

Traditional Leadership in Democratic South
Africa

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Introduction

The birth of democracy in South Africa has allowed for the development of an equality driven society, where the political ideals and rights of all citizens have legitimate voice and are guaranteed by the constitution. There are, however, a number of critical issues which have stemmed from the democratization and liberalization of the South African political system. In particular, the practice of traditional leadership has become a point of vociferous debate and has lead to severe political contention.

The traditional leadership is an ancient institution, prevalent across the entire African continent. For centuries the African people experienced no other form of governance. However, the forces of imperialism and colonialism have served to severely undermine and disintegrate the institution of traditional leadership, not least in South Africa where the successive apartheid period compounded and accelerated this process. Under the National Party regime a number of laws were formulated to regulate and control traditional leadership, often to the advantage of the racist regime. (Nthai, 2005:1-3).

Now, as South Africa's young democracy strengthens, the future of traditional leadership seems uncertain. It has been argued that traditional leadership has no role to play within a democratized society and therefore has little role to play within the contemporary South African system of governance. This argument has been opposed by traditional authorities, who claim that their fundamental cultural rights and the role they play within rural societies, is unfairly compromised by the current democratic system in place. Although government has allowed traditional authorities some political voice, traditional leaders claim that they have been excluded from the political arena and thus their role in contemporary South Africa has been negated. This paper focuses on whether traditional leadership is, in fact, relevant within democratized societies and whether it has a role to play within South African politics and the development of a sustainable and transparent democracy.

South African Legislation on Traditional Leadership

- ANC Constitutional Guidelines

In 1986 the legal and constitutional committee of the ANC produced a set of constitutional guidelines, intended to provide the fundamental principles of a new democratic South Africa. With respect to traditional leadership, these guidelines prescribed that hereditary rulers conformed with the principles of democracy, embodied in the Constitution and its Bill of Rights and consequently, all inequalities, especially that between men and women, inherent in the institution had to be abolished (Nthai, 2005: 5).

- The Constitution

During the initial negotiations and drafting of the Constitution, the issue of the institution of traditional leadership proved to be a particularly problematic issue. Middle ground had to be found between the ancient institution and the new principles of equality, representation and constitutionality. Hence, the 1993 interim Constitution provided for limited recognition of traditional leadership and Houses of Traditional Leaders at both national and provincial level were established. This compromise laid the basis for further development and transformation of the institution (Nthai, 2005: 5).

Chapter 12 of the South African constitution (1996) specifically acknowledges the institution of traditional leadership and its place and role in the system of democratic governance. It provides for the continued authority and functioning of such leaders in accordance with traditional law, within the broader legal framework, and for traditional leaders to participate at local government level. Further the Constitution also established a Council of Traditional Leaders. (The Constitution of South Africa, 1996: Ch12)

It is generally held that the 1993 constitution was more favorable to traditional leaders than the later final constitution, simply due to the influence that the Congress of Traditional Leaders (CONTRALESA)) had on the negotiations .

- Council of Traditional Leaders Act

Prior to the final Constitution being formalized, in 1994 the Council of Traditional Leaders Act was passed in order to expound the composition of the Council of Traditional Leaders, the process of election of its representatives and its specific powers and functions. However, in 1997 a new Council of Traditional Leaders Act was passed and the 1994 legislation repealed.

Much confusion over the scope and degree of traditional authority remained, with traditional law and practices often coming into conflict with those of our new democracy.

- The Traditional Leadership & Governance Framework Act (2003)

After much delay, the South African Parliament finally passed two pieces of legislation in 2003 that aimed at giving the role of traditional leaders in South Africa greater clarity and substance. These were the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act and an amendment to the Communal Land Rights Bill. However, they also make concessions to traditional authorities that, some may argue, effectively resuscitate the powers they enjoyed under the notorious Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 (Ntsebeza, 2004: 4).

Under this act and similar legislation, undemocratic structures of governance were established, commonly known as traditional authorities. These structures composed council members appointed by a traditional leader, who in most cases would appoint his or her relatives as members. Unfortunately, more often than not, these traditional institutions were mere puppet-governments operating on behalf of the apartheid regime. Indeed the homeland system is an obvious example of this, where traditional leaders were granted token, or limited authority within the homelands in order to extend the indirect control of the apartheid government into these areas, to gain the support of traditional leaders and their communities and to curb any possible revolutionary (anti-apartheid) activity within the area (Kyed & Buur, 2006:1).

Thus, an important objective of the 2003 Framework Act was the establishment and recognition of traditional councils (not to be confused with CONTRALESA) at a local level, in order to align traditional rule and traditional councils more strongly with the principals of democracy and to hopefully remove some of the negative sentiments associated with traditional rule and traditional councils.

A traditional council, according to section 3(1) will be established in an area which has been recognized by the Premier as a traditional community. Further, the Act acknowledges a position for traditional leadership, not only within local government, but at the provincial and state level as well (Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act, 2003).

These councils are composed of mostly unelected members who include traditional authorities and their appointees. At first, only 25 per cent of members were to be elected, however strong protest from civil society and the NGO sector resulted in this quota rising to 40 per cent (Ntsebeza, 2004). In addition at least a third of its members must be women. The composition of the body has been a contentious point as civil society has asserted for the majority of the members of a traditional council to be democratically elected, whilst traditionalists argued the need to preserve the image and the traditional values of the institution. Some have seen this Act as remarkable and inspiring, in that it is a first genuine attempt to “[fuse] democratic principles and traditional practices” (Nthai, 2005: 8). However others have been less optimistic and argue that as unelected members remain a majority, this body cannot in any way be considered democratic (Ntsebeza, 2004: 4).

- The Communal Land Rights Bill

The role for traditional authorities in land administration is stipulated within the Communal Land Rights Bill, amended on 8 October 2003, seems to have been another step toward resolving the contentious issue of the role of traditional authorities in rural governance. The amendment states that the traditional councils established in terms of the

Framework Act, will have land allocation and administration powers and functions in communal areas. This gives traditional leaders substantial and unprecedented powers, and some fear that they may be open to abuse, especially as the councils have a majority of unelected and hence unaccountable members. Thus, the amended draft of the Communal Land Rights Bill received much criticism from a variety of sources, including civil society organizations, gender and land rights activists. Despite this, in 2004 the Communal Land Rights Act was passed, and after more than ten years of opposition and discontent, traditional authorities have given their overwhelming support for the Act. Ntsebeza (2004: 5) argues that this act makes traditional councils supreme structures when it comes to land allocation, and that creates the opportunity for abuse of power and mismanagement.

The Congress of Traditional Leaders (CONTRALESA)

The Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (CONTRALESA) was launched in 1987, in order to articulate the interests of Traditional Leaders and act as an extra-parliamentary opposition movement to the apartheid regime. The movement aligned itself with the African National Congress and the United Democratic Front. It was initially a regional formation largely constituted of traditional leaders persecuted by the homeland government of Kwangwane. However, in the 1990s when the ANC was unbanned it gained a national following (SA History, 2007). During the CODESA negotiations from 1991-1993, CONTRALESA pushed for traditional leaders to maintain their authority and functions in the new democratic South Africa (Fokwang, 2003:5).

Despite its previous strong affiliation to the ANC lead alliance, in the run-up to South Africa's first democratic local government elections in 1995/1996, CONTRALESA began to work with the Inkatha Freedom Party. It is important to note that in the pre-1994 period these two groups had never collaborated and in fact had openly disagreed with each other. As Ntsebeza (2004: 3) put it: “the post-1994 government policies and laws were closing the ideological gap between members of CONTRALESA and those traditional authorities who are sympathetic to the IFP”. Initially cooperation was around

the issue of local government, however it appears that the main issue bringing traditional authorities together is their struggle for recognition and power amidst the development of new democratic structures and institutions.

Throughout the drafting process CONTRALESA campaigned for the constitutional recognition of the status, role, and powers of traditional leaders in the new democratic South Africa, which resulted in the drafting of Chapter 12 of the Constitution. Despite this, until the passing of the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act of 2003 there was little real indication of the actual role or functions of traditional authorities within the democratic system.

Throughout this period CONTRALESA expressed its frustration at the apparent lack of recognition traditional leadership received from the new dispensation. This was dramatically illustrated at a conference, organized by the Ministry of Provincial and Local Government in 2000, on “traditional leadership and institutions” aimed at producing a White Paper. Assembled royals, led by key members of CONTRALESA, refused to participate, demanding that the Constitution be amended to recognize their sovereignty and asserting that they would discuss the matter with no one other than the state president (Comaroff & Comaroff: 10).

However the 2003 legislation seems to have quelled CONTRALESA's dissatisfaction and eased tension between the democratically elected government and the ancient regime of African kings and queens- at least for the time being.

How relevant is traditional leadership in democratized South African society?

The question of relevance, with regard to traditional leadership and democracy, needs to be taken in the contemporary context of cultural pluralism and globalization. Before

examining the importance of traditional leadership in democratic South Africa, one has to acknowledge the fact that South African politics is not autonomous but rather occurs within a global setting and thus has to serve the purpose of incorporating both local and international concerns. This will be important, in my view, when considering the extent to which traditional leadership will determine the nature of South Africa's democracy and thus the relevance of traditional leadership in a democratized South Africa. In other words, when looking at South African democracy and the role of traditional leadership, one cannot isolate South Africa from the nature of the contemporary global political community, but needs to consider the issue with the idea of South Africa being a part of an integrated whole and accept that the political values of South African democracy are a manifestation of ideas and practices from a global influence.

South Africa's history of both colonial rule and apartheid plays an important role with regard to the value of traditional leadership within society. In the words of Holomisa and Sanga, referring to Africa as a whole,

“...the advent of colonialism in Africa destroyed the social fabric and the political system of the continent's nations. Customs and traditions that were the basis and source of law were either nullified as being *contre bonos mores* or distorted in their interpretation to the extent that they were regarded as reactionary and in the contravention of human rights...”

(Holomisa and Sango, 2001: pp)

The system of government that has developed within South Africa is thus based upon the principles and values of the colonial and apartheid rulers and has neglected the customs and traditions of the ethnic population. Traditional structures of governance were destroyed by the colonial and apartheid government and thus the post-apartheid system, it is argued, and it is merely a continuation of the structures which defined the apartheid era. The political values and customs of the ethnic population remain marginalized by the post-apartheid system, it has been argued, and thus there is the need to incorporate traditional leadership into South Africa's democratic system. The relevance of traditional leadership to South African democracy thus stems from the fact that there are large ethnic

communities which subscribe to the values and customs of traditional leadership and which are thus not represented by the contemporary system of Western democracy employed by South Africa's government. Holomisa and Sanga (2001) argue that the reluctance by the South African government to accord legitimate political authority to traditional leaders in the governance of the country, especially at a local level where it is argued that traditional leadership has greatest influence, is "a recipe for future ethnic conflict". It is in this light and in the light of local government, therefore, that the relevance of traditional leadership needs to be examined.

From before the days of colonialism, through apartheid and up into the present, traditional rulers have taken for granted the rights to rule and there has been little to convince them, or their tribes, otherwise. This results in a large number of ethnic communities who subscribe to the authority of traditional leaders. In terms of relevance on a broad level, research has shown that up to eighty percent of people living in rural areas still support and acknowledge chiefs and tribal leaders (Oomen, 2002:pp). Although material support for chiefs remains low, acknowledgment of their position and respect for their authority is high and thus suggests that traditional leadership maintains some relevance in society. According to the *Amakhosi of the Kingdom of KwaZulu Natal* in a meeting with President Mbeki, traditional leadership is the most important feature of traditional communities, especially with regard to societal organization (Transcript of a meeting between Thabo Mbeki, 2000).

The question that remains, however, is whether it is relevant in *democratic* society. One of the fundamental concerns with regard to traditional leadership is that it undermines the commitment towards achieving an accountable and efficient form of democratic governance in South Africa. This stems from the fact that traditional leadership councils are based on historically founded tribal authorities, which were dominated by un-elected chiefs who were unaccountable, undemocratic and despotic (Ntsebeza, 2004). This therefore implies that by incorporating traditional leadership into the South African system of governance, it would be an attempt to reconcile two fundamentally disparate

institutions and could thus, potentially, have a destabilizing effect on the system as a whole. It is difficult, from a democratic perspective, to see the relevance for traditional leadership within contemporary democratic societies, such as South Africa. This is primarily due to the fact that the principles upon which they are based are contradictory. The following quote taken from Ntsebeza's article highlights this point.

While the initial collaboration was around local government, it is quite clear that the main issue that brings traditional authorities together is their opposition to the notion of introducing new democratic structures. They would be happy to be the only primary structure in rural areas and insist on preserving the concentration of functions they enjoyed under apartheid, in particular land administration. Not only are they opposed to the idea of separation of powers, they are also opposed to any attempt to introduce alternative structures that would compete with them. For example, in the case of local government, traditional authorities reject the introduction of municipalities in their areas. They argue that they should play a central role in rural development, and by implication, they reject the democratic principles upon which post-1994 developmental local government is based. (Ntsebeza, 2004)

This attitude of traditional council's shows, in our opinion, that the dedication of government to a democratic South Africa is not supported by the ideals of traditional leadership and thus lending support for the view that traditional leadership is irrelevant in democratized society. It is crucial to note that it is not only due to the hereditary nature of traditional leaders or their quest for political dominance within their geographic jurisdiction that questions their relevancy, but most importantly is the nature of their political structures. In other African countries, such as Ghana, traditional politics is participatory and involves the citizens in the decision making process. This style of leadership is complementary to the democratic process and is thus relevant to modern democratic means of governance.

In South Africa, however, and KwaZulu-Natal in particular, traditional leadership is based on a hierarchy of authority and political authority is centrally controlled. Rural

citizens are not involved in the decision making process and are thus excluded from political engagement in traditional communities (Piper, 2007). It is for this reason that one questions the compatibility of traditional leadership and democracy in South Africa. Furthermore, one needs to question whether those living under traditional rule would be afforded the same rights as those who do not. If traditional authorities were to gain political authority within their regions, what voice would the citizens have in terms of political decision-making? The basis of democracy stems from all citizens having a potential influence in the political process and thus, the centrality of power and authoritarian nature of most traditional leaderships in South Africa, casts doubt on whether the citizens do, in fact have a political voice.

There is one specific issue with regard to the disparity between democracy in South Africa and traditional leadership that highlight the incongruence between the two. This is the response of traditional leaders to homosexuals and their rights within society. CONTRALESA has stated outright that homosexuality is abnormal and should not be tolerated by the constitution. The following quote made by Holomisa, head of the council of traditional leaders, highlights the position of CONTRALESA and traditional leaders towards homosexuality. "...If you accept this (being gay), you might as well accept people having sex with their relatives or with animals for that matter..." (Holomisa, 2007)

Traditional leadership is only relevant to democratized society if the nature of its political judgment is also democratic. Whilst the hereditary nature of authority and unelected rulers can be overlooked if leadership and decision making involves the direct participation and contributions of the citizens, an authoritarian, dictatorial approach cannot. Traditional leadership can only be relevant to democratized society if its contribution to society is democratic. In other words, the relevance of traditional leadership can be judged on the contribution it makes to the achievement of an accountable and efficient democratic system of governance and if its fundamental objectives are democratic.

The role of traditional leadership in democratic South Africa and its challenges

Understanding the multi-cultural make-up of South African society is imperative in the quest for political stability in the post-apartheid era. Multi-culturalism within society, however, provides an exceptionally complex and sensitive political sphere in which the ideals and aspirations of different cultural groupings are contended. The problem is exacerbated by the phenomenon of globalization, which emphasizes the need for cultural integration within society, whilst at the same time highlights the differences between them. This is fundamental when studying politics in the contemporary era, in that political stability is dependent, on the ability of the governing political system, to adhere to the needs and values of all cultural groups within society. In other words, political stability depends on whether all parties or groups within society have a voice which, in some or other way, is recognised. The following quote taken from J. Hall confirms:

As long as everything is open to question by all parties at all times, Tully suggests, stability — or perhaps, in the words Count Taaffe (Prime Minister of Austria in the Dual Monarchy of Austro-Hungary), “bearable dissatisfaction” — can be maintained.” (Hall: 482)

The South African context is particularly complex, given its history of apartheid and the need for social transformation. Contributing to the problem is the fact that the current political institutions, which provide the framework for the South African political system, are based, primarily, on a Western European model and thus, it can be argued, are at times contradictory to the political values and morals of other South African cultures, in particular, Zulu traditionalism. Zulu traditional leadership focuses upon the hierarchy of authority and the institutionalization of the King as ruler. Political authority is centralized, which allows for chiefs to intervene in social conflicts, whilst at the same time regulating external affairs. “The Zulu Kingdom is a central politically controlled system of economy and law.” (Deflem: 371-391) These basic characteristics of Zulu culture already highlight the disparity between traditional leadership and liberal

democracy as a means of governance. The following quote, taken from the work of Daphna Golan, summarizes the fundamental problem which has led to questions being asked of the role of traditional Zulu leadership in South African democracy and the prospect of political stability.

“Clashes between supporters of Inkatha and those of the ANC have resulted in the death of thousands of people in the last five years. While Inkatha, a Zulu-based movement, attempts to maintain the ethnic division enforced by the apartheid regime, the ANC is struggling for a non-ethnic and colour-blind democracy and a political system elected on the basis of “one man, one vote.” Their struggle is about the future of South Africa, about sharing power and resources. It is also, however, about the past and the use of its symbols.” (Golan: 113)

The development of political institutions within a society is heavily dependent on the culture of that society and thus so is the nature of the political system. Adding to the problem of cultural pluralism is globalization and the fact that whilst it has fuelled economic integration, on a societal or cultural level, the opposite, it can be argued, is evident. As Huntington points out, there has been a rebirth of the notion of civilizations with identity groups forming based upon cultural and religious factors which transcend geographical borders (Huntington 1993: 22-28). Within nation-states, therefore, there are groups of people who identify more with the ideals of their ‘civilization’ than the spirit of nationalism and thus base their lives upon such ideals. Although on a micro-level, this is particularly evident within the South African context and in the case of the Zulu Nation. The reluctance of ethnic Zulus to move away from their cultural heritage in the contemporary era of globalization and political liberalization, is creating the ‘fault-lines’ of conflict which Huntington speaks of. Violence, as Golan points out, has already erupted over the disparity between the ideals of Zulu leaders and the government’s quest for liberal democracy. This poses a very serious question as to the long-term sustainability of South African democracy, especially with the borders of KwaZulu-Natal and thus begs the question of whether there is potential for compatibility between the two forces.

The primary challenge facing traditional leadership in the South African context is whether traditional leadership can be incorporated into the ideals of South African democracy and, furthermore, what the consequences are on the future stability of the South African political system.

Lessons from the rest of Africa

Across Africa, there are several kinds of chiefs and chieftaincies, and likewise there have been several different approaches to incorporating them into new and developing democracies and democratic structures. However, in many African countries the relationship between traditional leaders and government remains strained, as has been the case in South Africa. Ghana however, has been an encouraging example of a nation which has successfully blended the old and the new with inspiring results.

Ghana has managed to gain the cooperation and support of its traditional leaders for a range of development endeavors, including health and education programmes. Instead of being seen as adversarial to democracy, these leaders indeed complement and advance it. However, traditional leadership in Ghana is somewhat different from that of South Africa, in that some have argued that it is more democratic in nature and hence better able to coexist with, or even enhance, democratic institutions.

One Ghanaian's description of village life and politics illustrates the ways in which democratic practices are inherent in Ghanaian traditional leadership:

“When I was growing up at the village, the “dawuro” was the most common ... method by which the traditional leader communicated with his subjects. Such communication involved either summoning the community to participate in discussion of issues impacting on the village, or requesting his subject to undertake some important community activity. ... Democracy was exhibited at every level through the participation of all able-bodied men and women in community discussions as well as in the execution of these activities. The selection and eventual installment of a traditional leader was based on democratic principles. While the

village “royal house” had the prerogative of suggesting the chief-designate, the final approval was left to the community at large. Any nominee deemed unsuitable by the community was rejected, and it was up to the village royal house to nominate a substitute who was acceptable to the community.” (Ghanaweb, 2006)

The author further asserts that the method of identifying and installing traditional leaders in traditional Ghanaian communities that he has described is no different from the modern practice of conducting elections to elect governments in modern political systems (Ghana web, 2006).

The central government has acknowledged the importance of traditional leaders to the social and political life of the country, and has recognized that at the level of local government, they are indispensable. Congruently, traditional leaders have themselves realized that in order to meet the needs of their people today, they need to modernize the institution of traditional leadership, especially in the face of new social, economic, and health problems created by modern pressures. Thus, in Ghana chiefs and queen mothers are regaining a lot of authority as partners in development.

In the western world celebrities use their fame to convey socially significant messages, and likewise in Africa, chiefs and queen mothers have the respect and authority to influence people’s views and practices on difficult issues (Robitaille, 2005:4). In Ghana traditional leaders have become increasingly involved in the struggle against HIV/AIDS. The task is considerable when trying to convince individuals to change their most personal behaviours, such as sexuality, and in order to be effective, the message must come from a trusted source. Thus, in Ghana, traditional leaders have been encouraged to cooperate “with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), international agencies, and government to build the capacity of their local communities to respond to the epidemic” (Robitaille, 2005:4).

Another area where traditional leaders have had considerable influence in Ghana is the contentious question of land ownership. It is not uncommon for land in Ghana to be held

in common and thus, foreign and domestic investors have occasionally complained that it is hard to obtain land titles. They have voiced their preference for private property ownership, instead of the current system from one based on communal land tenure — involving ownership by a chief or the head of an extended family. In response, "the government approached the National House of Chiefs to examine this issue. The National House of Chiefs concluded that for a variety of reasons, it would be too socially disruptive and could result in the creation of a landless class. According to the current system virtually every Ghanaian has rights to some land. This system has proved a saving grace as without the customary land tenure system, the country may have been unable to resettle the 1,000,000 former citizens who were expelled from Nigeria in 1983 (Eberlee, 2003: 2-3).

Swaziland too has been mobilizing its traditional leaders in development initiatives. In 2000 Orphan Aid, a non-governmental programme was launched, to assist children whose parents have died from AIDS. This programme however, is dependant on the cooperation of Swaziland's 200 chiefs.

These traditional leaders help identify orphans in their areas with the assistance of designated field workers from their communities, and then consults with representatives from Orphan Aid and the Department of Social Welfare under the Ministry of Health to place the child with a suitable caregiver, approved and financially assisted by Orphan Aid. Prince Mguciso, one of King Mswati III's royal councilors "The chiefs know their subjects and what is going on in their areas better than anyone. They have seen the toll Aids has taken on families and the rising number of orphans the disease is leaving." (Hall, 2000).

In order to emulate these countries it is vital that traditional leadership reform to some degree in order to assimilate to democracy, and remain appropriate and meaningful to modern life. In addition, it is vital that government recognizes the importance of traditional leadership to South African society and aides this assimilation process through

appropriate legislation, education. This is vital as cooperation between the government and traditional leaders, and even the NGO sector, is imperative to development in rural areas.

Traditional Leadership and Public Participation: Help or hindrance

Chiefs and other traditional leaders still wield considerable power in many African countries, despite the rise of elected governments, bureaucracies, and other apparatus of the modern state. This makes them uniquely powerful in their ability to express the will of their people and also, at times, to suppress that will.

Their influence is especially strong in rural areas where, due to the strong preservation of traditional norms and values in these communities and their geographical and political distance from the centre. Not surprisingly, here too is where people are most underrepresented and their needs most neglected. In such circumstances, chiefs often play a key role as community advocates. Chiefs constantly act as spokespeople for the community, articulating locally felt needs, expressing grievances and mobilizing support for particular causes. In many African countries, traveling to rural areas and meeting with their chiefs has become a popular public relations exercise for politicians and local leaders use this opportunity to express the hope that the government will build a road into the area, open a hospital, or upgrade the school (Eberlee, 2003: 2-3).

As a result, individuals in these areas are encouraged to participate, to make their views known to their traditional leaders as they see these leaders as valuable outlets for these views. Chiefs serve to mediate between an ever complicated and bureaucratic state and an increasingly excluded and frustrated people. If however, this mechanism was not available to them, individuals may be discouraged from participation as they lack the ability or means to effectively communicate their views to those in office, or feel that even if they do, there is little likelihood of any action to be taken, as these individuals

have little or no political influence. The status of chiefs however, adds legitimacy and authority to the claims of the community.

In addition, traditional leaders can encourage public participation due to the different appeal it holds, compared to that of the democratic state. The roots of legitimacy for African chiefs are partly pre-colonial historic, partly religious, and partly cultural. The contemporary state's roots, by contrast, include the legal system, the constitution, the nationalist struggle, and democratic elections (Eberlee, 2003:3). When the state attempts different projects, it may exclude chiefs, leaving untapped a possibly large support base. According to Ray (Eberlee, 2003:2), one of the ways to remedy this is to work out mechanisms, where appropriate, to combine legitimacies from both the state and traditional leaders, so there are more appeals to citizens to carry out development programs [or to engage in civic activities], whatever those might be".

However, as Ntsebeza (2004) reminds us, we must not ignore the possible dictatorial or despotic tendencies of traditional rule in South Africa. Due to their strong influence over their communities, individuals may be afraid to make their true opinions known and hence the chief will not be an effective representative of the will of the people. Further chiefs may use the positions and their ties with government to further their own goals at the expense of the community. Hence it is vital that local government structures interact regularly with rural communities and that these communities are educated on their rights and the appropriate role of their chief, in order to provide a suitable degree of transparency, checks and balances.

Conclusion

The politics of traditional leadership is critical in the quest for a stable and transparent democracy in South Africa. In conclusion, it is important to recognize the incongruence between the values of traditional leadership and those of liberal democracy and thus question the relevancy of traditional leadership in contemporary South African politics.

This said, however, one cannot overlook the social role that traditional leaders play within their rural communities and thus can be considered a useful tool in helping to stimulate public participation with regard to political affairs. The primary factor which answers the question over the relevancy of traditional leadership is the extent to which they are given political voice. The hierarchical and dictatorial tendencies of many traditional leaders suggests that, given the fundamentally contradictory values of democracy and traditional leadership, social mobilization and encouraging public participation, should be the primary role of traditional authorities. In order for the development of a sustainable and transparent democracy, all levels of leadership need to stem from the same liberal ideals upon which the constitution and legitimacy of South African politics is based.

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