7 What amaXhosa leadership practices can offer to the discourse on transformative leadership

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Overview

Since Africa comprises 54 countries with numerous cultural groups, clans, and tribes, it is unsurprising that African leadership discourse is just as diverse and eclectic. This chapter explores leadership principles of the amaXhosa, a South African cultural group, through a desktop study, and compares these with transformative leadership theory. The author seeks to establish the leadership principles of the amaXhosa by referencing lessons from the oral traditions, literature, and folktales of the amaXhosa – thereby gleaning from 'yesterday'. amaXhosa leadership practices are relational and inculcated from a young age and in a community. The amaXhosa exercise their power and authority to achieve harmony within their community. These practices align well with Eric Weiner's transformative leadership practices of justice and democracy. In addition, the dialectic between individual democratic accountability and social responsibility compares well with Archie Mafeje's interpretation of amaXhosa leadership practice.

Introduction

Dominant leadership concepts have been studied and applied as 'universal', even though they have been studied in selective cultural contexts such as the individualistic traditions of the United States. So-called 'third-world' thinking is usually regarded as 'local' or not global enough – perhaps even backward (Nkomo, 2011; Wa Thiong'o, 1993). According to Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe (2005), formal leadership studies started in the 1930s. The 1970s introduced leadership as relating to 'management' practice, while the 1980s brought what came to be known as 'New Paradigm' models, which largely related to 'charismatic leadership', 'visionary leadership', and 'transformational leadership'. However, leadership in the 21st century needs to be less transactional and more transformative by beginning with 'questions of justice and democracy, critiqu[ing] inequitable practices and address[ing] both individual and public good' (Shields, 2010, p. 559).

This chapter argues that the amaXhosa from the Eastern Cape province of South Africa exercise their power and authority to achieve harmony within their communities, and that they demonstrate the transformative

leadership attributes of justice and democracy outlined by Weiner (2003). The dialectic between individual democracy, accountability, and social responsibility is similar to the leadership practices of the amaXhosa described by Mafeje (1963). Furthermore, the chapter deepens transformative leadership discourse by arguing that arbitration and the nexus between the leaders and their communities are the hallmarks of amaXhosa leadership. These, if understood contextually, can contribute to the growing transformative leadership scholarship. Weiner's (2003) argument shares commonalities with concepts of amaXhosa leadership practice, which also relies on the strength of responsibilities being shared between leaders and followers, and incorporates social harmony through arbitration, mediation, verbal engagement, and dialogue across the Xhosa polity (Mafeje, 1963; Peires, 1976; Soga, 1932). Nyamende (2010) also contends that the Xhosa view of justice is universal. Perhaps this is why there is a need for the inclusion of the Xhosa people's perspective in the wider interpretations of African leadership.

Conceptual framework and methodology

The ideological basis of amaXhosa leadership practices arises from Xhosa oral traditions of *iminombo* (genealogies), *izibongo* (praises), and *amabali* (tales) (Peires, 1976). The amaXhosa use metaphors and stereotypes to educate their youth, weaving together a tapestry of leadership influences. Notwithstanding some major challenges, including its focus on men as leaders, its writing system, oral traditions, and differing anthropological accounts, it is still worthwhile investigating historical leadership principles to build on, validate, and acknowledge their usefulness in the past and today.

This study employs multiple research methods including a literature review; analysis of indigenous artefacts such as storytelling, proverbs, and language; and autoethnographic research and writing methods. The latter, autoethnography, according to Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011, p. 273), 'challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing other…[and]…seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)'. By including historical and indigenous artefacts, valuable insights are able to be incorporated into mainstream research methods (Chilisa & Tsheko, 2014).

A conceptual challenge for such a study, as pointed out by Mafeje (1971, p. 245), is that '[i]n South Africa, the indigenous population has no word for "tribe"; only for "nation", "clan", and "lineage" and, traditionally, people were identified by territory, i.e., "Whose [which chief's] land do you come from?"' However, the term tribe has been used frequently in the historical texts, so it has not been possible to remove it completely from this chapter. Therefore, the amaXhosa are referred to as a 'tribe' to avoid distorting historical material and

the context of their time, while recognising the need to be politically correct in the current intellectual epoch. A further conceptual challenge concerns the overwhelming reference to men as leaders in amaXhosa history. While this is not overtly addressed in this chapter, it remains an outstanding and important point of discussion.

Autoethnography assists in recognising cultural principles and values that would otherwise be elusive to an outsider, and it also helps to make sense of the subtle cultural influences that breed valuable leadership attributes in the local people. In this regard, the literature search was based on a subjective understanding of these influences and how they can be put in conversation with transformative leadership principles.

The Kingdom of the Youngest

Drawing on his identity as a Xhosa man, the author appreciates Xhosa literature's cultural and linguistic nuances. The etymological root of the Xhosa word *inkosi* (a chief of royal descent), generally understood as a leader, is derived from the word *umkhosi*, meaning an army, an expedition, or an entourage (Nyamende, 1990). The word 'Xhosa' is derived from a Khoi word meaning 'angry men' (Peires, 1976). The youngest son of Ntombela was also named Xosa, and he became the progenitor of the Xhosa nation – hence the Kingdom of the Youngest, rather than the firstborn heir tradition (Soga, 1917). The current Xhosa-speaking tribes and polity of the Eastern Cape of South Africa include amaXhosa, abaThembu, amaMpondo, amaMpondomise, amaBomvana, and amaXesibe.

Xhosa praise poetry shows a strong link between the leader of the people and their religion, ascribing divine rights to the leader (Nyamende, 1990; Tisani, 1999). Some commonly identified leaders in the Xhosa culture are diviners, the older members of the family, and the medicine man during circumcision (Nyamende, 1990). This establishes that leadership concepts are considered to be part of the roles of various characters within the Xhosa kingdom. The idea of a leader is not of one who theorises, or is a mere titular head in a position of power, but of practice, service, and responsibility. There are a number of accounts in amaXhosa history and folklore that show how someone born a 'commoner' rises to leadership or chieftainship, 'picking it up' or usurping leadership (*ayichole*). For example, Xosa left home, established his chieftainship, and left the older brother, Tshaka, to inherit rulership from Ntombela, their father (Peires, 1976; Soga, 1917; Soga, 1932). Xosa then had two sons, Cirha and his younger brother, Tshawe. Varying accounts show Tshawe defeating Cirha, the rightful heir, and taking over the chieftainship (Peires, 1976; Soga, 1932). The position of authority, although hereditary, is still a contested terrain that might allow unlikely incumbents to rise to leadership.

J. H. Soga (1932) traces the earliest reigning chief, Chief Xosa, from 1535. For this chapter, it is sufficient to understand that there are various groupings within the Xhosa-speaking tribes, including those who were assimilated and engrafted through various processes. Hence Peires (1976, p. 49) claims: 'The limits of Xhosadom were not geographical or ethnical, but political'. The deliberate incorporation of other groups into the Xhosa tribe built a nation of diverse people who were then politically referred to as amaXhosa, not necessarily because they were born into the tribe, but possibly also through assimilation and adopting the language. Some accounts state that the chief gave instructions not to ask anyone where they come from, so they never had to miss home, but were easily incorporated into the Xhosa nation. Therefore, the tribe is national in character with deliberate accommodation and pursuit of diversity and nationhood among people of different origins. This unity is built by encouraging individual accountability and social responsibility among both community members and leaders.

Individual accountability and social responsibility as a leader

In the Xhosa context, a leader is primarily regarded as such based on lineage and societal roles. Nyamende (1990, p. 1) argues: 'The concept of a true leader among the Xhosa is someone who has proven his worth on the battlefield or by some other distinguishing features'. Nelson Mandela also stated, 'Heroes like the Khoi leader, Autshumayo, Maqoma of the Rharhabe, Bambatha, Cetywayo of the Zulu, Mampuru of the Pedis, Tshivase of the Vendas and a host of others, were in the forefront of the wars of resistance and we speak of them with respect and admiration' (cited in Mzileni, 2019, p. 85). Nyamende (1990, p. 1) further affirms that the 'evidence of this view abounds in Xhosa oral literature, such as folktales and praise poetry'. Where chiefs do not act in a praiseworthy manner or reflect much divinity, scathing criticism could be directed towards them. In that regard, Melikaya Mbutuma's hyperbole and criticism of the Paramount Chief Dalindyebo – that the 'chief does not drink European liquor, he swims in it' – depicts a chief who was less than superior and 'demonstrated stunted personality and lack of purpose' (Mbutuma, cited in Nyamende, 1990, p. 3). The chiefs are open to criticism with impunity by the *imbongi* (a praise singer) even though they can also enjoy favourable commentary or prophecy from these literary virtuosos (Opland, 1983, cited in Nyamende, 1990, p. 4). This makes two types of *iimbongi*: flatterers and agitators, the latter being those who drive the individual accountability and social responsibility of a leader through verbal chastisement. Thus, leaders receive praise only when they deserve it.

Tisani (1999), in her study of the amaXhosa, notes that royalty can be referred to as *umntwana* (a child), which is a reminder of the limits and boundaries

that are placed on their highnesses. The inference is that, despite their position, chiefs or leaders remain part of a family that needs to be guided and protected, and '[t]he [Xhosa] ruler cannot exercise his/her rule except in conjunction with his/her people' (Tisani, 1999, p. 8). The Xhosa kingdom is confederal, enabling 'sharing of power between members of the royal house. Further sharing occurred between the royal house – *abantwana* – and the rest of the population' (Tisani, 1999, p. 9).

Mtimka (2021, paras 3, 5) brings the Xhosa adage *isizwe sifa ngomnt'onye* to life, stating that it means that 'a nation may perish on account of one person', because 'a person who values sacrifice for the greater good knows not to make any choice that may plunge an entire family, village, town, or nation into a crisis, even if it maximises their private gain'. Individual appetites like greed are always cautioned against and youth are warned against it in bedtime stories (Mnqwazi, 2019). When one person rises into leadership through chieftainship, the exercise of power and authority needs to be under the constant check of the people, so that the clan, tribe, or polity are always steered in a desirable direction.

Power and authority

Soga (1932) and Peires (1976) agree that the political leadership of chiefs and councillors is renewed in each generation. A prince could have up to forty companions during his initiation rite to manhood, *ulwaluko*. The first companion to be circumcised became *isandla senkosi* (hand of the chief), the chief administrator. Others would be his administrative bureaucracy, as well as advisers. One or two of the chief's father's councillors would be included in the son's council for continuity (Peires, 1976). According to Soga (1932), a young heir to a chieftainship would be protected by his father's councillors should the father die or be incapacitated. Community leaders would be people who have walked with their peers and been observed by their community, so the people whom they subsequently lead will know them. This develops mutual accountability between the chief and council members. It also protects a new chief from family members who may seek to ingratiate themselves to obtain access to power or benefits.

The training and mentorship of a chief start from the age of 10 to 12, and is carried out by the grandparents or their generation (Peires, 1976). Leadership awareness, therefore, is taught. Everyone from councillors, mentors, and administrators has a role to play in making the chieftaincy a success, which then makes leadership a multi-generational community affair that requires harmony across the community. amaXhosa leadership practice is relational, and is inculcated from a young age and in a community. This relationality is an important part of the transformative leadership discourse.

The key developments in the lives of young Xhosa boys, and, by extension, leaders, are as follows:

- Since Xhosa chiefs rule with their age-mates, it is easy for them to be called to order or addressed on their predilections, biases, and blind spots.
- The leadership–council relationship is peer to peer, which encourages the spirit of criticism, openness, and individual judgement, as opposed to the alternative of neophyte to elder, which can lead to complete obedience and the domination of the youth (Peires, 1976).
- The leadership discourse is multi-generational, and there is continuity through support and counsel from the older generation.

The disadvantage of age-mate councils is that they do not readily dissolve after the death of the chief and before the heir takes over. This can cause succession conflicts to fester (Peires, 1976). Other forms of leadership conflict may also include sons who are not next in line having to move away from the homestead to give space to the reigning father. In this regard, Peires (1976, p. 54) recounts:

> The tension of the intra-generational conflict was relieved to a considerable measure by the dispersion of young chiefs and their followers to territories of their own. This enabled each chief to build up a chiefdom commensurate with his abilities without treading on another's toes.

A leader's reputation and authority are acquired through a lifetime of being around the council that eventually rules with him. The council discusses and rules on a matter, and the spokesperson announces the decision as if it is from the chief's own thinking and mouth. The preface of the decision or announcement is always *Ithi inkosi*…(The chief says…). The court is not legislative in that the laws remain engraved in the life and experiences of the people, who then pass them from generation to generation.

Arbitration and justice are a fundamental function of amaXhosa leadership, and the issues may include personal, domestic, or tribal conflicts (Soga, 1932). Councillors come from the most influential families in the tribe. Therefore, when councillors die they are replaced by their sons. Wise men with particular aptitudes may also be appointed to the council. Little change occurs in the council during the lifetime of a chief unless death or incapacity occurs (Soga, 1932). Leadership, therefore, is viewed as a lifelong function that is relatively stable and predictable, so much so that most leadership challenges can be relayed from generation to generation, and are dealt with and not forgotten. A Xhosa chief is a protector of his subjects. He does not usually call for anyone's death, but if he did, the order would be carried out without much opposition, because the chief is sacred to councillors, and his popularity is paramount. Even though that is the case, '[t]he power to rule, and sometimes, the power to put to death vested in one individual, and that a chief, is abhorrent to the Xhosa tribe'

(Soga, 1932, p. 30). Therefore, no man should be so all-powerful that he can give judgement and pronounce death on his own, unless he seeks to lose his social standing and credibility across the polity. Odora Hoppers (2014, p. 28) argues that the kind of leadership that Africa requires is 'non-authoritarian authority', which is characterised by its ability to perform social functions in the same way that pilots fly passengers to another airport or doctors bring people back to good health. Perhaps the reason that leaders are not estranged from their followers is that there are family-like bonds between the leaders and the people as opposed to them being cold or emotionless figures.

Soga (1932) described King Ngqika (1778–1829) as the father of the nation, and the Great Place as the home of all Xhosa people. Nyamende (2010, p. 22) alludes to this by drawing from *Ityala Lamawele*, a foundational Xhosa novel by Mqhayi, (1914) about a court case of twins contesting seniority, and how the counsellors told the complainants, '*Akukho sifuna ukumona kwaba bantwana; ngabethu, siyabazala*' (We do not wish to sin against any of these children; they are ours, we have given birth to them). Therefore, according to Mqhayi, Xhosa courts are not just sites of punishment, but also 'a place of love and protection like a home'. He goes on to say, 'African thought goes further than that and sees law and justice as the Creator's tool for maintaining peace. The chief is seen as the user of this tool; and when it is used wrongly it turns against him' (Mqhayi, 1938, cited in Nyamende, 2010, p. 23).

The chief is above the law by virtue of his being its custodian, but he dares not break it for fear of bringing chaos to the land. Therefore, the chief's judgement is the product of extensive engagement with and clarification from the councillors. The solution then becomes 'the word of the chief' and a display of 'non-authoritarian authority'. If a leader does not understand that decision-making process, they risk being regarded as autocratic. They might lose general respect from their council, which could negatively affect social justice and harmony within the polity.

Social justice and harmony

Social justice and democracy are hallmarks of transformative leadership, whose origins lie in Western management and education theory. The amaXhosa can advance and deepen the scope of these intellectual traditions by offering another perspective drawn from an African social context. Odora Hoppers (2014) contends that the goal of leaders is not to be cleverer but to be more human, a sentiment that Steve Biko (2004, p. 51) also argued in relation to all Africans:

> We reject the power-based society of the Westerner that seems ever concerned with perfecting their technological know-how while losing out on their spiritual dimension. We believe that in the long run,

> the special contribution to the world by Africa will be in this field of human relationships. The great powers of the world may have done wonders in giving the world an industrial and military look, but the great gift still has to come from Africa – giving the world a more human face.

Biko, who died at the hands of Apartheid South African police in 1977, a year before these words were first published, was a Black Consciousness leader born into the Xhosa nation. Biko, an Africana existentialist philosopher (More, 2008), was forward-thinking in his outlook on Africa's contribution to the world, even while living under the oppressive regime of the White minority government. Biko's argument was for a non-racial and egalitarian society where there is no minority or majority, just people (Biko, 2017). This is a good description of what ubuntu as a philosophy seeks to achieve, but for Biko, social change, as also prescribed in transformative leadership literature, was necessary before this harmony could thrive. De Kock and Swartz (Chapter 2, this volume) also argue that social change and agential development are an essential part of transformative leadership, something that Biko exemplified so well. A leader must have ubuntu, which is about the nature of the individual in a leadership role and a concern for the other person. Ubuntu allows for a communal enterprise that favours outcomes for the group above the individual; involves decision-making that is inclusive and circular; enables a wide vision, which allows for the multiplicity of views; and accommodates a diversity of perspectives (Ncube, 2010).

One example of how ubuntu and social harmony worked is in relation to the payment of fines and taxation. The chief frequently benefitted from unpaid services and material goods, especially from goats and cattle for blood fines (*isizi*), and other forms of taxes in the later years when the population began to be educated in Western ways. In former times, a portion of the harvest would be given to the chief, but this fell into abeyance (Soga, 1932). However, it was important for the chief both to solve problems and to institute punitive measures to deter wrongdoing, or he would not acquire the material resources expected from his followers. While subjects were theoretically served without expecting anything in return, in practice social harmony was enacted when the chief acted to improve social conditions for citizens. This arrangement was particularly useful in preventing lazy leaders, since the material wellbeing of a Xhosa leader was dependent on his maintaining harmony and cooperation with his subjects.

Archie Mafeje on leadership imperatives

The Xhosas have a system of rulership that follows male inheritance. Women can rule as regent when the rightful heir to the throne is still a minor, or when other males in line might not be trusted with the temptations of usurpation.

This regency arrangement is regarded as one of the ways of ensuring that the tribe does not disintegrate into chaos (Soga, 1932). In this sense, women are trusted with leadership positions as safer custodians of chieftainship. It could be said that patriarchy runs to matriarchy for safety and reassurance, even though the relationship is still exploitative. The amaXhosa leadership experience, like many national and tribal histories around the world, remains patriarchal; however, this is partly the case because of how Xhosa histories were written or understood. Magoqwana and Tisani have unearthed some narratives from overlooked female accounts, which makes it possible for concepts like *inimba* (maternal feeling towards children) and the role of *dabawo* (paternal aunt) to be elucidated, albeit in retrospect (Magoqwana, 2018; Tisani, 2021). Thus, it might not be that female leadership roles and contributions are non-existent, but that maternal legacies have been epistemologically excluded. Mndende (2021) has recently provided accounts of the role of women in, for example, *ulwaluko* (initiation school). Moving away from an assumed logic of biology and the restricted narrative, *umakhulu* (a grandmother) should be regarded as a productive member of society – an 'institution of knowledge' that is more than just a conduit of history through folktales (Magoqwana, 2018, p. 76); she is one of the bearers of leadership pedagogy for the next generation of Xhosa leaders. In this regard, the amaXhosa offer a new lens for looking at the contribution of women to the transformative leadership discourse, which could start by reappropriating the maternal legacies and reducing the importance of paternalistic views and attributes in leadership practices.

In Mafeje's (1963) master's thesis, focusing on leadership and change in the rural peasant communities of All-Saints and Gubenxa, a few lessons emerge that advance the understanding of Xhosa people's approaches to leadership. Mafeje (1963, p. 3) defines leadership as 'the capacity to direct other people's activities and receive cooperation, [which] though it involves inequality of statuses, does not necessarily involve compulsion'. He argues that leadership is a process of superordination and subordination where no leader effectively advances his followers' objectives without maintaining internal order and harmony. Initiating activities, arbitration, internal order, and harmony are essential in understanding leadership according to Mafeje (1963), and this view is mirrored by transformative leadership scholar Bukusi (2020). These criteria used to identify leaders emanate from people's aspiration to see themselves advance in life. The communities must see themselves and their future wellbeing in the conduct of the leaders they choose before they elevate them into leadership positions. In this regard, Mafeje (1963, p. 3) argues, 'Men and women, in entrusting their affairs to certain persons, usually look for particular qualities which coincide with their image of a "good leader"'. Leaders must identify with their followers – in other words, they must share interests with them, observe and maintain group norms and values, concern themselves with the solidarity of the group, and rule with consent; responsibility to the group must increase as the power increases (Mafeje, 1963).

Folktales and pedagogy in Xhosa culture teach that some of the fundamental attributes of a good leader include 'will-power, wisdom, cleverness, bravery, ambition, physical strength, and endurance' (Nyamende, 1990, p. 6). These traits are usually expressed through various animals and stories told to children by the older generation, grandmothers in particular. A character who possesses 'these qualities in the correct proportion occupies a position of leadership in many folktales', and an imbalance causes a rather flat character: the hares, the tortoises, and the baboons are always subordinated, whereas a lion is usually viewed as a good, agile, and powerful leader (Nyamende, 1990, p. 6). Therefore, the characteristics of lions in Xhosa folktales teach neophytes how to be leaders, act in a kingly manner, and judge fairly or equitably among subordinates. Nyamende (1990, p. 6) also reflects these attributes by arguing that 'will-power, wisdom, cleverness, bravery, ambition, strength and endurance' are characteristics that will effectively convey early leadership impressions into the heart and minds of young Xhosa people.

Arbitration is an essential element of leadership; therefore, arbitration and initiation of activities should be seen as functions of all leaders. The establishment and maintenance of amicable relationships are a prerequisite for the continuance of social groups and, ultimately, for achieving goals of existing in harmonious communities and environments (Mafeje, 1963). Therefore, leadership is not acquired by studying textbooks. No one sat Nelson Mandela down to read training manuals on the subject. Both the history of the cooperation of Thembu royalty with the colonial government and the rebellion of the Thembu people imbued Mandela's leadership outlook and remained practical examples of what it means to be with or against your subordinates (Mangcu, 2019). Acceptable power is exercised with the approval of followers and is based on their norms and values; whereas unacceptable power or coercion disregards these norms and values, and leads to the loss of reciprocity and cooperation between the leader and their followers. Followers appreciate notable improvements in the quality of life rather than well-meaning leaders who fail to bring about change (Mafeje, 1963), and this is consistent with the notions of the individual and public good of transformative leadership as described by Shields (2010).

No leader symbolises change and transformation in the South African context as clearly as Nelson Mandela, who comes from the abaThembu, one of the Xhosa-speaking tribes. Leadership awareness, like all education, 'cannot and should not be separated from what it means to live as powerful, disciplined, and free individuals, ethical because of our "capacity to spiritualise" the world, to make it either beautiful or ugly' (Freire, 1998, cited in Weiner, 2003, p. 90). Mandela undoubtedly enriched the world by adding a 'spiritual dimension' and a 'more human face' to leadership (Biko, 2004; Odora Hoppers, 2014). Mafeje (1963) also noted that leaders must share group values and aspirations and seek to encourage

the unity of subordinates at all times, sometimes to the detriment of whatever the leader desires.

Gadla Mandela, Nelson Mandela's father, in his articulation of the leadership role, argued that

> The people might wish to have something done for them which was going to be a danger to them and land them in difficulties, but a person who was placed over others as a ruler was given a superior power to be able to guide the people and keep them from going into difficulties. (cited in Mangcu, 2019, p. 1048)

This is probably the most direct teaching on leadership that Mandela had from his father, and one missing from his numerous biographies until Mangcu (2019) highlighted it. Mangcu describes Mandela explaining why he unilaterally decided to initiate negotiations with the repressive Apartheid regime, without the consent of his comrades and the African National Congress. Mandela's explanation reflected his father's outlook on leadership, when he said, 'There are times when a leader must move out ahead of the flock, confident that he is leading his people the right way' (Mandela, cited in Mangcu, 2019, p. 1048). Public disapproval of such a decision can be severe, and there is no better contemporary example of this than Joel Netshitenzhe, Head of Policy and Coordination Services in the South African Presidency until 2009, speaking about the recall and resignation of the then President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki:

> Is it not a requirement of leadership that at times a leader may be obliged to take unpopular decisions, sometimes with dire consequences for himself? In the 'Divine Comedy', Dante posed a stark question graphically: What should leaders do when the masses shout: 'Death to our life and life to our death!' Related to this is whether being and remaining a leader should be the be-all and end-all of a leader's objective. Can the very tragedy of loss of personal power and acceptance of such a consequence be in themselves an act of leadership in a non-personal and historical sense (to take a long-term view)? I suppose dealing with current 'history' – a phase in a story that is still in dynamic motion – may result in us drawing conclusions that may prove premature in later phases of the unfolding story.
> (cited in Khoza, 2011, p. 8)

Moreover, Khoza argues that followers must be compassionate, have empathy, and understand when leaders are navigating through change. This is what Netshitenzhe was referring to in the excerpt: that sometimes the reasons for decisions taken by leaders might elude some of their followers in the 'unfolding story' or 'current history', and that the leader does not have to maintain the position as if it were the ultimate objective of leading. Gadla Mandela, Nelson

Mandela, and Thabo Mbeki viewed the act of deviating from popular or majority opinions as part of the leadership imperative, and offer a demonstration of a 'transformative moment', in the view of Montuori and Donnelly (cited in Bukusi, 2020). Gadla Mandela raises this notion as the 'people's wishes that end in danger'; Nelson Mandela interprets it as 'moving ahead of the flock' but for the right reasons; and Netshitenzhe poetically argues, through Dante, that self-sacrifice becomes a non-personal approach to leadership. In each case, the leader's intention is vindicated, and they are absolved by future success of their unpopular unilateral decisions. Weiner (2003, p. 89) sums this up as the need for oppositional leadership work that 'can provide a productive force for breaking into dominant formations of common-sense or counter-hegemonic ideas, and perhaps, dominant mass views of subordinates'.

Conclusion

A few lessons can be drawn from this chapter and used to construct a more inclusive leadership discourse. Disharmony is caused by leaving people without solutions, a lack of arbitration, and a sense of social injustice. Undeserved power and its questionable use breeds despotic leaders who lack morals, ethics, and societal responsibility towards their followers. The lack of understanding of subordinate values and aspirations is the first level of disqualification for effective leadership. The leader sometimes earns sufficient trust from followers that they can take calculated unilateral decisions about where the group needs to venture next, believing in the correctness of such a decision; otherwise, leadership as a function of leading is pointless. A judge who attends to people's issues might not necessarily conform to their wishes. Likewise, a leader, as a judge, is not preoccupied with conforming to the wishes of their followers, but with resolving issues and leading through change to better conditions. This is leading change and it, therefore, brings the transformative moment. Leaders have a moral responsibility to tell the truth and apportion credit or blame without favour or bias. According to the amaXhosa, leadership is transformative in that it introduces new and better conditions for the subordinates through negotiated use of power, democratically or non-democratically, as long as the objective is to uphold the values and aspirations of the people.

Culture and traditions do not generally support change, and this remains true with the amaXhosa. While some maintain that all leadership should facilitate social change, in some cultures, consistency and harmony are valued more than evolving into something new. On the other hand, the amaXhosa can learn from the transformative leadership discourse and be more critical about knowledge, culture, and traditions, especially those that have normalised the suppression of views and freedoms based on gender and class.

#AmaXhosaLeadershipPractices

The leadership practices of the amaXhosa, a cultural group in South Africa, align well with the principles of transformative leadership. See how here, including an analysis of these leadership practices by Archie Mafeje.

Questions for discussion

1. What words/terms are used to denote leadership in your local language, and what are their literal meanings?

2. The amaXhosa account of leadership in this chapter is primarily patriarchal. The author says this could be due to an absence of accounts about women-led leadership. What are your thoughts on this – is traditional leadership inherently male-led, or is female leadership just not visible in texts and oral traditions? How can this be addressed?

3. In his conclusion, the author argues that not all leadership should be about social change, but that preserving harmony and cultural norms is also an important aspect of leadership. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? What are the dangers of preserving tradition?

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