definition of leadership as the achievement of designated ends through influencing and directing others, charting a course, identifying a vision, and motivating people towards that shared goal. Bennis and Nanus argue that a leader 'commits people to action…converts followers into leaders, and…may convert leaders into agents of change' (2007, p. 3, cited in Caldwell et al., 2012, p. 176). Leadership, then, is not only about managing operations within an organisation or shared space, but about keeping sight of tomorrow – recognising the value of both individual and collective growth towards a shared goal. In a review of women in leadership, the Mastercard Foundation (2014, p. 3) further defines transformative leadership as '[Making] or influencing positive change and addressing inequity. The concepts of critique and promise are central: transformative leaders see a problem and ask themselves "what can I do?" to solve it'.

A more recent Mastercard Foundation definition is distilled as follows: engaging others in an ethical manner to generate positive and lasting change. If leadership is concerned with executing a vision, transformative leadership is about identifying and operationalising a vision for change that transcends the immediate concerns of a single organisation or group, to considering wider social, political, and material issues. This differentiates it from related theories of leadership, which are discussed briefly below.

Theories of leadership form part of a tradition of attempts to understand the conditions under which structures of human interaction can be effective, successful, and capable of delivering on their core goals. Over time, these theories have shifted from a focus on individuals to interactions, behaviours, and later, strategies, recognising that the nature of human interaction and exchange has become increasingly complex as societies rapidly developed in the last century. For example, the 'Great Man' notion of leadership of earlier political history has given way to more robust, collaborative approaches that recognise the importance of securing participation and cooperation from a more diverse range of stakeholders (McCleskey, 2014; Amanchukwu et al., 2015). These earlier theories hold that leadership is an intrinsic disposition of specific individuals, while later work emphasises the value of relationships, the conduct of leaders and their approach to managing people, and the processes by which they achieve their ends (Burns, 1978; Bass 1985; Amanchukwu et al., 2015; Misra, 2019).

Within this chronology, Burns (1978) introduces a notion of 'transforming leadership' that draws from earlier theories while transcending their focus to incorporate a distinctly moral dimension – one where both leaders and their followers are transformed by their interactions. Bass (1985) extends this work by identifying four mechanisms underlying what he calls 'transformational leadership', distinguishing this from transactional forms of leadership that focused only on narrowly beneficial exchanges between leaders and followers. However, issues of conceptual slippage have continued to impact understandings of leadership with a 'transforming' orientation.

Differentiating between transformational and transformative leadership

Transformative leadership is regularly, but erroneously, conflated with transformational leadership (Shields, 2010; Sun & Leithwood, 2012; Hewitt, Davis, & Lashley, 2014). Both form part of a branch of leadership theory associated with directing change and transformation, in contrast to theory concerned with transactional interactions between leaders and followers in the achievement of particular ends (Hewitt et al., 2014; Amanchukwu et al., 2015). This also corresponds to differences in the hierarchical nature of organisations: transactional leadership approaches require a stronger distinction between leaders and followers, and greater (more vertical) lines of authority and accountability (Weiner, 2003). Horner (1997), importantly, notes the turn towards more collaborative and team-based leadership approaches in recognition of the increasing need for understanding leadership as being process- rather than characteristic-based. By this she means that contemporary work on leadership theory should focus on the social dimension within which leadership occurs, and the coordination of common purpose and action by participants towards a particular end (Horner, 1997).

Transformational and transformative leadership approaches thus recognise the mutually reinforcing agency of all members of an organisation or interest group, and engender dynamic ways of facilitating collaborative and dialogic leadership strategies. While this does not preclude the possibility of distinct leaders emerging, these individuals must necessarily be willing to work with others in a process of mutual learning and planning towards the desired outcome (Weiner, 2003; Amanchukwu et al., 2015; Mouton & Wildschut, 2015).

From the literature, it appears that transformational leadership differs from transformative leadership in that it is primarily concerned with organisational transformation and renewal. Transformational leaders focus on revitalising institutional culture, leading others in the achievement of organisational goals, and enhancing efficiency and effective operation in order to be more competitive and relevant (Sun & Leithwood, 2012; Hewitt et al., 2014; Oberfield, 2014). Caldwell et al. (2012, p. 177), following from Bass (1985), identify four

dimensions of transformational leadership: 'idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration'. These leaders cultivate the four dimensions in their practices so as to motivate team members to identify with and pursue the collective vision. In this way, team members develop and grow their capacities and skills while furthering the aims of the organisation.

While a valuable intervention in the field of leadership theory and practice, transformational leadership does not account for the social, economic, ethical, and material dynamics that may influence, shape, and challenge organisations and their members. Moreover, it does not offer a moral imperative for organisations to contribute to social change, or to conduct their affairs in such a way as to impact society directly. Transformative leadership responds to this gap. Its origins in the world of educational leadership enables transformative leadership theorists to critically identify those ways in which it can directly influence and transform whole school communities, include historically marginalised groups in decision-making processes, and cultivate lasting and progressive social change (Shields, 2010). This does not mean the theory is without its critics, however. As Shields (2010, p. 572) points out, the work of the current generation of transformative leadership scholars will be to demonstrate the causal relationship between transformative leaders and enhanced social, educational, and material outcomes, given that its critics view the theory as 'too idealistic and too demanding… [despite] a considerable body of conceptual work…[and] little empirical research related to transformative leadership'.

Transformative leadership as a concept has circulated within discourses of leadership for several decades, but achieved popular purchase in at least two critical moments. The first, as described by Weiner (2003), occurred through the work of educational theorist and popular educator Paulo Freire. Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux were two critical pedagogy scholars who informed earlier notions of transformative leadership in education (Weiner, 2003). Their understanding of schools as a site of cultural politics has deep resonance with the motivations underpinning transformative leadership theory. Freire's work on education as a site of emancipation and freedom highlighted the need for forms of leadership that would support the renewal and reinvigoration of educational communities. This entails the democratisation of public-school governance to involve all stakeholders, including parents, janitors, and cooks, in the decision-making processes that impact school management (Weiner, 2003). It began from a core understanding that facilitating greater democratic participation and ownership of schools would not occur through existing authoritarian modes of engagement with school communities (Weiner, 2003).

The second critical moment can be found in a ground-breaking article published in 2010, in which Carolyn Shields drew together her research and theory

development from prior works to delineate transformative leadership as a standalone theory of leadership, separate from, for example, 'transformational' or 'servant' leadership. This was an important endeavour, she argued, because of the central role transformative leadership could play in developing education leaders who could create inclusive, progressive, and socially just schools, districts, and systems (Shields, 2010). It was also important for repositioning transformative leadership within the field of education, after some attempts had been made to use it in managerial contexts (Caldwell et al., 2012), as well as to deploy the managerial dimensions of this leadership style back into the public sector (Currie & Lockett, 2007). In this way, Shields echoes Weiner (2003), who holds that transformative leaders must co-create structures that carry and incorporate their vision into something collectively owned and continuously redefined, but always positioned in a way that is critical of unjust structures and values, with a view to dismantling patterns of domination. This goes beyond a 'recipe' of leadership characteristics to encourage us to think carefully about what leaders do.

Shields (2010, p. 562) further develops the notion of transformative leadership by summarising seven attributes emerging from the literature:

> a combination of both critique and promise; attempts to effect both deep and equitable changes; deconstruction and reconstruction of the knowledge frameworks that generate inequity; acknowledgment of power and privilege; emphasis on both individual achievement and the public good; a focus on liberation, democracy, equity, and justice; and finally, evidence of moral courage and activism.

Transformative leadership, then, is leadership committed to unearthing, problematising, and dismantling those structures of power and privilege that act against equity and freedom (Weiner, 2003; Shields, 2010; Odora Hoppers, 2014). It relies on leaders who will be, and create, agents of change who can pursue a vision of a more just and democratic society. What sets it apart from other theories of leadership is the notion of social responsibility that underpins the interaction between 'leaders' and 'followers'. To their followers, transformative leaders may be ethical leaders, or servant leaders, but always with a view towards a higher purpose, that is, social justice. Furthermore, they are not always firmly embedded within traditional horizontal and vertical lines of accountability and authority, given the importance of democratic participation and the co-construction of strategies, interventions, and goals (McNamara, 2010).

The distinctiveness of transformative leadership

The main proponents of transformative leadership have come from Brazil, the United States of America, and the United Kingdom. At least 20 articles are cited in this section, with a further 25 forming part of the review process, accounting

for just over half of the literature reviewed. Insights from the literature suggest that transformative leadership is set apart from other leadership theories in at least two ways.

First, it is fundamentally *outward-looking* – focused on the impact that leaders can make on society through their work in particular organisations and institutions. Second, it is concerned with *agential development* of not only leaders, but their followers and those they serve, with the intention of facilitating and supporting the emergence of any number of individuals capable of serving as leaders in their own right. This deeply democratic orientation shifts away from a hierarchical and static understanding of the work that leaders do, suggesting that successful transformative leaders are capable of having a 'mushrooming effect' on the growth and spread of change agents in society.

On one level, the imbalance in the geographical origin of theoretical work on transformative leadership can be explained by its scholarly origins, given the impact of scholars such as Shields, Freire, and Giroux on the development of the theory and its applications within educational settings. However, the origins of this body of work also provide valuable justification for its use within an African context: in much of the work produced in, for example, the US, issues of race, citizenship, and economic inequality have been foundational concerns in the promotion of transformative leadership. These are not dissimilar from the challenges faced in any number of African states. Of interest to scholars of transformative leadership in Africa should be the specific conditions and challenges that enable and constrain the concept's applicability in local contexts.

Transformative leadership in African contexts

Literature on transformative leadership in Africa (and especially by African scholars) was limited in the context of the search conducted. This is not to say that this body of work is, itself, paltry. Rather, a focus on the term 'transformative leadership' yielded far fewer results than expanding search terms to incorporate the issues that transformative leadership would seek to address.

Amanchukwu et al.'s (2015) work on leadership theory, for example, ends its chronological account at transformational leadership, but the authors do not discount the value of a social consciousness informing practices of leadership, nor do they stop short of highlighting social justice foci in the theories they present. However, they do not foreground a commitment to social justice as a prerequisite for good leadership, nor do they describe theories, styles, or examples where this might be useful.

Despite preceding the work of Amanchukwu et al. (2015), Bell (2001) shows why it is important to distinguish good leadership as a moral and ethical imperative, rather than only an operational one. His research into conceptions

of leadership among vice chancellors at historically Black universities in South Africa demonstrates that strong understanding of their organisational and institutional role as leaders did not always translate into a discerning notion of transformative leadership. Rather, these leaders continued to work within the institutional frameworks inherited from the country's Apartheid past, favouring collegial and internal development processes over a wider commitment to social reform (Bell, 2001). Furthermore, their deployment of endogenous philosophies of communalism, such as ubuntu, focused more on relationships than on social change or benefit. Bell's (2001) findings are certainly dated, given the increasing impact of socioeconomic inequality on South Africa's higher education landscape – and the need for leaders equipped to deal with these issues substantively – but he offers an important view into what happens when transformative leadership is assumed by virtue of an individual's historic, cultural, and social positionality.

This provided an interesting segue into examples of leadership that have been hailed for their transformative potential within the context of governance and government on the African continent. Endogenous philosophies are regularly deployed to explain or locate good leadership ethics within a contextual frame of reference, but they are also proof of how the political is invested within the personal, and within the ways people behave towards each other. For example, in South Africa, the notion of ubuntu is a regular invocation within the social imaginary; in Kenya, it is *harambee*; and in Zimbabwe, *hunhu*. The review has made the argument that these philosophies have different features but share a common core in their values of mutual interdependence, collaboration, and striving for a sense of shared common good. Another example can be found in East Africa: *gada*, which fuses the political, philosophical, and cosmological dimensions of society within the Oromo ethnic group.

Gada *as an African concept contributing to social reconstruction*

Similar to the way that ubuntu was deployed as a sort of national ethic during the transition from Apartheid in South Africa, *gada* has been hailed for its potential as a tool for peacebuilding and social reconstruction in the ongoing conflict between the Oromo people and the Ethiopian government (Debisa, 2022). A complex history underpins the relationship between the Oromo and Ethiopia, and Jalata (1996) describes this as a colonising relationship wherein indigenous Oromo institutions, knowledge, and practices were deliberately smashed in order to facilitate their oppression and incorporation into the then Ethiopian Empire. Jalata's historicisation of the field of Oromo studies provided an important source of context for the review of resources on *gada*.

On one level, the *gada* system is a form of republican governance supported by the division of Oromo society into age- and generation-based peer groups (Jalata, 1996; Aliye, 2020; Debisa, 2022). Political succession is determined through

ascension to a particular age stage (from 40 onwards) and is automatically terminated after eight years, with former leaders – known as *Abba Gadaa* – then forming part of the advisory council of the incoming *gada* grade. Checks and balances are ensured through three principles: 'periodic succession, balanced opposition and power sharing' (Jalata, 1996, p. 113). This political and legislative system is supported by the holistic worldview that informs *gada*, which emphasises peace, mutual respect between people and between people and the natural world, and the pursuit of social harmony and care (Shewadeg, 2021; Debisa, 2022).

To analyse the *gada* system in terms of whether it aligns to contemporary theory on transformative leadership would miss the point. The way that endogenous political philosophies are conceived is inextricable from the contexts in which they are located, but the tendency within contemporary scholarship is to define them abstracted from these specific features, magnifying their positive attributes in a vacuum from the social, political, economic, and cultural factors that are the condition for their possibility. This turns a contextually rich concept into 'a magical bag without a bottom' (Mboti, 2015, p. 129). The case of ubuntu in South Africa is instructive here. Mboti (2015) argues that its application in media, popular culture, and government agenda-setting demonstrates a tendency to convey African communitarian ethics as 'fated', as a natural feature of African endogenous societies, something that already exists and needs only to be unearthed.

Pursuing collective humanity and mutual well-being

It makes more sense to recognise that the similarities these endogenous philosophies share is an *ongoing pursuit of the expansion of collective humanity and mutual well-being*. Different cultures and communities have historically found diverse ways of resolving the question of a just society within the terms and structures that are particular to their physical, ecological, and political location, and these diverse solutions have much to offer our contemporary understanding of transformative leadership. Inasmuch as theory enables us to collapse this diversity into neat descriptions of 'democracy', 'communalism', and other frames of reference, it also flattens the unique features that enable these philosophies to continue to have purchase centuries after their origination.

Temple (2012) makes a strong case for this position when he argues that beneath the surface of everyday and contemporary conflicts, there are real and deep metaphysical conflicts that remain unaddressed, and which sit at the root of the contradictions and failures of leadership on the African continent. He defines a metaphysical conflict as '[any] incongruity that exists within the layer of deeply held beliefs (about the nature of the world and our relationship with it), which affects our decisions and actions in real life' (Temple, 2012, p. 49). While Temple's argument is pessimistic in its treatment of African leadership, it makes the critical point that an ongoing and unresolved tension exists between endogenous

and precolonial social structures which have been overlaid, shaped, and contested by the colonial and postcolonial state. The denial of this complexity also belies the competing claims to obligation, loyalty, and service that result. In Temple's view, this produces a 'fragmented metaphysics', where the African state is required to meet competing claims to belonging, deserving and accountability, both by necessity and historical design. Where, for example, corruption may be explained in terms of clan, ethnic, or religious loyalties – suggesting that these are contradictory to the values of liberal democracy – this in fact highlights the outcomes of such a fragmented metaphysics wherein notions of loyalty, accountability, and service compete for dominance within the political and social sphere (Temple, 2012).

> Apart from the fact that the creation of the nation state had a bitter history and necessarily diminished the powers of individual ethnic groups, the new nation state did not offer emotional and social security. It lacked real metaphysical significance. (Temple, 2012, p. 55)

Temple's work is a provocation to think differently about politics in the African state and the assumptions that are regularly made about how it should function. While his work follows the critique by Mboti (2015) of reducing African group belonging and identities to essences, it thoroughly articulates the challenge of leadership-in-relation-to, that is, the competing allegiances that leaders in complex societies have to negotiate and counterbalance when the state is the major source of access to resources and power. This is not to suggest that clan, ethnic, or other group belonging represents a threat to a cohesive state and effective leadership, but that the 'national good' and a sense of collective responsibility will generate friction. The more personal and localised forms of group belonging offer security that the state either will not or cannot offer. Reconciling and inclusively fostering this foundation of a universal form of security and belonging, without negating the particular, is the only viable pathway out of such a situation.

Positionality as a robust driver of transformative leadership

Finding more rigorous ways of using cultural resources can significantly inform and localise transformative leadership practices. Magoqwana (2019) advocates for the incorporation of African philosophies and idioms to inform leadership in higher education, in particular referencing an idiom of motherhood called *inimba*, loosely translated from isiXhosa as 'birthing pains', but extended to mean the process of giving, sustaining, and enabling life. As an idiom of institutional leadership, *inimba* foregrounds an ethic of care towards the vulnerable – in particular poor, historically disadvantaged students and vulnerable staff – and works to manage and transcend their precarity. In this sense it is unquestionably embedded in transformative leadership: *inimba* recognises struggle, inequality,

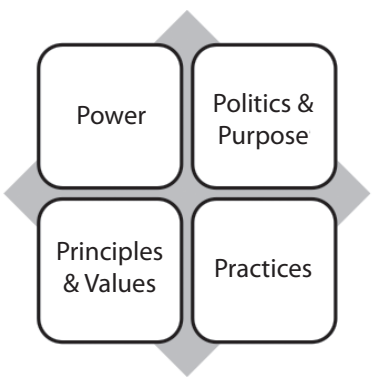
and challenge in the making of student experience, and provides an alternative leadership practice that emphasises student inclusion, success, and dignity.

Women-centred approaches to transformative leadership have also emerged in the work of NGOs such as Oxfam. Brown, Ekoue, and Goodban (2019) discuss the implementation of Transformative Leadership for Women's Rights (TLWR), a framework designed to address historic imbalances in the role of local women in development programmes. This approach recognises the scalar nature of social change, and the relative alienation of local women and their organisations from centres of power. In their study, Brown et al. (2019) argue that this requires both the problematisation and transformation of Oxfam as an organisation, alongside ongoing work at the grassroots level to identify and address contextual challenges. Furthermore, TLWR requires deeper engagement with the very notion and practice of leadership, given the impact that women's daily work and responsibilities may have on their effective participation in decision-making processes.

Encouraging collaboration, using informal spaces and networks, and supporting organic organisational structures are some of the most useful strategies that Brown et al. (2019) identify in the course of their work. The role of stakeholders such as NGOs should also shift from broker or intermediary to a facilitator of greater interaction, dialogue, and participation between the state and ordinary citizens. This would be transformative leadership in action.

In the case of Batliwala's (2008) work, operationalising leadership skills must also be understood within the particular power dynamics and constraints that act upon individuals and groups, impacting their ability to take up space, claim legitimacy, and challenge authority. To this end, Batliwala (2008) developed a framework of feminist leadership which differentiates between *feminine* and *feminist* leadership, noting that not all instances of women in leadership are inherently feminist or transformative, even while it is still important to

Figure 2.1 *The Four Ps Framework*



Source: Batliwala, 2008, p. 15

advocate for greater representation and voice for women's rights and issues. For leadership to be feminist in its orientation, it needs to meet the Four Ps framework (Figure 2.1).

Batliwala developed a rich theoretical understanding of the meaning of these four concepts for transformative feminist leadership which relates to some of the issues raised in this review. Feminist leadership must render *power* visible while articulating new modes of sharing and distributing power that destabilise how leadership is conceptualised, who is considered a leader, whose voice matters, and whose priorities are allowed to shape the transformative agenda (Batliwala, 2008). *Principles and values* underpin the practice of leadership by explicitly articulating the 'non-negotiable' factors that frame how leaders act. Batliwala thus argues for principles and values to be a living instrument of transformative leadership. This is also deeply connected to how leaders understand their *politics and purpose*. For transformative leadership to bring about social change, it needs to be contextually located and responsive, mindful of the political environment in which organisations operate (Batliwala, 2008).

While *practices* is perhaps one of the more essential dimensions of this leadership framework, Batliwala (2008, p. 28) cautions against overemphasising the practical dimension of leadership in ways that strip practice of its ideological and normative foundations: '[We] cannot approach skills-building in an instrumental way, or separate them from our ideological position. Skills are not neutral, portable abilities – they are shaped by values and politics'. This critique is particularly valuable to practitioners in leadership development, given that a focus on spreading transformative leadership through skills-focused programmes may neutralise the contextually embedded features of social change.

A question raised in the grey literature review was whether it is possible for leadership to be transformative when enacted by or in collaboration with the state. This is an important issue that gets to the heart of what transformative leadership is 'for'. Both Batliwala (2008) and Domingo et al. (2015) suggest that there are differences between deploying a leadership framework as praxis compared to invoking it with the aim of 'adding colour' to a specific policy focus or intervention. This is not to assume that states cannot operationalise transformative leadership, but that as the concept becomes a more mainstream feature in international development settings, it runs the risk of being emptied of its meaning.

Proponents of transformative leadership recognise the importance of positionality for informing empathy, understanding, and relevance, but should heed Bell's (2001) suggestion that this must be accompanied by a demonstrable passion for social change as well as openness to learning and critique. Transformative leaders must be able to recognise that while their experience should inform and shape their work, it should not be taken as universal, and

should not speak over the experiences of those they serve and collaborate with. What matters is understanding positionality in relation to structures of power, and strengthening collaboration and participation with the aim of undoing and challenging injustice.

Rylander (2010) shares this view in his reflection on the capacity for transformative leadership to take root on the continent. He argues that effective political leadership has been pivotal in arresting potentially explosive situations and redirecting towards stability, economic well-being, and social cohesion, signalling the importance of strengthening continental, regional, and multilateral organisations (and collaborations between them) as a way of developing a clear vision for a prosperous African future. This view is echoed by Olonisakin (2017), who argues that a focus on leadership as a process provides an opportunity to think about how leadership works, what it is for, and who leaders are meant to serve. This is fundamentally about synthesising top-down and bottom-up leadership strategies, recognising that these can be mutually enforcing and complementary.

Transformative leadership as an ethic of humanism

Tshililo (2014) and Odora Hoppers (2014) both provide alternative perspectives of leadership that dovetail with transformative leadership, and Odora Hoppers does reference transformative leadership by name. Her contribution speaks to the importance of 'interrupting cycles of humiliation' (Odora Hoppers, 2014, p. 32) without collapsing into the trap of creating oppositions between the world that is problematised and the world that is desired. Operationalising transformative leadership begins with self-recognition, including recognition of the roles we play in facilitating domination or displacing blame. The metaphor of the 'wounded healer' is core to Odora Hoppers' discussion: the notion that the transformative leader works from a position of intimate knowledge of their own experiences of suffering, loss, or deprivation, and commits to a project of converting suffering into praxis.

Tshililo (2014) extends this by emphasising the role religion could play in the expansion of transformative leadership on the continent. While his work is rooted within a particular kind of Christian ethic, the argument has broader salience for transformative leaders who are committed to service and to dismantling everyday practices of domination and oppression. Tshililo (2014) argues that the Christian idiom provides a framework for recognising the responsibility of leaders towards those who follow or work with them, grounded within a moral and ethical view of the world that closely aligns with critical humanism. In this way, leaders are able to draw on the universalist principles within their own value systems towards achieving greater social inclusion and equity for everyone they serve, including those whose values

and beliefs diverge from theirs. Unfortunately, Tshililo (2014) does not engage extensively with the legacies of religious and cultural conflict on the continent, which would offer further insight into the kinds of approaches transformative leaders could deploy to sensitively manage the tensions and cleavages that exist within diverse societies with complicated histories.

Expanding the search: Social justice, ubuntu, and ethical leadership

Several of the papers reviewed conflated transformative and transformational leadership. By and large, these focused on transformational leadership, with 'transformative' often being used as a synonym rather than a distinct theoretical position. For this reason, the search was expanded to include 'social justice' and 'ethical leadership', considering the ways in which these theories dovetail with the definition of transformative leadership. Bosu, Dare, Dachi, and Fertig (2009) argue that leadership for social justice is integral to the work of school leaders in low-income and marginalised communities, given that a narrow focus on outcomes and accountability might mask the patterns of inequity and privilege at work within the wider system. A moral and ethical focus on leadership 'for whom' and 'for what' enables school leaders to tailor their practice towards the well-being of the wider school community, recognising the central role schools play in socialisation and community support (Bosu et al., 2009). A notable case was a school in Ghana, which was the only one in its region that served hearing-impaired learners. The approach taken by the school principal was to develop strategies to support effective language and sign language acquisition to enable learners to be full members of their local community, and disrupt the taboo around disability that often resulted in their exclusion and marginalisation (Bosu et al., 2009).

Chedondo (2019) suggests that the use of ubuntu as a leadership philosophy is premised on a notion of shared humanity, interdependence, and interconnectivity, where collaboration is an implicit component of its successful application. He argues that '[t]hrough thorough consultations, decisions are taken jointly, hence it becomes easier to own a common vision or destiny…This type of leadership ensures continuity and [consistency] in times of crises and in turn creates stability' (Chedondo, 2019, p. 23).

This is held up as an example of ethical leadership. Chedondo's work focuses on what ethical leadership looks like in a political context, where ethics is understood to be concerned with standards of appropriate conduct, the pursuit of a notion of shared good, and the reasons for doing so. However, his approach does not completely align with a notion of transformative leadership: while the emphasis on ethics is assumed to produce better, more effective leaders, how this occurs is never fully articulated, nor is it clear whether ethical leaders have transformative intent. This is an important distinction to bear in mind given that while different

approaches to ethical and socially just leadership may fall under the framework of transformative leadership, not all of them do. Moreover, the deployment of endogenous philosophies of leadership – such as ubuntu – provides critical cultural and historical context for the values informing transformative leadership in specific contexts, but does not inherently imply that these philosophies are transformative in their own right.

This view is supported by Mayanja (2013), who argues that it is important to synthesise an understanding of endogenous leadership philosophies within the framework of the democratic state, so as not to use these philosophies to justify unethical conduct. This is not because these endogenous philosophies are shallow. Rather, the tendency to deploy quite specific and contextual value systems in relation to the abstract political community has the effect of weakening, and often erasing, the particular social conditions that contribute to their successful implementation. In this way, endogenous philosophies with *transformative potential* are stripped of their progressive value, and held up as constellations of meaning that support oppressive or conservative regimes (Mayanja, 2013). Mayanja thus advocates for rooting the ethic of ubuntu within a clear understanding of rights, obligations, and the appropriate use of power, arguing that these dimensions have always formed part of the application of ubuntu as a praxis in its originating political contexts. She calls this approach 'ethical political leadership for sustainable peace and social justice' (Mayanja, 2013, p. 120).

Walker (2011) also positions ethical leadership as an essential component of sustainable development, speaking specifically of the role of the public service in African states. He defines four contextual roles of public servants that are consistent with the understanding of transformative leadership in his review: '1) the leader of leaders, 2) the servant of leaders, 3) the professional advocate and 4) the steward of quality public service delivery' (Walker, 2011, p. 41). Leaders of leaders stimulate networking and interconnection, drive creativity, and disrupt the status quo. Servants of leaders mentor and support the growth of their team, stimulate the reproduction of a culture of high ethics and high performance, and emphasise the impact of their work on society. Advocates are expected to promote the interests of those they serve; 'focus politicians, citizens and others on the attainment of the public good' (Walker, 2011, p. 59); and chart a vision for a better future. Lastly, stewards must ensure that they maximise resources in responsible ways, ensuring the best outcome for those they serve and maintaining a high standard of ethical and professional conduct. These roles operationalise ethical leadership and articulate it as an active, involved, and concrete practice where ethical values are expected to translate into transformative leadership.

The literature review enabled a broad sweep of the theoretical and contextual underpinnings of transformative leadership as a concept and praxis. Beginning from key theorists informing the development of transformative leadership

as a standalone concept, we have homed in on the specific characteristics of transformative leaders and the substance of what their work entails. The works of Bass (1985), Shields (2010), and Weiner (2003) were highlighted for their contribution to the development of transformative leadership as a workable theory and praxis to support social change, particularly in educational settings.

Insights from the African continent deepened this discussion, demonstrating how different contexts articulate the meaning of transformative leadership while holding to a common core: progressive, flexible, and responsive leadership, committed to driving social change where leaders are located, while creating a strong collegial culture that engenders critical agency, awareness, and action. Scholars including Walker (2011), Mayanja (2013), and Magoqwana (2019) point to the value of drawing on endogenous cultural resources to support the expansion of sound leadership, rooted in foundations of social justice, ethics, and ubuntu. These leadership philosophies nuance our understanding of what transformative leadership looks like in different societies, highlighting the particular trajectories that inform continental debates on leadership and social justice.

Looking ahead: Transformative leadership resources from Africa

In further refining the review, the aim was to deliver additional perspectives on innovative leadership practices emerging in Africa. While some of this has been covered above, this section draws from the extensive grey literature review conducted as the second component of this review. The grey literature provided insights from professionals working in development, social justice, and civil society; global organisations; and governance. This is valuable for the broader work of this review because it engages with how leadership is enacted on the ground, the multilevel negotiation required for interventions to take hold, and the range of institutions and structures in place to support effective leadership. Perspectives from the grey literature supported the view that a variety of forms of leadership (for example distributed, servant, and ethical leadership) can be operationalised into transformative leadership if there is a definitive commitment to fundamentally 'changing the rules of the game'. Where there is an emphasis on social justice, collective agential development, and catalysing long-term change, it is likely that a framework analogous to transformative leadership is at work.

Much of the grey literature described the specific frameworks of leadership developed or deployed to guide the work of particular organisations. These are useful because they demonstrate particular interpretations of leadership theory, how these are operationalised, and the working models that emerge from their use. Moreover, they offer a refinement of existing theories and concepts through their practical application in diverse contexts. This is particularly important

given that the strong influence of Northern scholarship on leadership theory leaves it open to critique, re-assemblage, and reimagining (Wakefield, 2017).

For Perera, Houston Shearon, Jackson, and De Ver, 'Leadership *requires* leaders to understand that the existing rules of the game are preventing the full realisation of a particular developmental good, and that it is necessary to institute a new set of norms and patterns of behaviour' (2018, p. 3, emphasis added). This supported the development of three criteria used to evaluate whether the case studies in their report could be considered transformational or indeed *transformative*:

1. The changes effected would need to bring about a broader public good through demonstrable improvements in, for example, 'the delivery of public services, better governance or improved security' (Perera et al., 2018, p. 4).
2. Change needed to be 'deliberate', in the sense that it could not be solely an unintended outcome of an intervention (Perera et al., 2018). This is important because it emphasises developing a critical understanding of how leaders have acted specifically to alter the rules for transformative ends.
3. Changes would need to be durable, enduring beyond a single intervention or leader, and on a path to sustainability that would embed a commitment to transformational change within the institution or structure (Perera et al., 2018).

This model emphasises the ability to successfully implement a programme of leadership that can produce transformational change in tangible and widespread ways. Merely possessing 'leadership skills' is insufficient – the viability of these skills is limited by the vision and breadth of contextual and institutional knowledge available to operationalise them effectively (Batliwala, 2008; Perera et al., 2018).

This naturally includes leadership focused on pursuing gender equity, feminism, and disability justice. For example, the African Women's Leadership Institute (AWLI) takes the standpoint that feminism is concerned with power relations and the interlocking forms of inequity and discrimination that specifically impact African women (AMWA, 2019). For this reason, the AWLI programme fuses personal development and emancipation with the broader organisational aim of achieving widespread social transformation. Within such an environment, the indicators of organisational progress dovetail with the agential development of the communities being served, foregrounding the ongoing interplay between the personal and the political.

Social movements are one sphere of society where these issues have regularly shaped political engagement. The proliferation of social movements in the Global South demonstrates the need for an expanded notion of what constitutes, influences, and shapes the political sphere to include the 'the historical and current micropolitics from which new popular political subjectivities and practices emerge' (Motta, 2013, p. 6). The chapter by De Kock and Nyamnjoh in this volume (Chapter 19) will expand on this. Understanding the dynamics of the

relationship between leaders and those they lead is crucial to developing a notion of transformative leadership that can name and address the rules of the game that act against meaningful political participation and transformation.

The experience of social movements provides one way of conceiving of transformative leadership that exists in a generative relationship with the state, because it requires that the 'rules of the game' that potentially exclude the public from political participation be fundamentally altered to allow people to concretely contribute to and design the processes that shape their lives. It also asks that we recognise as legitimate those forms of political engagement that do not follow the expected rhythms and patterns of formal political engagement – including strikes, stayaways, and public disobedience campaigns. The current tendency is to represent these forms as somehow criminal or 'outside' of the democratic sphere, when in truth they indicate a push to expand the space of the political to include those whose voices are regularly marginalised by high-level stakeholder negotiation and deliberation in the governance arena (Harders, 2015).

The globalisation of a particular form of liberal democracy has also heralded a shift towards a politics of representation rather than participation, where voting is viewed as the primary act of engaged citizenship (Robins, 2010). However, social movements have emerged to contest this phenomenon for excluding members of the public from participating in the actual processes that shape their lived experience, whether in terms of housing and transport policy, welfare, or environmental destruction. Social movements in South Africa have also contested xenophobic policy-making that excludes migrants, refugees, and other displaced persons from access to public services, and foments competition and discord among vulnerable groups in society (Neocosmos, 2011). De Kock and Nyamnjoh (Chapter 19, this volume) argue that incorporating the demands, processes, and modes of engagement of this sphere of political society is essential to realising a more substantive form of democracy.

Conclusion

This review has engaged with the breadth of research conducted to date on the issue of transformative leadership and the strands of scholarship that feed into its development as a field of enquiry. While not exhaustive, we have attempted to offer a comprehensive overview of the definitional, contextual, and theoretical issues that shape how transformative leadership can be understood and applied as a progressive framework for social change.

This does leave a number of new possibilities open for future research and advocacy. For one, it is important to start developing a nuanced understanding of how causality operates in the application of transformative leadership, in order to be able to make concrete claims about the impact of transformative leadership principles in producing lasting and broad change. Additionally, it is

necessary to begin to think about how historic and contemporary alternative conceptions of society and social obligation can expand current notions of what transformative leadership could look like, how it might operate, and the outcomes it can produce. It is important that, rather than articulating this concept as something vacuous and capable of being filled with a multitude of ideas and related ethics – a magic bag with no bottom – we instead reframe it as a comprehensive framework that is elastic in its applicability to local contexts with their own conceptualisations of what the universal pursuit of social justice could look like.

#AfricaLeadership

Transformative leadership aims to stimulate systemic change and social justice. Transformative leaders care about disrupting injustice and fostering collective social well-being. Many African concepts support this understanding of leadership.

Questions for discussion

1. Is transformative leadership a universally useful concept? How could such an understanding of transformative leadership become more widely adopted?
2. If systemic change is the desired outcome of transformative leaders, is it fair to expect individuals to become successful transformative leaders? What alternatives are there?
3. What other African concepts could be useful in building our understanding of transformative leadership?

References

Aliye, A. A. (2020). African indigenous leadership philosophy and democratic governance system: Gada's intersectionality with ubuntu. *Journal of Black Studies*, *51*(7), 727–759.

Amanchukwu, R. N., Stanley, G. J., & Ololube, N. P. (2015). A review of leadership theories, principles and styles and their relevance to educational management. *Management*, *5*(1), 6–14.

AMWA (Akina Mama Wa Afrika) (24-30 March 2019). Strengthening Feminist and Transformational Leadership for a Just and Secure Africa. Report of the 2019 Africa Women's Leadership Institute for Eastern and Southern Africa. Retrieved from https://www.akinamamawaafrika.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/AWLI-REPORT.pdf

Bass, B. M. (1985). *Leadership and performance beyond expectations*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Batliwala, S. (2008). *Changing their world: Concepts and practices of women's movements*. Toronto, Canada: Association for Women's Rights in Development.

Bell, D. I. (2001, July). *Leading change: African conceptions of leadership and transformation in higher education in South Africa*. Paper presented at Higher Education Close Up 2, Lancaster University, United Kingdom.

Bennis, W. & Nanus, B. (2007). *Leaders: Strategies for taking charge* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Harper-Collins.

Bosu, R., Dare, A., Dachi, H. A., & Fertig, M. (2009). *School leadership and social justice: Evidence from Ghana and Tanzania*. EdQual Working Paper No. 17. Bristol, United Kingdom: EdQual Consortium. Retrieved from https://www.edqual.org/publications/workingpaper/edqualwp17.pdf/at_download/file.pdf

Brown, E., Ekoue, E., & Goodban, V. (2019). Transformative leadership for women's rights in Africa: Learning from Oxfam's work. *Agenda*, *33*(1), 21–37.

Burns, J. M. (1978). *Leadership*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Caldwell, C., Dixon, R. D., Floyd, L. A., Chaudoin, J., Post, J., & Cheokas, G. (2012). Transformative leadership: Achieving unparalleled excellence. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *109*(2), 175–187.

Chedondo, M. (2019). *Ethics and leadership: A critical analysis of cultural resources for ethical leadership in Southern Africa*. PhD thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. Retrieved from https://ukzn-dspace.ukzn.ac.za/handle/10413/16818.

Currie, G. & Lockett, A. (2007). A critique of transformational leadership: Moral, professional and contingent dimensions of leadership within public services organizations. *Human Relations*, *60*(2), 341–370.

Debisa, N. G. (2022). Building peace by peaceful approach: The role of Oromo Gadaa system in peace-building. *Cogent Social Sciences*, *8*(1). https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2021.2023254.

Domingo, P., Holmes, R., O'Neil, T., Jones, N., Bird, K., Larson, A., Presler-Marshall, E., & Valters, C. (2015). *Women's voice and leadership in decision-making: Assessing the evidence* (ODI Report). Gender Climate Tracker. Retrieved from https://genderclimatetracker.org/resource/22405.

Harders, C. (2015). 'State analysis from below' and political dynamics in Egypt after 2011. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, *47*(1), 148–151.

Hewitt, K.K., Davis, A. W., & Lashley, C. (2014). Transformational and transformative leadership in a research-informed leadership preparation program. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, *9*(3), 225–253.

Horner, M. (1997). Leadership theory: Past, present and future. *Team Performance Management, 3*(4), 270–287.

Jalata, A. (1996). The struggle for knowledge: The case of emergent Oromo studies. *African Studies Review*, *39*(2), 95–123.

Magoqwana, B. (2019). *Tapping into inimba to show deep transformative leadership in Mandela University*. Nelson Mandela University.
Retrieved from https://crishet.mandela.ac.za/getmedia/0741dadc-3048-4f36-bc80-656dd3e8e2af/Babalwa-Magoqwana?disposition=attachment.

Mastercard Foundation. (2014). *Women's transformative leadership in Africa*. Retrieved from https://mastercardfdn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Womens-Transformative-Leadership-2014-accessible.pdf.

Mayanja, E. (2013). Strengthening ethical political leadership for sustainable peace and social justice in Africa: Uganda as a case study. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, *13*(2), 113–146.

Mboti, N. (2015). May the real ubuntu please stand up? *Journal of Media Ethics*, *30*(2), 125–147.

McCleskey, J. A. (2014). Situational, transformational, and transactional leadership and leadership development. *Journal of Business Studies Quarterly, 5*(4), 117–130.

McNamara, K. H. (2010). Fostering sustainability in higher education: A mixed-methods study of transformative leadership and change strategies. *Environmental Practice*, *12*(1), 48–58.

Misra, N. L. (2019). *Crisis leadership at South African universities: An exploration of the effectiveness of the strategies and responses of university leadership teams to the #FeesMustFall (#FMF) protests at South African universities in 2015 and 2016*. PhD thesis, University of the Western Cape , Cape Town, South Africa. Retrieved from http://etd.uwc.ac.za/xmlui/handle/11394/7096.

Motta, S. C. (2013). Reinventing the lefts in Latin America: Critical perspectives from below. *Latin American Perspectives*, *40*(4), 5–18.

Mouton, J. & Wildschut, L. (2015). *Leadership and management case studies in training in higher education in Africa.* Cape Town, South Africa: African Minds.

Neocosmos, M. (2011). Transition, human rights and violence: Rethinking a liberal political relationship in the African neo-colony. *Interface*, *3*(2), 359–399.

Oberfield, Z. W. (2014). Public management in time: A longitudinal examination of the full range of leadership theory. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, *24*(2), 407–429.

Odora Hoppers, C. (2014). Wounded healers and transformative leadership: Towards revolutionary ethics. In K. Kondlo (Ed.). *Perspectives on thought leadership for Africa's renewal* (pp. 23–36). Pretoria, South Africa: Africa Institute of South Africa.

Olonisakin, F. (2017). Towards re-conceptualising leadership for sustainable peace. *Leadership and Developing Societies*, *2*(1), 1–30.

Perera, S., Houston Shearon, E., Jackson, P., & De Ver, L. (2018). *What enables or disables leadership for transformational change in Africa?* Research Paper 55. Developmental Leadership Programme. Retrieved from https://www.dlprog.org/publications/research-papers/what-enables-or-disables-leadership-for-transformational-change-in-africa.

Robins, S. (2010). How deep is deep democracy? Grassroots globalization from Mumbai to Cape Town. In V. S. P. Coelho & B. von Lieres (Eds). *Mobilizing for democracy: Citizen action and the politics of public participation* (pp. 143–145). London, United Kingdom: Zed Books.

Rylander, S. (2010). *Governance and transformative leadership in Africa: Progress, prospects and challenges*. Harare, Zimbabwe: The African Capacity Building Foundation. Retrieved from https://www.asclibrary.nl/docs/408423056.pdf

Shewadeg, B. (2021). Gadaa as an alternative understanding of democracy in Africa. *Conflict Trends*, *2021*(2), 45–53.

Shields, C. M. (2010). Transformative leadership: Working for equity in diverse contexts. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *46*(4), 558–589.

Sun, J. & Leithwood, K. (2012). Transformational school leadership effects on student achievement. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *11*(4), 418–451.

Temple, O. E. (2012). Metaphysical challenges of ethical leadership in Africa. *Leadership*, *8*(1), 47–65.

Tshililo, L. (2014). The king's justice: An example of leadership. In K. Kondlo (Ed.). *Perspectives on thought leadership for Africa's renewal* (pp. 75–85). Pretoria, South Africa: Africa Institute of South Africa.

Wakefield, S. (2017). *Transformative and feminist leadership for women's rights*. Boston, MA: Oxfam America.

Walker, K. (2011, July). *Ethical leadership for sustainable development*. Paper presented at the 8th Annual Forum of Heads of Public Service in Africa, Namibia.

Weiner, E. J. (2003). Secretary Paulo Freire and the democratization of power: Toward a theory of transformative leadership. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *35*(1), 89–106.