

Traditional Leaders in a Democracy: Resources, Respect and Resistance 2019

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ABSTRACT

The book, *Traditional Leaders in a Democracy: Resources, Respect and Resistance* (2019), has been produced by the Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (MISTRA), a recently established private organization, which operates information services on governance and development, and whose address is given in the heading to this review. The book is well summed up by editors themselves, as a dramatic picture in which the misery of traditional leaders in our country is mirrored, showing that their powers have been stripped in rural areas. Each of the 13 chapters, dealing with various aspects of the history of traditional leaders, is preceded by half-a-dozen highlights calculated to chill the blood of anyone who cares about the future of traditional leaders in South Africa.

Keywords: Democracy; Governmental; Traditional leaders

INTRODUCTION

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Towards the end of colonization and apartheid, traditional leaders in South Africa enjoyed the privilege of leading rural communities to prosperity. However, the situation for traditional leaders today is worse compared to the era of colonization and apartheid.

The gravity of the situation in relation to the deterioration of the rural leadership of traditional leaders in land and law administration has now been neatly documented by a dedicated group of male and female experts in the field of traditional leadership.

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Each of the 13 chapters, dealing with various aspects of the history of traditional leaders, is preceded by half-a-dozen highlights calculated to chill the blood of anyone who cares about the future of traditional leaders in South Africa. Here are some examples:

Land

Traditional leaders are said to be the custodians of land for their

communities. However, land that is economically viable for the purpose of mining is being looted away from traditional leaders and communities by the government. It is alleged that politicians are looting land in traditional areas.

Leadership

The recognition of traditional leaders was based on wars that have occurred for over a hundred years. As a result, leaders gained followers, land and cows to sustain their communities. The leaders then maintained the leadership in the family, which was then passed down to their grandsons. Traditional leadership is based on the premise that leaders are born not made. However, in the case of South Africa there are traditional leaders that are made. For instance, in Eastern Cape politicians are able to remove a legitimate traditional leader and install a leader of the government's choice. Traditional leaders find themselves in a position where the leaders have to compete with politicians to lead the rural communities.

When it comes to the issue of leadership, the Khoi-San communities are experiencing a serious challenge mainly because their traditional hunting habit is to move from one place to another as a way of life. The community cannot stay in one place for a long period and establish normal leadership communities. Thus, the leadership of the Khoi-San cannot be established and maintained because the communities are not stable or fixed in one area.

The above indicates that a consciousness of the problems of traditional leaders in a democracy is growing in South Africa, and the Department of Traditional Affairs has been promulgated to deal with all such challenges. The Department acknowledges the

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problems of traditional leaders and has introduced the Traditional Khoi-San Bill (TKLB) to deal with discrepancies of the past and to acknowledge that the Khoi-San and its communities were excluded from participating in government.

Legislation

The Government has promulgated legislation that has caused a great many challenges for traditional leaders. For example, the Traditional Courts Bill has its advantages and disadvantages for traditional leaders. Women according to some traditional customs are not allowed to be in the same court with men. However, according to the Constitution and the Traditional Courts Bill, women have a democratic right to be heard and sit with men and take part in decision making processes. On the other hand, Traditional Courts are easy to access without communities paying any fees as compared to the western style courts.

Nkosi Phathekile Holomisa and Nkosi Mwelo Nonkonyana discuss the issues of how traditional leaders supported the ruling party African National Congress (ANC) to lead South Africa to democracy. The authors clearly state that the ANC in the

negotiations in the 1990s promised traditional leaders that they would have a meaningful role to play in government and that the roles of traditional leaders would be stipulated in the Constitution of 1996. However, the role of traditional leaders in chapter 12 of the Constitution of South Africa 1996 was not proclaimed and traditional leaders have had to rely on the National and Provincial governments to provide the leaders with roles and functions.

The traditional leaders are of the opinion that the current government can bring change and allow traditional leaders to have a say on issues of their leadership, land and the law.

Past failures are officially recognized and constant deliberations with the minister responsible for the Department of Traditional Affairs, Minister Zweli Mkhize, will bring change. The discussions give hope that those charged with the care of traditional leaders will take up the challenge to see that their message penetrates all governmental activities and activates the people responsible. Unless this happens, the future of traditional leaders and rural communities could be dismal.

This review will itself assist to raise public sector consciousness and, one hopes, act as an eye opener for the government.