

INDIGENOUS AFRICAN CONCEPT OF A LEADER AS REFLECTED IN SELECTED
AFRICAN NOVELS

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DECLARATION

I declare that INDIGENOUS AFRICAN CONCEPT OF LEADER AS REFLECTED IN SELECTED AFRICAN NOVELS is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references and that this work has not been submitted before for any other degree at any other institution.

Full names

Date



DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my entire family especially my wife Lucia who supported me through thick and thin; and in particular my late mother, Evelyn, who goaded me to look to my laurels.

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I would sincerely like to acknowledge my supervisor Dr SA Dseagu for the pivotal role he played in making this dissertation a success. His assistance was invaluable and unparalleled. Had it not been for him, the dissertation would not have materialised. May the Good Lord bless him abundantly.

Last but not least, I would like to thank the ever loving God for protecting me during my travels to the university, and giving me the will power never to surrender in the face of adversity.

ABSTRACT

The mini dissertation seeks to explore the positive and negative qualities of an indigenous African leader as presented in a variety of oral texts including folktales, proverbs and praise poems as well as in the African novels of *Mhudi*, *Maru*, *Things Fall Apart* and *Petals of Blood* in order to deduce an indigenous African concept of a leader. This research is motivated by the fact that although researchers and academics worldwide acknowledge that it is very difficult to objectively define and discuss the terms 'leader' and 'indigenous leader' yet many tend to dismiss offhand such indigenous concepts of leadership as *ubuntu* as primitive, barbaric and irrelevant to modern institutions without examining them in detail.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 DEFINITION OF 'LEADER'

According to *Macmillan English Dictionary* (2005: 809), a leader is "someone who is responsible for, or in control of a group, organisation, country". This definition places the key words on the management role of a leader. *Chambers 21st Century English Dictionary* (1996: 774) defines a leader as "someone or something that leads or guides others". This definition places the key words on the role of a leader as a guide. The *Macmillan English Dictionary* definition suggests that a leader may or may not be in the midst of the group as he or she manages it. The *Chambers 21st Century English Dictionary* definition, however, suggests that a leader is physically present in the group and is located at the front of it demonstrating how things must be done. The two dictionaries therefore differ in their view of a leader.

Just as the two dictionaries differ in their view of a leader, many academics and researchers also differ in their definition of a leader. The following are some comments by some academics and researchers on the issue of the problem of definition:

Mainstream leadership theory and research attempted to answer the fundamental question of what makes a leader. However, a subsequent examination of trait and contingent theory only led to the production of inconclusive and often contradictory results (Bresnen, 1995: 495).

But what is leadership? It seems to be one of those qualities that you know when you see it, but is difficult to describe. There are almost as many definitions as there are commentators (Van Maurik, 2001: 2).

Leadership is an elusive concept. Like many complex ideas, it is deceptively easy to use in everyday conversation. Everyone talks about it, few understand it (Chima, 2007: 53).

The subject of leadership has attracted huge interest over the years. The resultant massive body of literature on the subject generated confidence in the existence and study of the phenomenon, but there was considerable discontent with the

results of studies so far. Moreover, the academic world still did not demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Nyabadza, 2008:1).

Nyabadza, after examining various attempts by academics and researchers to arrive at a satisfactory definition of the term 'leader', comes to the following conclusion:

Finding a common definition of leadership may simply not be possible as two thirds of texts on the subject do not define the matter. Furthermore, even if such a definition was possible, this could possibly stifle new ideas and ways of thinking about the phenomenon (2008: 19).

The main reason that is often given by academics and researchers for the difficulty in satisfactorily defining the term 'leader' is that the methodology used for the analysis is contested:

Disagreement about the definition of leadership stems from the fact that it involves a complex interaction among the leader, the followers, and the situation. For example some researchers define leadership in terms of personality and physical traits, while others believe leadership is represented by a set of prescribed behaviours. In contrast, other researchers believe that leadership is a temporary role that can be filled by any one (Mollo, Stanz, Groenewald, 2005:35).

1.2 OVER-RELIANCE ON UNITED STATES OF AMERICA FOR SITUATIONAL MODELS OF LEADER

In the attempt to make it manageable to describe and analyse the term 'leader', many academics and researchers have tended to contextualise it in Western culture. House and Aditya (1997) argue that 98% of theories of leadership which have thus been contextualised in Western culture and were taught globally in most academic institutions in the 1990s were distinctly American in character. These theories, according to them, highlighted many aspects of American culture such as aggressiveness and individualism and promoted them as standards of ideal leadership. House and Aditya (1997) explain that not societies in world cherished the American ideals of aggressiveness and individualism so the United States-based

models did always apply on the global setting. For instance, the ideals of aggressiveness and individualism are not cherished by Africans.

1.3 SEARCH FOR GLOBAL MODELS OF LEADER

Attempts have therefore made to find alternatives to these United States-centred models to support the theories of leadership (Locke, 2007; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Gronn, 2008; Wright & Barker, 2000). Many studies in this regard have been influenced by the ideas of Weber. In his “The three types of legitimate rule” (1958), he explains that leadership is structured in a lineal progression beginning with the primitive stage which comprises traditional leadership and developing into the transitional stage which comprises charismatic individual leadership and ending in the advanced stage which comprises modern bureaucratic leadership.

Weber explains the primitive stage of traditional leadership structure as follows:

Traditional authority is legitimated by the sanctity of tradition. The ability and right to rule is passed down, often through heredity. It does not change overtime, does not facilitate social change, tends to be irrational and inconsistent, and perpetuates the status quo. The creation of new law opposite traditional norms is deemed impossible in principle (Weber, 1958: 4).

This idea that traditional leadership structures are “irrational”, “inconsistent” and “static” has prejudiced many efforts to find global models to substitute for the United States based-models. Hence, although academics and researchers agree with the principle that leadership is heavily influenced by environmental (social, cultural, religious, historical) factors, yet at the same time many of these same academics and researchers do not think modern societies can learn anything from traditional models of leadership.

For instance, Barnard (1992) in searching for qualities that make a person a leaders in Khoisan society finds that such a person must be modest and humble. He concludes that these qualities are “the opposite of arrogant, boastful, overbearing and aloof (p.

245)” qualities which are prized in many United States-based models of leadership. On this basis he makes the following observation that the views and recommendations of Western authorities should be used with caution in research into indigenous African institutions:

In studying Khoisan kinship, I have often found that the rigid application of traditional models drawn from other parts of the world or from anthropological, rather than indigenous discourse, obscures interesting features. An approach which takes into account similar features across societal boundaries can reveal underlying structures which add much more to our understanding of kinship than the surface structures which are the subject of conventional methods of formal analysis (pp. 5-6).

This contrast in leadership models between an indigenous African society and the United States which Barnard has identified is so significant that it can be used towards establishing global models for leadership. However, because of negative opinion of authorities such as Weber about indigenous leadership structures, such indigenous models are often ignored by academics and researchers. Therefore, although academics and researchers wish to find global alternatives to the United States-based models, in actual practice there is not much incentive to research for those indigenous models.

1.4 DEFINITION OF 'INDIGENOUS LEADER'

As it is difficult to precisely define the term 'leader', it is to be expected that the definition of an indigenous leader would also be difficult. Three reasons account for the difficulty in defining the term 'indigenous leader'. The first reason is that the conception, status and role of a traditional leader are context-based and therefore differ from one society to another:

The authority and role of traditional leaders differs according respective groups and even subgroups. This makes it even more difficult to come up with a clean, simple set of meanings relating to traditional leaders (Rechebei, 1999).

The second reason is that there are different types and levels of indigenous leaders

extending from kings to clan elders so it is difficult to lump them all of them together and give them one definition:

There are various types and levels of traditional leaders. Traditional leaders include such instruments of political organization and socialization such as chiefs, clan leaders, kings, leaders of clan and chief councils, leaders of social development structures, leaders of justice dispensing structures, and leaders of professional bodies such as priests, healers, and diviners (Senyonjo, 2002).

The third reason is that accurate information on all these various types of indigenous leaders is scanty:

Perhaps in their sheer variety, uncodified flexibility, and ever-changing adaptability, traditional forms of governance in Africa seem unpredictable, risky, and difficult to control or categorize. The way we do things in a Tswana chieftom in South Africa is different from the way things work in Ghana or Cameroon or Swaziland. Some of these institutions may be more or less representative, more or less transparent, and even more or less oppressive (Molotlegi, 2004).

1.5 SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON INDIGENOUS AFRICAN LEADERS

Although academics and researchers acknowledge that it is difficult to define the term 'indigenous leader', yet most of them agree that there is substantial information from indigenous societies about the status, roles and qualities of indigenous leaders.

One important source of this information comes from the findings of anthropologists. According to anthropologists, the institution of kings and chiefs is hereditary and patriarchal in lineage in most African societies (Ashton, 1947; Stayt, 1968; Ralushai, 1982; Lainè, 1991; Beall, Mkhize & Vawda, 2004). Hence, kings and chiefs in most African societies are not chosen at random; they are usually descendants - sons or nephews - of previous kings and chiefs. Therefore, one substantial point that can be made about indigenous African leaders is that they are mainly males who are descended from previous leaders in patrilineal heritage.

According to Schapera (1965), a Tswana chief holds office through heredity. Such a person is the eldest son of the 'great wife' of previous chief. A 'great wife' does not mean necessarily the first wife, but a wife designated to bear the heir. If the chief has no male child by the 'great wife', the eldest son of the wife next in the rank to the 'great wife' becomes his heir. If all the wives of the chief produce no male descendants, the chief-ship passes to the line of his next brother. According to Schapera, succession in Tswana society is determined strictly by seniority of descent. If the heir is still young when his father dies, a paternal uncle or some other close agnate acts as a regent during his minority.

Although leadership succession is generally patrilineal, the Modjadji, Rain Queen dynasty is a phenomenon which proves that there are instances in Africa where leadership is passed on through maternal inheritance. The origin of the Modjadji, Rain Queen dynasty is recounted as follows:

Queen Modjadji V has thirty-three wives. She is not allowed to marry men, but must choose her 'wives' among the eldest daughters of the loved people, which her dynasty has ruled for two centuries. Modjadji V the Rain Queen has mystical rainmaking powers. The Zulu have always feared these queens, who live in the mountains of the Transvaal. They believed they were four-lunged witches, who haunted ponds and marshes.

When the ruler died, the empire of the Monomotapa was divided between her two sons; one of them was the sacred king of Mambo. His daughter, Dzuguzini, and her lover had a son out of wedlock. Since she refused to reveal her lover's name to her father, he expelled her from the kingdom. Before leaving, she stole the sacred beads and the secret of the rain, which she gave to her son as a gift. Later, she admitted that she had committed incest with her brother the prince.

Thus Dzuguzi's son became the new king of Mambo. Born of incest, the Dynasty perpetuated itself by incest. Mugodo, the fifth king in the dynasty, was paranoid. He saw plots everywhere. He murdered his sons, and as his madness worsened, he became convinced that all men wanted to assassinate him.

Mugodo had a vision that only a woman born of royal incest could govern the people. Since his eldest daughter refused to commit incest, king Mugodo convinced his second daughter, who was more naive, to do so. She gave him a son whom he immediately strangled with his bare

hands. Her second child was a daughter who became Modjadji II, the Rain Queen (Lainé, 1991:148).

Another important source of information comes from folk tales, proverbs, traditional wise sayings, and praise poems. One such folk tale is the following Xitsonga story entitled *Dyikunwana Dya Mukhalabye* (Khathi, 1986: 12-16):

Garingani wa garingani

Khale ka khaleni a ku ri na mufana loyi a tshama na tata wakwe. Tata wa mufana loyi a khalabyile swinene naswona a nga ha tirhi. A a hanya hi ku hlota swiharhi. Hi ntiyiso, tata wa mufana loyi a a nga koti ku hlota hikuva a khalabyile. A nga ha koti ku vona naswona ku famba a ku ri ntirho lowukulu.

Tata wa mufana loyi a nga ha koti ku rhendzeleka ngopfu hikuva a nga ha koti na ku tsutsuma, kutani hambu loko a ngheneriwile hi makhema a nga ta kota ku tsutsuma. Loko mufana a dlaye xiharhi, a ta huwelela a ri ekule a ku: "Tatanoo. Hlanganyeta ndzilo. Ndzi dlele mhunti." Mukhalabye a ta n'wayitelanyana hikuva a swi tiva leswaku lexi a xi ri xikombiso xa leswaku u ta etlela a dyile madyambu walawo.

Nkarhi wu fambile wu ya emahlweni. Siku rin'wana mufana u humile a ya eku hloteni. A va tivanga leswaku a ku ta humelela yini. Siku rero va tikumile va langutanile ni makhema. Loko makhema ya fika, mufana u tsutsumile a kongoma tlhelo ra le kaya. U tsutsumile ku ponisa vutomi bya yena; kambe a swi twa leswaku a swi ringananga. U yile emahlweni a tiyisela. U tsutsumile a ya emahlweni. Loko a ri karhi a tsutsuma, u swi vonile leswaku makhema a ya tlheli. U tshivelerile a tsutsuma swinene.

Loko a ri karhi a tsutsuma, u huwelerile. Rito ri twakale ri ri karhi ri ku: "Tatanoo. U nga hlanganyeti ndzilo. Makhema hi lawa. Ya le ku hlongoriseni mhunti." Mufana u yile emahlweni a ku: "Tatanoo. Va ndzi endlile mhunti!"

Ematshan'wini yo yingisela hi vukheta, mukhalabye u sungurile ku n'wayitela a tsakile. U endle tano hikuva ku huwelela eka yena a ku vula leswaku nyama yi le ndleleni. U sungurile ku famba-famba a ri karhi a hlanganyeta ndzilo. Ndzilo wu pfurhile hi matimba. Malangavi ya va lamakulu swinene.

Mufana a ri eku teni, a ri karhi a tsutsuma makhema. U tlhele a huwelela a ku: "Tatanoo. U nga hlanganyeteli ndzilo wu kula. Namuntlha ti bihile. Hi nghenelwe hi makhema!" Mukhalabye a nga kalanga a yingisela. U yile amahlweni a ri karhi a hlanganyetela ndzilo.

Loko makhema ya ri ekusuhi, hi kona mukhalabye a nga sungula ku swi

vona leswaku timhaka se a ti bihile. U khomiwile hi ku chava. U tlhelele endzhaku a nga ha tivi lexi a faneleke ku xi endle. U wele ehansi hi ku chava lokukulu. Makhema se a ya ri kusuhi no n'wi fikela.

Hi nkarhi wolowo wa nkemankema, u titlhotlhometele emisaveni a tumbela. U sungurile ku tivona nandzu a ku: "A ndzi ehleketa leswaku n'wananga a a vula leswaku ndzi fanele ku hlanganyetela ndzilo. A ndzi ehleketa leswaku u ri ndzi fanele ku tseleka poto exitikweni. Hambi swi ri tano, ndzi ponile."

U vurile leswaku u ponile, a rivala leswaku dyikunwana dyakwe dyi le rivaleni hambiswi a a ringetile ku titumbeta. Kutani makhema ya tlhele ya vuya ku ta lava mukhalabye hikuva ya swi vonile leswaku ya vonile munhu eku sunguleni. Makhema ya lavile mukhalabye, kambe ya nga kumi nchumu. Ku nga ri khale ku twale un'wana wa wona a ku: "Ndzi kumile mina!"

Hi loko lavan'wana va vutisa "Xana u kumile yini?"

"Ndzi kumile mina! Ndzi kumile mina! Ndzi kumile dyikunwana!" Loko a ri karhi a ku tano, hi loko a pfupfula dyikunwana dya mukhalabye. Dyikunwana dyedyo a dyi gwanyile dyi tlhela dyi ondza-ku komba leswaku hakunene I dyikunwana dya mukhalabye.

Makhema ya swi vonile leswaku leswi ya nga kuma dyikunwana ledyi n'wini wa dyona a ri ekusuhi! Va sungurile nakambe ku lava endhawini leyi va nga kuma kona dyikunwana. Endzhaku hi loko va kuma mukhalabye laha a a titumbete kona. Hi loko makhema ya khoma mukhalabye ya phatlulela ya dya swirho hinkwaswo.

Ku sukela siku rero mbilu ya mufana a yi khunguvanyekile swinene. U ehleketile hi tindlela leti a a ta rihisela ha tona rifu ra tata wa yena. Nkarhi wun'wana niwun'wa na a a tsundzuka loko a ri karhi a ku: "Tatanoo! Hlanganyeta ndzilo. Ndzi dlhele mhunti!"

U fikile laha a nga swi vona leswaku makhema a va ri vanhu vo biha timbilu swinene, hikuva a ha rhandza tata wakwe swinene, hambiswi se a nga ha voni kahle, naswwona a nga ha koti ku tsutsuma.

Mufana u tshamile ehansi. U bohile makungu ya leswaku makhema hinkwawo ya fanele ku dlawa hikuva ya ta dlayetela vanhu hinkwavo.

Loko tata wa yena a ha ku dlawa, mufana u pete byalwa bya makhaha kutani a rhamba makhema naswona a dlaye tihomu timbirhi. Makhema ya yengiwile hi byalwa na nyama, ya rivala leswaku ya ha ku onhela mufana loyi hi ku n'wi dlayela tata wakwe.

Makhema ya te ya tile. Ya tile hi madzanadzana. Ku sala ku ri hava

na ndhawu yo phela marha.

Mufana hi loko a ya phamela wonge o ya lan'wela. Makhema ya tsaka swinene. A ya nyiketela byalwa ya dakwa ya etlelatela Loko se ya dakwile, ya sungula ku dedeleka ya wela ehansi. Hi loko mufana a suka khwatsi a kongoma tlhelo ra nyangwa. A fika a pfula rivanti. Loko a ri gantlase se a vekile swihula swa byanyi ekusuhi na rona.

Hi loko a lumeka byanyi byi khoma ndzilo. Malangavi ya phohlela henhla ku tlhela ku twala mpfumawulo wo baleka.

Khema rin'wana ri vutisal: "Xana ku baleka kwihi?" Mufana a ku: "Ku na tilo namuntlh a." Khema ri ku: "Xana ku baleka kwihi?" Kutani mufana a ku: "Evukon'wanini bya timyana!"

Hi xihatla ya sungula ku vona leswaku ya le ku tshweni, yindlu a yi ri karhi yi tshwa na wona.

Ya sungurile ku huwelela mufana leswaku a pfula rivanti. Mufana u lo hleka a ku: "Ri le ku balekeni evukon'wanini bya timbyana. Xana u kwihi tata wa mina loyi mi nga n'wi dya mi nwi heta? Namuntlha ri le ku balekeni evukon'wanini bya timbyana !"

Makhema ya fa. A ku vanga na rin'we ra mhamba leri nga sala ku hlayela vatukulu leswi nga humelela. Vanbu a va tsakile ku tiva leswaku a ku nga ha ri na makhema lawa a ya ta kharhata ku fana na khale. Mufana u endliwile hosi. Pthu choyoyo!

(Loosely translated) Long, long ago there was a young man who lived with his father. The father had a big toe. He was very old. He walked with difficulty and could not see properly. The young man was the bread-winner. He lived by hunting. Every time when he returned from hunting with a kill, he would call his father from a distance and tell him to stoke up the fire. The old man responded. He smiled knowing that he would eat.

One day the young man went hunting as usual. In the forest he encountered the cannibals. They stalked him, in order to kill and devour him. The young man ran away. The cannibals pursued him. When he was about to reach him, he called his father and told him not to stoke up the fire because he was being pursued by the cannibals. The old man mistook the warning as a sign to stoke up the fire. He stoked it up.

When the young man was about few metres to reach home, the old man realised his mistake. He quickly hid by burying himself in the ground. However, the cannibals had seen him, yet were preoccupied by pursuing the young man. The young man disappeared from their sight. The cannibals returned to the yard to look for the old man. They could

not find him. When they were about to leave, one of them saw the big toe which protruded from the ground.

They dug it out together with the old man. They dismembered the old man and ate him. The young man was saddened by the death of his father. He brewed beer and slaughtered two oxen. He invited the cannibals to a feast. The cannibals attended in great numbers, none failed to attend. He accommodated them in a big hut. They ate and drank themselves to a stupor. The young man locked them in and set the hut on fire. When the cannibals felt the heat and the crackling of the fire, one of them asked, "What is blasting?" The young man answered, "There is thunder." He went on to say, "There is thunder at the in-laws of dogs." He laughed. All the cannibals burnt to death.

There was jubilation in the whole land. The young man became a hero. His shrewdness necessitated the people to honour him. They made him a chief.

The above story precisely illustrates that a nonentity can become a leader by virtue of his outstanding personality or character such as bravery, courage and determination to defy all odds. This story teaches the moral lesson that in indigenous African societies individuals who come from disadvantaged backgrounds can also be appointed leaders on account of their outstanding actions at the service of their societies. Stories such as this therefore show that although indigenous African leadership is on the whole hereditary, yet indigenous African societies make room for people from humble backgrounds to rise to the top.

The following Xitsonga proverbs also give information about indigenous African leaders:

Vukosi a byi peli nambu (literal translation: kingship does not cross a river). The general meaning is that a king or a chief has a specific territory over which he rules; in other words, an indigenous leader cannot be discussed in isolation from the community over which he rules.

Hosi hosi hi vanhu (literal translation: A king or chiefs is so because of people). The general meaning is that a king or a chief needs subjects in order to rule; in other words, the powers of an indigenous leader derive from the people over whom he rules; this

means a chief or king.

Praise poems are another source of important information about indigenous leaders. Many of the kings and chiefs are easily recognisable in their communities by the entourage of praise singers which accompanies them. The king or chief is not addressed by name; he is referred to symbolically as an animal or an object. Such animals and objects are called totems.

According to Schapera, totems are a very significant source of information about the close bond that exists between a chief and his subjects in indigenous Tswana societies. There were special myths telling how each Tswana group has acquired its totem. The totem was also a taboo to members of the group. For example, they might not kill or eat any animal of that species, not even touch its skin, should they do so in advertently they had to be specifically "purified" to avoid illness or other misfortune (1965: 30).

In this passage, Schapera is explaining one of the attributes of an indigenous African leader. He says that a totem is what unites an indigenous leader and his subjects in the community and praise-poems are used to describe a king or a chief as the personification of the community. This personification is often expressed through the name of the king or chief which is also the name of the tribe or community.

Many African literary works - novels, poems and plays - written in European languages also contain information about the indigenous African concept of leaders. *Things Fall Apart*, written by Chinua Achebe, is one such novel. The main character, Okonkwo, is a quintessence of an African traditional leader. He exemplifies the following characteristics of an indigenous leader:

Distinguished Character. "Okonko was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievement" (p. 3).

"He had spoken violently to his clansmen when they had met in the market-place to

decide on their action. And they had listened to him with respect (p. 136).

Wealth: "Okonkwo's prosperity was visible in his household" (p. 3). *Fierce Warrior*: "If a man comes into my hut and defecates on the floor, what do I do? Do I shut my eyes? No! I take a stick and break his head. That is what a man does (p. 113).

1.5.1 CONTESTATION ABOUT RELIABILITY OF SOURCES

Although these above-mentioned sources are useful sources of information, their reliability as scientific sources of deduction is often contested:

Traditional indigenous stories are unusual as sources in management and leadership research, except in research fields, such as anthropology, where indigenous people are the object of study. In such studies their stories are used to understand the indigenous society in question, but the knowledge is not considered relevant for drawing conclusions valid for the Western industrialised societies. The issue is what is considered legitimate knowledge. The scientific concept of knowledge has not much in common with the knowledge of indigenous people, which is largely based on personal experiences and uncontrolled, undocumented observations and conveyed in stories via oral tradition (Sveiby, 2009).

In the same vein, Van Nieuwaal and Van Dijk (1999), in an exhaustive analysis of studies on indigenous African structures of leadership, explain that many of the assumptions made about concepts of indigenous African leadership are based, not on detailed knowledge, but on sheer speculation. Similarly, Gronn (2002), O'Tool (2003), and Manz (2005) argue that many of the sources of information on indigenous concepts of leadership are largely dogmatic and uncritical.

Hence, the consensus of many academics and researchers is that the models presented in many indigenous concepts of leadership, when simulated, often result in organisational chaos and anarchy (Locke, 2007: 283). As a result of this contestation, there is a tendency among academics and researchers either to handle these sources of information with caution or to discredit them altogether.

1.6 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

As mentioned earlier, many academics and researchers regard Weber as the leading authority on the subject of leadership and therefore his statement that indigenous leadership is “irrational, inconsistent and static” is even regarded as a theory. When such a theory that indigenous African leadership structures are “irrational, inconsistent and static” is taught in African universities, many African learners would end up becoming ashamed of their own cultures:

One of the extremely debilitating effects of the history of disadvantage is the distorted self-image that non-egalitarian social systems impose on those who are considered by those in power to be unworthy. Over time, a deep sense of inferiority and the inability to make a worthwhile contribution grow within the disadvantaged individual...There are a number of issues which appear to be specific or indigenous and which need to be incorporated into a theory of African leadership. African culture values a strongly humanistic approach to leadership. The concept of *ubuntu* is one which is frequently offered as a basis for an African leadership model. This concept emphasises the inter-dependent nature of African people, and how one person's quality of life is leveraged off the quality of life of those around them (Saunders, 2008).

The research statement of this research project can be summarised as follows:

- global difficulty in defining terminology of a leader and indigenous leader
- United States-centred theories of a leader
- negative assumptions about indigenous African concepts of a leader
- scanty documentary evidence on status, role and management styles of indigenous leaders.

1.7 PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The global theories of leadership which present indigenous African concepts of a leader as primitive, barbaric and irrelevant to present-day needs of Africa are one more example of what many African writers have indicated to be the tendency of Western education to render educated Africans ashamed of their own cultural

heritage. Achebe, one of Africa's greatest writers, has indicated that one of his aims in writing is to remove this prejudice so that Africans can become proud of their cultures:

We must begin to correct the prejudices which generations of detractors created about the Negro... Thomas Jefferson believed that Negroes have a lower grade of talent than whites. Kipling said something about black men being half-devil and half-child...This presents the African writer with a great challenge. It is inconceivable to me that a serious [African] writer could stand aside from this debate or be indifferent to this argument which calls his humanity in question (1973a: 8).

I think it is part of my business as a writer to teach...that there is nothing disgraceful about the African [life and culture]. [It is my aim as a writer] to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement (1973b: 3-4) .

Ngugi, another famous African writer, makes a similar point:

The African writer found his image of the past distorted. Through his colonial, middle-class education, he found that he had no history... Hegel, one of the best minds of Europe has said this of Africa [Philosophy of History]: Africa proper, as far as history goes back, has remained for all purposes of connection with the rest of the world, shut up...The Negro exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality, all that we call feeling, if we would comprehend him. There is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character. At this point we leave Africa never to mention it again for it has no historical part of the world. It has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movement in it, that is in its Northern part, belongs to the Asiatic or European world. What we properly understand by Africa is the unhistorical, undeveloped spirit still involved in the condition of mere nature (1977: 6).

In addition, many African governments have realised that indigenous techniques of leadership have been effective in mobilising communities to actively participate the administration of health, justice and economic development in many rural areas and are now developing strategies to bring traditional leaders into mainstream national administration. (AU/NEPA, 2003)

The first purpose of this dissertation is ideological. The dissertation is a small contribution to the task started by African writers and statesmen to re-educate Africans to make them proud once again of their cultural heritage. The second purpose is academic. The dissertation is an attempt to fill that gap in knowledge about the status, role and management styles of indigenous African leaders which has been identified by many academics and theorists on the subject of indigenous leaders.

1.8 AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of the study is to examine the positive and negative characteristics of traditional leaders as presented in selected African novels in order to formulate an indigenous African concept of a leader.

1.9 OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The objectives of the study are:

- . to define the positive and negative codes of behaviour of an indigenous African leader
- . to determine the characteristics used in identifying a leader in an indigenous community
- . to speculate on how these indigenous concepts can be transferred into present-day technologically-based African societies.

1.10 TERMINOLOGY

As already mentioned, there is a wide variety of indigenous leaders. The list includes political leaders such as kings, chiefs, clan leaders, and family leaders. The list also includes professional leaders such as hunters' leaders, healers' leaders, diviners' leaders, and sorcerers' leaders. Some of these may overlap or may be performed by the same person. For instance, a clan leader may also be a leader of hunters or a leader of diviners. It is also possible that a king may also be a leader of sorcerers. In

this study, the term 'indigenous leader' will be used as a composite term to cover this wide variety of leaders. In the detailed discussions it will however be made clear that the indigenous leader refers to a political leader such as a king or a chief or a professional' leader such as a leader of hunters or a leader of diviners.

Another reason for using the composite term leader is that some of the equivalent terms have loaded connotations. For instance, the terms 'chief' and 'headman' are discredited now as relics of the past apartheid regime. Similarly, the term 'king' is considered vague because it does not fully describe the status and role of each and every king. Hence, people prefer to use more specific titles such as *Thovhele*, *Khosi*, *Inkosi*, *Hosi*, and *Vhamusanda* in place of the term 'king'.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 DEFINITION

The *Wikipedia Encyclopaedia* defines literature review as “a body of text that aims to review the critical points of current knowledge including substantive findings as well as theoretical and methodological contributions to a particular topic.” It also explains that a literature review is classified as a secondary source in comparison with the main research and as such, it does not deal with any new or original work and its main purpose is to highlight areas of that research which have already been covered by previous researchers and to expose gaps in knowledge which are still existing.

Hofstee (2006) states that “a good literature review must be comprehensive, critical and contextualised; it must provide the reader with a theory base, a survey of published works pertaining to the investigation and an analysis of that work.”

Hart (1998: 27) describes the following as key elements of a good literature review:

- . distinguishing what has been done from what needs to be done
- . discovering important variables relevant to the topic
- . synthesising and gaining a new perspective
- . identifying relationships between ideas and practices
- . establishing the context of the topic or problem
- . rationalising the significance of the problem
- . enhancing and acquiring the subject vocabulary
- . understanding the structure of the subject
- . relating ideas and theory to applications
- . identifying the main methodologies and research techniques that have been used placing the research in a historical context.

Following these three guidelines, this literature review focuses on ideas that have

already been developed and critical positions that have already been taken on the subject of a leader in general and indigenous African leader in particular. In order to present the information clearly, the literature review is divided into two sections: literature review on works dealing with global ideas and concepts of a leader; and, literature review on works dealing with Africa-specific ideas and concepts of an indigenous leader.

2.2 GLOBAL THEORIES OF A LEADER

2.2.1 **Webber: Three Types of a Leader**

Webber is regarded by sociologists as the pioneer in the study of the subject of a leader. His ideas on the topic are found in his book, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (1922). One English translation that many people regard as very close to the original German version is Anderson and Parsons's *Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (1947). Another English translation that is respected is Gerth and Mills's *Max Webber: Essays in Sociology* (1946).

Webber formulated the concept that there are three types of leaders: traditional leaders, charismatic leaders, and legal-rational leaders. Although Webber does not specifically mention it, it is clear from his argument that his concept of a leader is that it is a phenomenon which is in a state of evolution. Hence, the first stage is the stage of a traditional leader. As this is the basic stage of development, it is sometimes called the primitive stage of leadership. As a society develops, the traditional leader grows and becomes a charismatic leader. As this stage of development lies between the first and the last stages, it is sometimes called the transitional stage of leadership. Finally, when a society has fully developed, the charismatic leader turns into a legal-rational leader. As this is the last stage in the devolution, it is sometimes called the advanced stage of leadership.

Webber's concept of the three-stage evolution of a leader fits in well with the notion that societies progress from a primitive/traditional stage into a transitional stage and

finally into a modern stage. Hence, many academics relate Weber's concept to actual historical developments in society. For instance, they identify the traditional phase of leadership with places such as Africa; the charismatic phase with places such as nineteenth century England; and the legal-rational phase with modern party politics.

As a result of this association of Webber's concept with specific geographical regions, his description of a traditional leader as "irrational and inconsistent" has often been applied without question to traditional rule in Africa. Hence many traditional rulers are labelled as "irrational and inconsistent" and they have been seen as a stereotype which confirms Webber. This label and stereotype have discouraged many academics and researchers from conducting a proper in-depth study of the status, roles and identities of indigenous leaders in Africa.

2.2.2 Stogdill: Innate Characteristics of a Leader

Webber's discussions on the personal characteristics of leaders as indicators of their traditional, charismatic and legal-rational status led to the emergence of the theory of traits characteristics of leaders. One important exponent of this theory is Stogdill. In his *Handbook of Leadership: A Survey of Theory and Research* (1974), Stogdill argues that there are certain specific character traits which distinguish a leader from others in a society or community.

This theory of traits characteristics has had a profound influence on the development of the subject of human relations. Its influence on leadership theory has however proved to be controversial. While some academics support the idea of identifiable traits in a leader, other academics disagree and argue that many of the traits said to be unique with leader can in fact be found in every human being.

2.2.3 House & Aditya: Culture Specific Concepts of a Leader

The controversy that has been created over the theory of traits characteristics has tended to destroy the consensus of opinion which Webber created. Throughout the

1980s many academics realised that many of the assumptions and ideas of leadership had fundamental weaknesses. Hence, many academics came to the conclusion that very little progress had been made in knowledge about the subject of a leader.

House & Aditya examined many of the theories, assumptions and ideas of a leader in use in classrooms and the workplace since Webber. In their journal publication, 'The Social Scientific Study of Leadership: Quo Vadis?' (1997), House & Aditya argue that 98% of theories, assumptions and ideas of leadership in circulation in most academic institutions in the 1980s and 1990s were distinctly American in character because they are based on the cultural lifestyle in the United States of America.

This finding by House & Aditya has had a profound influence on the subject of a leader in the sense that it has led to the theory which is now dominant that the subject of a leader cannot and must not be discussed in vacuum but must always be discussed in the context of specific cultures and specific societies. The 1997 research finding of House & Aditya has therefore opened the door for culture-specific studies on leadership and has created a new opportunity for in-depth studies on leadership in African societies which hitherto appeared to have been discouraged by Webber's blanket dismissal of a traditional leader as 'irrational' and traditional society as 'static'.

2.3 THEORIES OF AN INDIGENOUS AFRICAN LEADER

2.3.1 **Schapera**

As the title of his book states, Schapera focuses his attention on Tswana chiefs. He defines a Tswana chief as a male member of the royal family who ascended to the status through hereditary inheritance. Secondly, Schapera discusses the relationship between a Tswana chief and his subjects. He notes that a Tswana chief is revered by his subjects. According to Schapera, one of the ways by which this reverence is shown is through the way the chief is addressed. The chief is addressed by the name of his totem and not by his real name. According to Schapera, another way by which this reverence is shown is by praise. Thirdly, Schapera discusses the management

roles of Tswana chiefs. He notes that, contrary to popular beliefs, Tswana chiefs are not despotic rulers. He explains that a Tswana chief, in managing tribal affairs, is assisted by other members of the royal family such as his paternal and maternal uncles, his brothers and cousins, and *dintona*, his confidential advisers. Fourthly, Schapera discusses the obligations of Tswana chiefs. He explains that a Tswana chief is obliged to rule his subjects humanely and to comport himself well. If a Tswana chief puts up an unbecoming behaviour, he would be warned in public by his circle of advisors. If he persists in his unbecoming behaviour, he could be assassinated as happened to Kwena Chief Motswasela II in 1821.

Schapera's study is an important source of information on indigenous African leaders. Its weakness is that it relates only to Tswana chiefs so not all the information in it can be applied to chiefs in other societies.

2.3.2 **Lainè**

Lainè's work focuses on African kings. It provides the history and development of kings in sub-Saharan Africa. One important highlight of the work is that it cites the Modjadji dynasty as evidence that the indigenous African concept of a leader is not restricted to males. Matriarchal leadership is recognised in indigenous African societies. The main weakness of the work is that because it covers the entire continent in its survey, some of the information is not detailed.

2.3.3 **Van Nieuwaal**

The main focus of Van Nieuwaal's article is the status and roles of chiefs in post-colonial Africa. The article is of a theoretical nature and makes use of topical theories on tradition and modernism in Africa. After reviewing current studies on chiefs in Africa, Van Nieuwaal draws the following conclusion:

It is never easy to assign chiefs to different categories or to clearly define their political and administrative tasks as distinct from the socio-religious and judicial roles they play in African society. Moreover, the intermediary

role chiefs have by definition played since colonial oppression also resists classification (p. 21).

This statement confirms the two prevailing ideas of this dissertation: (1) that it is very problematic to define the terms 'leaders' and 'traditional leaders' and (2) that there is still not much reliable information on the status and roles of traditional leaders in Africa.

2.3.4 Dlamini

Dlamini's dissertation deals specifically with folk songs of married Swazi women. Like Schapera, Dlamini argues from a premise that traditional Swati culture is highly structured with the roles of chiefs and subjects strictly defined. The strength of her dissertation is that she uses the analytical tools of post-structuralism in general and in particular the psychoanalytical tools of Kristeva to interpret the folk songs as reflections of individual and social misgivings existing within the highly structured Swazi society. The weakness of the dissertation is that its focus is narrow; it only deals with domestic songs of married women in Swaziland.

2.3.5 De Bruin

De Bruin's dissertation focuses on what is said about children in Zulu folk tales. Like Schapera and Dlamini, De Bruin's work is a case study that is premised on the notion that traditional Zulu society is well structured. The strength of the dissertation is that it uses the analytical tools of structuralism in general and in particular the psychoanalytical tools of Dundes to interpret Zulu folk tales as abstractions of Zulu traditional philosophy. Hence, the dissertation emphasises that Zulu folk tales are not for entertainment only but are also types of education by which skills training is imparted to Zulu children to train them to become leaders in their communities in the future. The weakness of the dissertation is that, like most structuralist deductions, it is difficult to distinguish between the author's own assumptions and valid traditional views of the Zulu people.

2.4 CONCLUSION

The conclusion that can be drawn from this literature review is two-fold. Firstly, the academic work done so far on the subject of indigenous leaders is mainly in the form of specific case studies of specific communities. Although these studies are informative, they cannot be used for a general analysis of the concept, status and role of indigenous leaders in the whole of Africa. Secondly, the studies which have used imaginative literature as the basis of deduction about indigenous African leaders have mainly concentrated on oral African literature. Very few studies have used both oral and written African literature.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 DEFINITION

Fox (1958: 285) defines research methodology as follows:

Research methodology is a way to systematically solve the research problem. It may be understood as a science of studying how research is done scientifically. In it we study the various steps that are generally adopted by a researcher in studying his research problem along with the logic behind them.

Kumar (2005: 8) also regards research methodology as a science.

We must understand research methodology as a science of studying how research is done scientifically. Researchers not only need to know how to develop certain indices or tests, how to calculate the mean, the mode, the median or the standard deviation or chi-square, how to apply particular research techniques, but they also need to know which of these methods or techniques, are relevant and which are not, and what would they mean and indicate and why. Researchers also need to understand the assumptions underlying various techniques and they need to know the criteria by which they can decide that certain techniques and procedures will be applicable to certain problems and others will not.

Kothari (2004: 27) argues that research methodology should be regarded as a science for the following reasons:

- . It relies on empirical evidence
- . It utilises relevant concepts
- . It is committed to only objective considerations
- . It presupposes ethical neutrality
- . It results into probabilistic predictions.

According to Goddard and Melville (2005), there are two main types of research methodologies: quantitative research methodology and qualitative research methodology. Quantitative research methodology involves numerical and statistical modelling and is suitable for laboratory experiments. In other words, quantitative research methodology is used in researches which use numerical and statistical methods to identify facts or trends in a particular phenomenon. On the basis of the numerical and statistical evidence, a deduction is made and general conclusions are drawn. Two main advantages of the quantitative methodology are that it promotes objectivity and the deductions and generalisations can be verified. However, its main disadvantage is that it cannot be used to analyse culture-specific symbolic events and situations.

Qualitative research methodology involves interpreting events and situations which are often culture-specific and have symbolic connotations. Such events and situations cannot adequately be described and understood by numerical and statistical methods because their meanings lie in the symbols. The qualitative methodology is used to unravel the varieties of meanings of these symbols. On the basis of these varieties of meanings, a deduction is made about the significance of the symbols and a generalisation is then drawn about the world-view of a community. The main advantage of the qualitative methodology is that it is well suited for literary analysis of symbolic texts. However, its main disadvantage is that its interpretations cannot be verified.

Goddard & Melville (2005: 9) use the term 'descriptive research' for research based mainly on interpretation because such a research involves describing events and situations and then discussing their significance. They explain that as the goal of interpretative research is to arrive at a theory or concept, some amount of quantification of themes will be involved in the study. Hence, they recommend that a mixing of the qualitative and quantitative methodologies should be used as follows: the qualitative method should be used for the description and interpretation; the quantification method should be used for the deduction and generalisation.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Creswell (2003: xxv) defines research design as “the structure of the specific procedures used in identifying the type of mixed methods strategy of enquiry, the data collection and the analysis approaches in a particular research project.” Creswell argues that a research design is one of the most important elements of a research project. He explains that the success or failure of the research depends on how a research project is designed.

3.3 QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

As this research project involves identifying authorial comments, statements by characters, episodes and characters in the selected texts which can be used for deduction and generalisation about indigenous African concepts of a leader, its main focus therefore falls within the interpretation of culture-specific symbols. This involves reading the specific literary texts in order to interpret them as reflections of real-life case studies. The qualitative methodology which is suitable for such studies is therefore used for the research. The use of the qualitative methodology is therefore grounded on the assumption that literature is a reflection of life and for that reason episodes in literature can be used as valid reflections of real-life case studies.

3.4 DESCRIPTIVE APPROACH

A descriptive approach is used for the qualitative methodology. Goddard & Melville (2005: 9) define the descriptive approach to research as follows:

Descriptive or case-study research is research in which a specific situation is studied either to see if it gives rise to any general theories, or to see if existing general theories are borne out by the specific situation.

The descriptive approach is used in this research project because it is the most suitable method of analysis for analysing case studies which are symbolic in nature. The descriptive approach is used in the research to identify, describe and analyse the

selected texts in a systematic manner in order to isolate their themes of indigenous leadership and also to determine the significance of these themes in the over-all structure of the texts.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

The following novels are used for the descriptive analysis:

Mhudi by Sol Plaatje

Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe

Maru by Bessie Head

Petals of Blood by Ngugi wa Thiongo.

3.5.1 JUSTIFICATION OF SELECTED NOVELS

Mhudi and *Things Fall Apart* are two novels which provide information on a wide variety of traditional leaders such as kings, chiefs and clan leaders and also deal with some indigenous characteristics of a leader such as the positive and negative qualities of an indigenous leader. *Mhudi* deals with pre-colonial indigenous life in South Africa. It is important because it serves as resource text on the characteristics of an indigenous African leader in pre-colonial Southern Africa. *Things Fall Apart* deals with pre-colonial indigenous life in Nigeria. It is important because it serves as resource text on the characteristics of an indigenous African leader in pre-colonial West Africa. *Maru* deals with post-colonial indigenous life in Botswana. It is important because it serves as resource text on the characteristics of an indigenous African leader in post-colonial Southern Africa. *Petals of Blood* is a novel that critiques African culture from a Marxist perspective. It has been selected because it gives information on the concept of indigenous African leaders from a radical post-colonial perspective.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

Textual analysis is the main data analysis method that is used in this research. McKee

(2004: 4) defines a text as follows: “whenever we produce an interpretation of something's meaning a book, television programme, film, magazine, T-shirt or kilt, piece of furniture or ornament we treat it as a text. A text is something that we make meaning from.” This is a broad definition that tries to avoid the normal idea of a text as a piece of printed literary writing. Just as McKee regards a text broadly, so also does he regard textual analysis. He defines textual analysis as “a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of their world” (p. 1).

The main tool of textual analysis that is used is content analysis. Krippendorff (2004: xviii) defines content analysis as a technique of interpretation used “to examine data, printed matter, images, or sounds texts in order to understand what they mean to people, what they enable or prevent, and what the information conveyed by them does. These are questions for which natural scientists have no answers and for which their methods are generally insensitive.”

Content analysis involves reading the texts to identify the relevant themes. This is done through analysis of the stylistic devices of narrative such as the overt and discreet meanings of authorial comments, statements by characters, descriptions of characters and settings, similes, metaphors and other figures of speech. On the basis of these, a deduction is then made about what the views of a particular author on the characteristics of an indigenous leader. These deductions are then collated and a generalisation is then drawn about the positive and negative characteristics of an indigenous African leader.

CHAPTER 4

INDIGENOUS AFRICAN CONCEPT OF A LEADER AS REFLECTED IN *MHUDI*

4.1 CRITICAL BACKGROUND

Mhudi was written at about 1913, thus making it one of Africa's earliest novels. According to *Wikipedia*, Plaatje struggled to get it published because the white administration at that time regarded it as subversive and dangerous.

Its publication was delayed because of the hostility against an indigenous product, seen as inferior to European levels, and at the same time, dangerous because of appreciative of local cultures and, therefore, implicitly subversive. The missionaries censured the original text, taking out the figure of an oral storyteller, who poses as a singer of the story and is an ancestor of the same Plaatje. The full version of *Mhudi* was rediscovered in...1975...in the warehouses of Lovedale (<http://it.wikipedia.org>).

Chennells (1997: 37) argues that although *Mhudi* is a historical novel dealing with events which occurred in the nineteenth century, it also has implications for the present.

Sol Plaatje's *Mhudi* can be read at several different levels, most obviously as an historical novel reconstructing events which had happened nearly a century before. No historical novel, however, deals simply with the past, for its author commands the benefits of hindsight which knows the present consequences of past actions. In *Mhudi* contemporary South African politics are implicitly and explicitly present in the account of the rise and fall of Mzilikazi's Transvaal kingdom and therefore the novel observes some of the conventional effects of the historical narrative.

Walter (2001: 4) also argues that the novel, although dealing with past events, has a relevance for the present because it lends itself to be used as an argument in defence of post-colonial theory.

Plaatje's work thus falls naturally into the field of interest of post-colonial critics...According to post-colonial theory, humanistic thought, which could categorize Plaatje's own world view, focuses on the innocent and

objective “human subject capable of knowing, acting upon and changing reality”. Accordingly, humanistic literary studies “have long been resistant to the idea that literature (or at least good literature) has anything to do with politics, on the grounds that the former is too subjective, individual and personal or else too universal and transcendent to be thus tainted”. And works can thus naively according to post-colonialism be categorized by humanists as having “ideological and political innocence”.

In contrast, Kunene (1976: 245) focuses on the literary merits of the novel and argues that it is over-rated.

Mhudi itself is a second-rate, badly organized hodge-podge of semi-history, semi-fiction, shoddy allegory a pastiche combining fact and fiction in a most illogical manner. To those championing *Mhudi* as a pioneering work, I say: Stop it! Begin now learning about the great African literary classics.

4.2 CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

This analysis takes a middle ground between those who focus on its historical significance and those who focus on its literary merits and regards the novel as a text in the broad sense as McKee (2004) uses the term which conveys information and meaning about how indigenous Africans in Southern Africa interpreted themselves and their environment before the impact of colonialism. The novel describes the period of *Mfecane*, which was the wars of extermination among the black nations of Southern Africa, started by Shaka, the Zulu King. *Mhudi* also describes the Great Trek, when the Afrikaners left the Cape Colony for the interior of South Africa.

The novel’s indigenous content and its nineteenth century historical context make it a valuable resource document on indigenous African concept of a leader. The novel deals with two main types of indigenous leaders: leaders who are despicable because they are blood-thirsty, vengeful, and unwise; and leaders who are admirable because they are compassionate and wise.

4.3 NEGATIVE QUALITIES OF AN INDIGENOUS LEADER

4.3.1 Triviality

Ra-Thaga is presented as a character that is trivial in his thinking. He asks Mhudi unintelligent questions and engages her in a worthless discourse. For example, he is easily swayed by the propaganda launched by the army of Mzilikazi that the Barolong have trespassed on the land and that they are not the rightful owners of the land they live in. He therefore begins to believe that the land might belong to Mzilikazi. Mhudi gets infuriated. She has to convince him that the land is theirs.

Ra-Thaga at times felt inclined to believe that the land on which they lived belonged to Mzilikazi, and that Mzilikazi was justified in sending his marauding expedition against Kunana. This aroused the feminine ire of Mhudi (p. 66).

Ra-Thaga's triviality in thinking is also shown in his dealings with the Boers. The Boers commit ghastly atrocities against black people, particularly the Hottentots. Ra-Thaga turns a blind eye to these atrocities. In one of his visits with Mhudi to the Boer settlement they witness a bad incident, although Ra-Thaga witnesses the final episode of the incident, he never terminates his friendship with the Boers. Mhudi, however, swears never to visit the settlement again. This is what Mhudi witnesses:

Outside one of the huts close by she observed a grizzly old Boer who started to give a Hottentot maid some thunder and lightning with his tongue. Of course Mhudi could not understand a word; but the harangue sounded positively terrible and its effect upon the maid was unmistakable. She felt that the Hottentot's position was unenviable, but more was to come. An old lady sitting near a fire behind the waggon took sides against the maid. The episode which began rather humorously developed quickly into a tragedy. The old lady pulled a poker out of the fire and beat the half naked girl with the hot iron. The unfortunate maid screamed, jumped away and writhed with the pain as she tried to escape. A stalwart young Boer caught hold of the screaming girl and brought her back to the old dame, who had now left the fireplace and stood beside a vice near the wagon. The young man pressed the head of the Hottentot girl against the vice; the old lady pulled her left ear between the two irons, then screwed the jaws of the vice tightly upon the poor girl's ear ... The screams of the girl attracted

several Dutch men and women who looked as though they enjoyed the sickly sight (p. 116).

Mhudi is revolted by this inhuman treatment, and reacts thus:

And when they left, she shook the dust of Moroka's Hoek off her feet and vowed never to go there again (p. 117).

In contrast, Ra-Thaga turns a blind eye to it. He fails to understand that the whites are brutally molesting the black girl because they do not regard her as a human being like them. An indigenous African leader cannot let people, let alone children, swear and taunt her/him with impunity. A leader respects himself or herself and expects respect from others since he or she respects others. Respect is a matter of reciprocity. As a result of the fact that Ra-Thaga is trivial in his thinking, he fails to react when he himself is insulted by the whites. The following episode illustrates:

One day Ra-Thaga returned from a long journey far out on the Taba-Tilodi plains in the direction of Basutoland. The day being hot he felt tired, and as he was to pass near the Boer settlement, he thought he would call on his friend for a piece of ash-cake which he was sure he would get on mentioning his hunger. Outside the camp he observed a number of Hottentots drawing water; among them there were a few Boer children playing round about the spring. Tired and thirsty as he was, he saw a vessel full of cold water and at once began to help himself. He had hardly stopped drinking when the loud cries of a Dutch boy interrupted him. The boy, howling at the top of his voice, was yelling "the kaffir, the kaffir!" Soon a number of Boers were scrambling towards the pool, gesticulating so rapidly and loudly that his Boer vocabulary proved useless to him. With the exception of a few abusive terms he could not distinguish much of what they said, but it soon became clear that the loud profanity was meant for him. For a while things looked very ugly, for he had never seen the Boers so angry. As they approached he collected his little bundle, and adjusting his attire was on the point of running when an elderly Boer from the top of a wagon shouted to his infuriated brethren to return and leave the Barolong alone. They did not return however before making use of a few more expletives and shaking their threatening fists at the same time (p. 118).

4.3.2 Ruthlessness

Langa, son and heir to Mzilikazi, is presented as a blood-thirsty and ruthless leader. The novel describes his intemperate character thus:

This army of destruction was led by Langa, second living son of Mzilikazi an impetuous youth, very jealous of the dignity pertaining to his station. Despite his extreme youth, he had several times vowed to wage war against his people if, on the death of his father, they attempted to pass him over in favour of his elder half brother of another house. This lightning raid on Kunana was his first military exploit. His army was composed mainly of young men (p. 49).

This is how this army of young men led by this impetuous youth, very jealous, mercilessly slaughtered the women and children of Kunana during the raid.

It was clear...that the Matabele were not fighting men only; they were actually spearing fleeing women and children...The next moment a woman fell beside a tree, her fall hastened by a stab from behind. She carried her baby in a spring-buck skin, strapped to her back. The skin loosened as she fell, and a Matabele withdrawing the assegai from the mother's side, pierced her child with it, and held the baby transfixed in the air (p. 32).

4.4 POSITIVE QUALITIES OF AN INDIGENOUS LEADER

4.4.1 Compassion

Gubuza, the commander-in-chief of the Matabele warriors, is a good example of compassionate and considerate leaders. He is level headed and rational in thinking. He does not act impulsively. His astuteness manifests itself when he protests against the brutal manner in which Prince Langa and his band of young men brutally conquered the Barolong. According to him, Langa has created bad blood between the Matabele and the Barolong or the Tswana as a whole. His words later vindicate him when the Barolong team up with the Boers and defeat them.

Wiseacres of different nationalities are agreed that cheap successes are always followed by grievous aftermath. Old people are equally agreed that individuals, especially nations, should beware of the impetuosity of youth. Are we sure that Bhoya was guiltless?" he asked. "Was there provocation? Supposing there was ... I am a King's servant and know what I am talking about. I ask these questions because men of my circle too often forget that they are emissaries of the King (p. 54)

Gubuza's words bring wrath upon him. He is told to keep quiet if he has nothing positive to say. Amid all the diatribe and false accusations of jealousy, Gubuza keeps his head. His words refute the notion that indigenous African warriors in general, and the Matabele warriors in particular, are blood-thirsty war-mongers.

4.4.2 **Wisdom**

Gubuza also distinguishes himself as a brave leader and a wise man. He leads the army that fights the coalition of Boer-Batswana armies with bravery. The Boers use superior weapons and this leads to Gubuza's defeat. As a leader who thinks rationally, Gubuza concedes defeat. He wants to spare the lives of his warriors because he realises that they cannot match the superior weapons used by the enemy.

"Look, just look," said the broken-hearted Gubuza to his despondent King, pointing a solemn finger at the frightful scene of the massacre. "It is thunder, lightning! No warriors can resist it. Our attempts to get at the enemy have been superhuman, but try as we did, we never got any of them within range of the spears" (p.170).

4.4.3 **Imperiousness**

Mzilikazi is presented as a man who has an ambition to create a large empire. He reveals his ambition after his defeat by the coalition forces.

"Have I not been kind to these Bechuana traitors? It was my desire to incorporate them with ourselves so that together we could form one great nation; they pretended to be willing, yet they have always played me false. When they failed to bring tribute I slew them not; yet at the first opportunity they did not hesitate to abuse my kindness" (p 174).

His ambition is further asserted thus:

He had for years been cherishing a beautiful dream. He had dreamt of establishing a kingdom stretching east, west, north and south. He had made enormous preparations for overpowering and annexing the adjacent nations one by one and for augmenting the Matabele contingents from the fighting men of the conquered peoples and having inured them with Matabele pluck, he had hoped to rule over the most terror-inspiring nation of death-defiers that ever faced an enemy. Then with his power thus magnified he had looked forward to a march upon Zululand, the crown of his ambition, recapturing the ancient dynasty with superior fighting forces and establishing an empire from the northern extremity of Bechuanaland to the sea coast of Monomotapa, embracing the Tonga, Swazi and Zululand Kingdom and extending with the sea shore as its boundary right away to the Pondoland coast. This was his dream of many years' (p. 170).

Mzilikazi is driven by his vision of himself as an emperor to always venture for war. This is clearly shown when the coalition forces defeat his warriors. Instead of giving up, Mzilikazi decides to regroup his remaining forces in order to fight again.

He sent word to collect all the veterans and returned soldiers with the object of going back to make a final stand against the invaders of his land. This army he himself would lead (p. 167).

4.4.4 **Dignity**

Mzilikazi is accorded dignity and respect. When he emerges from his royal dwelling he is greeted with praise songs and ululations.

The appearance of the royal party was hailed with tumultuous shouts. The rattle of the assegais on the shields rivalled even the rattle of a heavy hailstorm. The court jester sang and leaped, bedecked in all manner of fantastic head-dresses, till the cat-tails round their loins literally whirled in the air (p. 50).

He is also addressed in a manner only befitting a king.

"My Lord, and Chiefs!" he said. "Who is Sitonga, that King Mzilikazi the

Great, the terrible ruler of land and clouds, should select him to congratulate his heroes after so great a feat of arms. Yet I am proud of the honour conferred on me as I am proud of the achievement of these youth” (p. 52).

The word ‘Lord’ is reserved for a respected leader. The respect that Mzilikazi commands is even exaggerated. He is called ‘the ruler of land and clouds’. We know that no mortal can rule the clouds. As a token of respect, Sitonga asks rhetorical questions: “Who is Sitonga, that King Mzilikazi...should ask him to congratulate his heroes”. Sitonga humbles himself before Mzilikazi; this shows the respect and high esteem which Mzilikazi enjoys.

4.4.5 **Generosity**

Although Mzilikazi is an ambitious empire-builder, yet he is generous. His generosity is epitomised by his invitation of the chiefs who respect and pay tribute to him. He invites them to feast with him, for the success of his junior warriors who have defeated the Barolong chiefs and looted their livestock.

The Great One has sent invitations to all the Bechuana chiefs : Makabe is here and Sechele too. The Bahurutshe are strongly represented and the Bafokeng have also sent delegates. These visitors join our festival with their chieftainship undiminished (p. 53).

His generosity goes beyond invitations to feasts. He gives the invited chiefs presents to show his appreciation for the respect that they show him.

Each of these chiefs shall drive home a share of the booty, and show his people that as long as the Bechuana are loyal to us, Mzilikazi is their shield (p. 53).

4.4.6 **Mercifulness**

Mzilikazi is also merciful. He does not always punish chiefs who fail to pay tribute to him. He shows leniency. He explains his tolerance for disrespect as follows:

“Have I not been kind to these Bechuana traitors? ... When they failed to bring tribute I slew them not” (p. 174).

4.4.7 Democratic Governance

Mzilikazi does not take decisions alone. He takes advice from his advisers. He seeks advice from his brave and trusted general, Gubuza.

Mzilikazi: “What would you advise me under this heavy cloud of death? Speak, for you alone bear the amulet that could shield us from destruction. Even now do I hear the thunder of their murderous weapons?” Gubuza: “My advice to the Great One is, take the bodyguard, return at once to the people and move them to a place of safety” (p 170).

Mzilikazi is not a leader who blames others when things go wrong. He takes responsibility for the defeat of his army and the forfeiture of his livestock.

“I alone am to blame, notwithstanding that my magicians warned me of the looming terrors, I heeded them not. Had I listened and moved the nation to the north, I could have transplanted my kingdom there with all my impis intact” (p. 172).

4.5 ORDINARY PEOPLE ACHIEVING GREATNESS

Mhudi also gives a description of ordinary people who are not children of traditional leaders but who acquire leadership qualities through hard work. By virtue of her heroism, Mhudi qualifies to be called an indigenous African leader. Heroism and leadership are inseparable in an African context. The following qualities make Mhudi outstanding:

4.5.1 Intelligence

Compared to Ra-Thaga, Mhudi is intelligent. She can discern people's character and intentions intuitively. For example, she distrusts the Boers and finds it odd that Ra-Thaga befriends and trusts them. Her distrust is vindicated by what she sees at the Boer settlement.

4.5.2 **Bravery**

It takes courage and bravery for an ill woman to achieve an insurmountable task of killing a lion. Mhudi accomplishes this task. She assists Ra-Thaga to kill a lion.

She aimed a stab at the lion's heart. The infuriated animal fell over with a growl that almost caused the earth to vibrate (p. 64).

In spite of her illness, Mhudi endures pains and acts courageously. Her selflessness allows her to let Ra-Thaga to enlist in the army which is to fight the Matabele. She gives him blessings to fight side by side with the allies at Thaba Nchu; her suffering from an attack of malaria fever notwithstanding.

Although she was growing worse, she assured Ra-Thaga that she dared not prevent him from carrying out his long-nurtured revenge against Mzilikazi (p. 151).

4.5.3 **Compassion**

Mhudi is compassionate; she abhors the suffering and pain inflicted upon the Hottentots and Africans in general by the Boers. During her search for Ra-Thaga who has enlisted in the coalition army, in the company of the Boers, she witnesses extreme violence committed by the Boers who call themselves Christians and enlightened yet behaving barbarically and satanically.

As we were crossing the Lekwa I sat in the rear of one of the waggons. Behind us, the Hottentot leader of the next waggon's team swam so near that he often touched the brake of our waggon. I could easily speak to him from where I sat. Suddenly something went wrong with his team. Two of the middle oxen got entangled with their yoke and chain and the waggon stopped amid stream. His name was angrily shouted and abuses were hurled at him by nearly every Boer, each trying to out-do the others in their expletives. It was Dancer this, Dancer that and Dancer again and again, in a chorus of profanity that conveyed to me much meaning but very little intelligence. The Boers in our waggon also shouted their imprecations at Dancer - they frightened me terribly, for I feared they were going to fling me into the water...As soon as the convoy got through Dancer was tied to the waggon wheel and flogged till

he was half dead (p 162).

4.6 CONCLUSION

This analysis has identified some important issues. One of the issues is that Sol Plaatje condemns the ruthless slaughter of women and children as committed by the army of Langa. He also condemns the brutal treatment of Africans by the Boers. The message that comes out is that Plaatje cherishes the dignity of a person's life and recommends that this dignity must be upheld at all costs.

A second issue that is raised in this novel is that Plaatje gives clear and precise information about the positive and negative characteristics of an indigenous African leader. Mzilakazi is a good example. He is clearly presented as an indigenous leader who is respected by his people and who in turn consults his council of elders. The message that comes out is that democracy is not a policy that was brought by the West and that indigenous African societies were practising it long before Whites came to Africa.

The third issue that is raised in this novel relates to Mhudi. It is significant that in the 1910s when this novel was written, long before feminism became widespread, Sol Plaatje was already advocating gender equality.

CHAPTER 5

INDIGENOUS AFRICAN CONCEPT OF A LEADER AS REFLECTED IN *MARU*

5.1 CRITICAL BACKGROUND

Maru was published in 1971 while Bessie Head was living in exile in Botswana from her own country of South Africa. According to her (1990: 14), *Maru* had a symbolic significance in the sense that it reflected her own views and attitudes.

Botswana was a traumatic experience to me and I found the people, initially, extremely brutal and harsh, only in the sense that I had never encountered human ambition and greed before in a black form. With all my South African experience I longed to write an enduring novel on the hideousness of racial prejudice. But I also wanted the book to be so beautiful and so magical that I, as the writer, would long to read and re-read it. I achieved this ambition in an astonishing way in my second novel, *Maru*.

That comment has tended to influence the criticism of *Maru* in the sense that many critics regard the novel as having an autobiographical significance. In that respect, Taiwo (1985: 192) argues that “*Maru*’s marriage to Margaret is presented not only as a personal act of enlightened self-interest. It is also a major political achievement. By it the novelist makes an important statement of hope and redemption for all oppressed people in Africa and elsewhere.” Miller-Bagley (1995: 5) also adopts an autobiographical approach when she states that “while the storyline of *Maru* diverges in important ways from Head’s life, the book’s autobiographical elements are tremendously significant. Margaret’s ambiguous racial identity may be seen as both a connection with and a digression from Head’s personal history.” Similarly, Ibrahim (1996: 125) describes *Maru* as an autobiographical novel in which “the novelist attempts to navigate the troubled waters of transnational identities and her exilic consciousness.”

The most recent analysis of her work is by Rafapa, Nengome & Tshamano (2011). They too argue that *Maru*, together with other novels of Bessie Head, is best understood when it is interpreted as a reflection of Bessie Head’s own life. Olaogun

(1994) goes even further and argues that many of the characters in *Maru* are mirror images of the health condition of schizophrenia with which Bessie Head was said to have been afflicted during much of her lifetime.

In contrast, Kemp (1999), Dieke (2007) and Lewis (2007) focus mainly on the novel. Kemp concentrates on the central theme of the love relationship between Margaret Cadmore and Maru and concludes that elopement of the two is, structurally speaking, the weakest part of the novel. Dieke takes issue with that conclusion.

Although many critics have called *Maru* a love story on some level, I would argue, however, that the love story is only a subplot that subserves the larger allegorical purpose in the novel--undermining an evil order in order to usher in a more humane, sympathetic order (p. 5).

5.2 CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Maru deals with a Batswana society which is patriarchal in social structure and prejudicial in attitude to other communities. The Batswana as a nation are taught from generation to generation to regard the San (Basarwa) who are their neighbours as sub-human.

Children learnt it from their parents. Their parents spat on the ground as a member of a filthy, low nation passed by. Children went a little further. They spat on you. They pinched you. They danced a wild jiggle, with the tin cans rattling: "Bushman! Low Breed! Bastard!" (p. 10)

It is in this society heavily influenced by tradition that Bessie Head sets the novel. The time of the novel is set in the post-colonial era when the white British administrators have left and the country is being administered by Africans. The place setting of the novel is a village called Dilepe in a remote part of the country.

The political administration of the village is in the hands of the local traditional leaders. The male traditional leaders are Maru, a paramount chief-in-waiting, Moleka, a chief, Pete, the school principal, Seth, an education supervisor, and Morafi, a prince. The

main female traditional leader is Dikeledi. The novelist uses these male and female characters to describe some characteristics of indigenous African leaders.

5.3 NEGATIVE QUALITIES OF AN INDIGENOUS LEADER

As already mentioned, the society of Dilepe is influenced by the traditional practices of patriarchy and prejudice against their San neighbours. Most of the male leaders are presented as people who are rigid in these two traditional practices.

5.3.1 **Sexual Exploitation of Women**

Moleka is presented as a male leader who treats women as sex objects. He uses and dumps them with impunity. To him, women are there only to serve the sexual demands of men. Moleka is presented thus:

There was nothing Moleka did not know about the female anatomy. It made him arrogant and violent. There was no woman who could resist the impact of his permanently boiling bloodstream. But he outraged them, and horrible sensations were associated with the name of Moleka. Moleka and women were like a volcanic explosion in a dark tunnel. Moleka was the only one to emerge on each occasion, unhurt, smiling (p. 35).

5.3.2 **Agent of Prejudice against the San**

Pete is presented as a leader who encourages the community to express hatred and resentment towards the San. This is brought out when Margaret Cadmore is posted to his school. When Margaret Cadmore arrives at the school, Pete who is the principal of the school questions her about her educational and social background. When Margaret Cadmore informs him that she is a Masarwa, his attitude to her immediately changes. He never expected that a Masarwa can be educated, let alone have the brains to obtain the outstanding symbols which Margaret has on her certificates. He begins to harass her. When that fails to unnerve her, he instigates the school children to laugh at her and generally make life unpleasant for her so that she would go away. When that plan fails to unnerve her, he instigates the school

children to laugh at her and generally make life unpleasant for her so that she would go away. When that plan too fails, he goes to Seth at the education office to ask him to remove her. This is the conversation that takes place between them:

“Seth,” the principal said. “There's been some chicanery.” “How so?” the other queried. “I have a Masarwa on my staff.” The man Seth whistled softly. “It's the Margaret Cadmore woman?” he said, looking serious (p. 41).

5.3.3 Subjugation of Women

Seth, the education officer, is presented as man who regards women as inferior. This is brought out in his response to Pete's request that Margaret Cadmore should be removed from the school. This is how Seth responds.

“God, this is going to raise hell among the Totems here.” He grabbed some files and ran his eye down the application list. There was no requirement for a person to define his tribe or race. He looked very annoyed. “They're going to blame me,” he said. “I only look at qualifications. She was top of the class the whole way through. How the hell did she get in? God, Pete, this is a mess.” Without seeing him he stared at Pete, the principal. Again, he whistled softly through his teeth. Pete grinned, then he drawled: “She can be shoved out,” he said. “It's easy. She's a woman” (p. 41).

Seth's response that “she can be shoved out...It's easy. She's a woman” attests to the fact that he regards women as inferior.

5.4 POSITIVE QUALITIES OF AN INDIGENOUS LEADER

5.4.1 Courtesy

In this society characterised by prejudice, Maru is presented as a character that is highly respected because he shows respect and courtesy to everyone, men and women alike. His sister, Dikeledi, describes him thus: “his manner towards everyone was of courteous, informal respect (p. 50)”. This courtesy and respect which he shows to all his subjects makes him a unique leader who stands out in this society

which has always practised subjection and prejudice.

5.4.2 Flexibility

Another easily recognisable admirable quality in Maru is his flexibility. Unlike Moleka and Fred who are rigid in their traditional ways, Maru reflects and introspects in order to evaluate situations on their own merits. This is how the novel describes him as a deeply thinking person:

Like one long accustomed to living in harmony with the earth, the man had continued to prepare his fields for the seasonal ploughing.. Who else had been born with such clear, sharp eyes that cut through all pretence and sham? Who else was a born leader of men, yet at the same time acted out his own, strange inner perceptions, independent of the praise or blame of men (p. 6)?

Maru's flexibility is also revealed in his first contact with Margaret. He tricks Moleka to return the bed lent to Margaret in order to make him believe that he does not want to be associated with her because she is a Masarwa. As a result, avoids Margaret and thus leaves her for Maru.

5.4.3 Innovativeness

Another quality which makes Maru stand out among his peers is his innovativeness. He is stunned when Dikeledi equates him with other chiefs: "Maru is a real chief. He is a little bit like chiefs we had in the old days, before the white man arrived" (p. 68).

As he sees himself as a leader bringing new ideas to his society, he becomes disturbed by this statement and vows to prove by his deeds that he is not a chief like all the others but a unique chief who wants to change his society.

Should he bother to explain to her the language of the voice of the gods who spoke of tomorrow? That they were opening doors on all sides for every living thing on earth, that there would be a day when everyone

would be free and no one is a slave of another (p. 68)?

He succeeds in proving by his deeds through his relationship and marriage with Margaret Cadmore that he is serious about bringing change to his society. This is how the novel describes this admirable quality in him.

When people of the Masarwa tribe heard about Maru's marriage to one of their own, a door silently opened on the small, dark airless room in which their souls had been shut for a long time. The wind of freedom, which was blowing throughout the world for all people, turned and flowed into the room. As they breathed in the fresh, clear air their humanity awakened. They examined their condition. There was the fetid air, the excreta and the horror or being on oddity of the human race, with half the head of a man and half the body of a donkey. They laughed in an embarrassed way, scratching their heads. How had they fallen into this condition when, indeed, they were as human as everyone else? They started to run out into the sunlight, then they turned and looked at the dark, small room. They said: "We are not going back there" (pp. 126-127).

Indeed, Maru has defeated the scourge of racism and prejudice. He has opened avenues for the Basarwa to see themselves in the new light. It takes courage for an individual to stand against the ills of society. This demonstrates that an indigenous African leader can discern unjust practices and rescind them. As a former participant in the subjugation of the Basarwa, Maru becomes their liberator.

5.4.4 **Kindness**

Another leader who stands out in this Dilepe society is Dikeledi. The novel describes her as follows:

She was the daughter of a paramount chief ... Dikeledi had no need of employment but unlike others who made wealth synonymous with idleness, wealth gave her the freedom to specialize in what interested her most (p. 25).

Although she is a very senior person in social status and even qualifies to be called a princess, Dikeledi shows kindness to all and sundry. The following episode

illustrates.

She had taken two slaves from her father's house and, without fuss or bother, paid them a regular monthly wage (p. 25).

5.4.5 **Self-Confidence**

Another trait in Dikeledi which is easily recognised is her air of confidence. Margaret notices this on their first meeting.

“Wait here,” she said. “I’ll find someone to carry the suitcase to the car.”... Margaret was amazed by her certainty that someone would carry a suitcase simply because they were asked to, as though the elegant woman was accustomed to being waited on... “She can’t be what I think she is, an ordinary person like myself”, Margaret thought uneasily (p. 26).

5.5 CONCLUSION

The arrival of Margaret Cadmore in Dilepe, a society entrenched in the traditions of patriarchy and prejudice, in many ways challenges the beliefs and attitudes of these traditional people. They had always regarded the Basarwa with contempt, but Margaret Cadmore is a Masarwa who does not fit into the stereotype.

She was so startling and unexpected in her elegance that one could draw any number of conclusions about her and still be puzzled... The near perfect English accent and manners did not fit her looks. In fact, not one thing about her fitted another and she looked half like a Chinese and half like an African and half like God knows what (p. 23).

This strange looking Masarwa, a descendant of a race that is despised by the Batswana, is the character which the novelist uses in order to evaluate the leadership qualities of the indigenous community. Pete and Seth rely on their tried and tested attitudes of prejudice to marginalise and subjugate her but they fail. The message from this is that indigenous African leaders should move with the times. Life and culture are not static and Africans now live in a global village in this twenty-first century. Maru and Dikeledi who are the leaders in this society who are flexible and innovative are the

ones who are able to relate to her. The message is that indigenous African leaders can deal with cultural issues successfully and even team up with politicians in eradicating the ills which prevail within indigenous African culture, but not limited to African culture only, like patriarchy, xenophobia and ethno-centricity.

CHAPTER 6
INDIGENOUS AFRICAN CONCEPT OF A LEADER AS REFLECTED IN *THINGS
FALL APART*

6.1 CRITICAL BACKGROUND

The fact that *Things Fall Apart* is known world-wide and appreciated as a novel expounding the world-view of a pre-colonial indigenous African society has had much influence on the critical reception of the novel. Many critics tend to view the novel as an ethno-anthropological text in which the world-view of an indigenous African society is described. Among these critics are Innes & Lindfors (1978), Wren (1981) and Rhoads (1993). Two critical studies of *Things Fall Apart* were published to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the first publication of the novel. One of the two was Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart: A Casebook* (2003) and *Routledge Guides to Literature Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart* (2007). As the title of the first of the fiftieth anniversary book suggests, the view of the novel as a case study of a pre-colonial indigenous African society is well acknowledged.

This view of *Things Fall Apart* as a case study is confirmed by Achebe himself. Achebe (1973a: 8; 1973b: 3-4) explains that his aim in writing his novels is to promote awareness of the significance of African culture.

We must begin to correct the prejudices which generations of detractors created about the Negro... Thomas Jefferson believed that Negroes have a lower grade of talent than whites. Kipling said something about black men being half-devil and half-child...This presents the African writer with a great challenge. It is inconceivable to me that a serious [African] writer could stand aside from this debate or be indifferent to this argument which calls his humanity in question.

I think it is part of my business as a writer to teach that there is nothing disgraceful about the African [life and culture]. [It is my aim as a writer] to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement.

6.2 CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Democratic governance is not a recent phenomenon; it was a widespread form of governance in Africa before whites came to the continent. This is clearly shown in *Things fall Apart* which deals with an African society before the arrival of whites on the continent.

And in all the nine villages of Umuofia a town-crier with his ogene asked every man to be present tomorrow morning...In the morning the market-place was full. There must have been about ten thousand men there, all talking in low voices. At last Ogbuefi Ezeugo stood up in the midst of them and bellowed four times...And then suddenly like one possessed he shot out his left hand and pointed in the direction of Mbaino, and said through his gleaming white teeth firmly clenched: "Those sons of wild animals have dared to murder a daughter of Umuofia."...Many others spoke, and at the end it was decided to follow the normal course of action (pp. 7-8).

As in *Maru*, the society in *Things fall Apart* is patriarchal. But unlike *Maru* which deals with traditional leaders who attain their status by inheritance, *Things fall Apart* deals with people who rise to prominence mainly through their own personality and hard work. This point is made clear by the description of Okonkwo's background.

With a father like Unoka, Okonkwo did not have the start in life which many young men had. He neither inherited a barn nor a title, nor even a young wife. But in spite of these disadvantages, he had begun even in his father's lifetime to lay the foundations of a prosperous future. It was slow and painful. But he threw himself into it like one possessed. And indeed he was possessed by the fear of his father's contemptible life and shameful death (p. 13).

The novel therefore describes a society in which a person ascends into a leadership role by virtue of his salient personality and not necessarily through entitlement or inheritance. Okonkwo, the main character, exhibits many of the personality traits that the indigenous Nigerian society cherishes about a leader. The following are the main personality traits:

6.3 POSITIVE QUALITIES OF AN INDIGENOUS LEADER

6.3.1 **Agility**

From an early age of eighteen, Okonkwo was well known and highly respected for his agility as a wrestler.

Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. As a young man of eighteen he had brought honour to his village by throwing Amalinze the Cat. Amalinze was the great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten, from Umuofia to Mbiano. He was called the Cat because his back would never touch the earth. It was this man that Okonkwo threw in a fight which the old man agreed was one of the fiercest since the founder of their town engaged a spirit of the wild for seven days and seven nights (p. 3).

The novel makes it clear that Okonkwo stood out among his peers while he was still a young man because he was good at wrestling. This shows that wrestling is one of the qualities which the indigenous Nigerian society uses to evaluate males in terms of leadership.

6.3.2 **Fierceness**

Okonkwo was also well known and feared on account of his physical appearance.

He was tall and huge, and his bushy eyebrows and wide nose gave him a very severe look. He breathed heavily, and it was said that, when he slept, his wives and children in their out-houses could hear him breathe. When he walked, his heels hardly touched the ground and he seemed to walk on springs, as if he was going to pounce on somebody. And he did pounce on people quite often (p. 3).

6.3.3 **Bravery**

Apart from being a famous wrestler, Okonkwo is a warrior of note. In the last war which Umuofia was engaged, he brought home five heads of the enemies, a feat hard

to accomplish at his age according to the standards of his community.

He was a man of action, a man of war. Unlike his father he could stand the look of blood. In Umuofia's latest war he was the first to bring home a human head. That was his fifth head; and he was not an old man yet (pp. 7-8).

6.3.4 **Industriousness**

Okonkwo was born into abject poverty. His father was indolent and incapable of supporting his family. Okonkwo had worked hard to become a person of substance.

It was not really true that Okonkwo's palm-kernels had been cracked for him by a benevolent spirit. He had cracked them himself. Anyone who knew his grim struggle against poverty and misfortune could not say he had been lucky. If ever a man deserved his success, that man was Okonkwo (p. 19).

6.3.5 **Prosperity**

As a result of Okonkwo's hard work, he was able to rise above the abject poverty into which he was born and he became prosperous. By so doing, he became a role model in the society. It is for that reason that when people who command respect were being selected to be emissaries to the people of Mbaino to go and demand rectification for the killing of Udo's wife, Okonkwo was one of the people selected.

That was why Okonkwo had been chosen by the nine villages to carry a message of war to their enemies unless they agreed to give up a young man and a virgin to atone for the murder of Udo's wife. And such was the deep fear that their enemies had for Umuofia that they treated Okonkwo like a king and brought him a virgin who was given to Udo as a wife, and the lad Ikemefuna (pp. 19-20).

Okonkwo was indeed highly respected in the society "for his industry and success" (p. 19). His prosperity was enjoyed by his entire household.

Okonkwo's prosperity was visible in his household. He had a large compound enclosed by a thick wall of red earth. His own hut, or obi,

stood immediately behind the only gate in the red walls. Each of his three wives had her own hut, which together formed a half moon behind the obi. The barn was built against one end of the red walls, and long stacks of yam stood out prosperously in it. At the opposite end of the compound was a shed for the goats, and each wife built a small attachment to her hut for the hens. Near the barn was a small house, the medicine house' or shrine where Okonkwo kept the wooden symbols of his personal gods and his ancestral spirits. He worshipped them with sacrifices of Kola nut, food and palm wine, and offered prayers to them on behalf of himself, his wives and eight children (p. 10).

6.4 NEGATIVE QUALITIES OF AN INDIGENOUS LEADER

Just as Okonkwo embodies many of the values which are cherished by the pre-colonial indigenous African society, he also embodies some of its negative values. Some of his negative elements are listed below.

6.4.1 Uncompromising Character

As in all indigenous societies which have well defined codes of conduct, the pre-colonial society of Umuafia expects its members to be strict in their observance of rules and regulations. Okonkwo fits in well in this situation by being not just strict but also uncompromising. When actions need to be taken he does not dilly-dally.

“Let us not reason like cowards”, said Okonkwo. “If a man comes into my hut and defecates on the floor, what do I do? Do I shut my eyes? No! I take a stick and break his head. That is what a man does. These people are daily pouring filth over us, and Okeke says we should pretend not to see.” (p. 110)

His utterances attest that he is a fearless warrior and a leader who is ready for action. When action needs to be taken, and a problem needs to be confronted, he does not bury his head in the sand like a proverbial ostrich; this, however, often makes him too strict.

6.4.2 **Strict Head of his Household**

This tendency on the part of Okonkwo to be too strict is seen in how he relates to his household. In a patriarchal society such as in *Maru* and also in Umuofia, a male adult exercises his domination over females by treating them with a firm hand. This is precisely how Okonkwo treats his wives.

Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his little children (p. 9).

6.4.3 **Inflexibility**

As a male exercising his domination over his wives in the patriarchal society, Okonkwo sometimes becomes inflexible to the point that he even begins to break some important taboos. During the week of peace he beat up his wife Ojiugo who went out to plait her hair and came back a bit late to prepare his meals. He beat her up so thoroughly that she cried noisily and disrupted the peace and quiet which must be observed during the week of peace. By beating her, Okonkwo had committed a sacrilege which was unheard of for many years and Ezeani, the priest of the earth goddess, came to admonish him. The priest harangued him thus:

“Listen to me” he said when Okonkwo had spoken. “You are not a stranger in Umuofia. You know as well as I do that our forefathers ordained that before we plant any crops in the earth we should observe a week in which a man does not say a harsh word to his neighbour. We live in peace with our fellows to honour our great goddess of the earth without whose blessing our crops will not grow. You have committed a great evil.” He brought down his staff heavily on the floor. “Your wife was at fault, but even if you came into your obi and found her lover on top of her, you would still have committed a great evil to beat her.” His staff came down again. “The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase, and we shall all perish.” His tone now changed from anger to command. “You will bring to the shrine of Ani tomorrow one she-goat, one hen, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries.” He rose and left the hut (p. 22).

Okonkwo displayed this inflexibility again during a democratic meeting where people were expressing their views freely. Okonkwo took offence with someone who had disagreed with him and insulted the person at the public meeting.

Only a week ago a man had contradicted him at a kindred meeting which they held to discuss the next ancestral feast. Without looking at the man Okonkwo had said: "This meeting is for men." The man who had contradicted him had no titles. That was why he had called him a woman (p. 19).

He again displayed this inflexibility concerning Ikemefuna. One of the highly respected elders, Ogbuefi Ezeudu, had come to advise him not to participate in the killing of the child.

"That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death." Okonkwo was surprised, and was about to say something when the old man continued: "Yes, Umuofia has decided to kill him. The Oracle of the Hills and the Caves has pronounced it. They will take him outside Umuofia as is the custom, and kill him there. But I want you to have nothing to do with it. He calls you his father" (p. 40).

The argument by Ogbuefi Ezeudu is that because the child calls Okonkwo his father, if he participates in his killing, it would amount to killing his own child which is a sacrilege. Okonkwo ignores this advice and goes on to participate in the killing of the child.

As the man who had cleared his throat drew up and raised his machet, Okonkwo looked away. He heard the blow. The pot fell and broke in the sand. He heard Ikemefuna cry, "My father, they have killed me!" as he ran towards him. Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his machet and cut him down (p. 43).

Towards the end of the novel, Okonkwo displays his inflexibility again. The people of Umuofia are at a democratic meeting to discuss the sudden appearance of whites in the area.

The market-place began to fill as soon as the sun rose. Obierika was waiting in his obi when Okonkwo came along and called him...When

Okonkwo and Obierika got to the meeting-place there were already so many people that if one threw up a grain of sand it would not find its way to the earth again (p. 142).

One of the elders recommends that they exercise caution in dealing with the white man.

Okika sprang to his feet ... then he began to speak: "This is a great gathering...But are we all here? They have broken the clan and gone their several ways...If we fight the stranger we shall hit our brothers and perhaps shed the blood of a clansman (pp. 143-144).

After Okika's speech and before any other person could speak, some messengers of the white man appeared on the scene.

At this point there was a sudden stir in the crowd and every eye was turned in one direction. There was a sharp bend in the road that led from the market-place to the white man's court, and to the stream beyond it. And so no one had seen the approach of the five court messengers until they had come round the bend, a few paces from the edge of the crowd... The white man whose power you know too well has ordered this meeting to stop' (p. 144).

This order from the white man is brought to the entire community which has assembled and they should have discussed it. But Okonkwo does not wait for the 'democratic' discussion to take place; instead he takes matters which are meant for the entire community into his own hands and acts thus:

In a flash Okonkwo drew his matchet. The messenger crouched to avoid the blow. It was useless. Okonkwo's matchet descended twice and the man's head lay beside his uniformed body (p. 144).

As the democratic meeting had not instructed Okonkwo to kill the messenger, he soon realised that no one has endorsed his action and he was therefore isolated. His inflexibility has turned him from a role model into a despised person. In the end he commits suicide by hanging himself and by so doing brings shame and disgrace to his entire family.

6.5 CONCLUSION

The story of Okonkwo illustrates some important characteristics of an indigenous African leader. As a man who rose to a high status in his society through his own effort and not through family connections by being born into royal family or a family of high social status, Okonkwo illustrates the indigenous African principle that indigenous African societies create opportunities for ordinary people to rise to the top of the social ladder. This principle disproves Webber's famous argument that indigenous societies are "static".

Okonkwo's story also illustrates the indigenous African principle that indigenous African societies practise democratic governance. During all the meetings of the people of Umuafia, everybody has a right to speak and express an opinion. On one occasion when Okonkwo tried to intimidate someone who is just an ordinary person when he spoke and gave his opinion, the others were objected to him. That shows that, contrary to the belief that indigenous African societies are autocratic and that democracy was brought to Africa by the West, the indigenous society encourages everybody - rich or poor, high or low – to participate in decision-making.

Okonkwo's sad end came about because he took an important decision which affects the entire community on his own and he did not allow the community to debate the issue through the normal democratic process in which everybody participates in the decision-making. What this means is that Okonkwo was becoming autocratic and therefore his people rejected him.

CHAPTER 7

INDIGENOUS AFRICAN LEADERS AS REFLECTED IN *PETALS OF BLOOD*

7.1 CRITICAL BACKGROUND

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, like Chinua Achebe, is known world-wide as a writer. Ngugi is generally regarded by critics as writer with radical political views. Gugelberger (1985), Boehmer (1991), Cantalupo (1995) and Okolo (2007) regard him as a socialist writer who uses the Marxist philosophy of class struggle in his novels in general and in *Petals of Blood* in particular. For instance, Okolo (2007: 3) states that:

Petals of Blood functions as a fictional account of Marx's ideology of class struggle; the organization of workers through unions; the transformation of society through an inevitable revolution that will sweep away capitalism and all the oppressive tools it has used to enslave, divide, disunite, suppress and exploit the proletariat; and the eventual triumph of communism.

Hence, many critics tend to place Ngugi's novels within the context of social and political development and discuss them not as novels per se but as 'case studies' of the successes or failures of development policies. One critic who contextualises Ngugi's novel within social and political development is Campbell (2004: 11) who comments on Ngugi as follows: "the corpus of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's work is positioned firmly at the forefront of national and international efforts to secure social justice and sustainable global development." Uwasomba (2006: 94) also contextualises him and discusses him as follows:

Against the backdrop of a continuing socio-economic crisis in Africa stoked and sustained by Western imperialism and its agents, this paper examines and discusses Ngugi wa Thiong'o's concern and perspectives on Africa's march towards selfhood and independence via his novels *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross* which represent an effort towards the liberation of Africa from the claws and shackles of imperialism as they deal with neo-colonialism in all its virulent manifestations. As political novels, they are unambiguous in their support of the views of the proletariat and condemnation of bourgeois philosophy and practice, as manifested in international capitalism, and thus reject neo-colonialism as a viable way of life for African people.

This tendency to view *Petals of Blood* in particular and all the works of Ngugi in general not simply as novels but as socio-political statements is aided by Ngugi himself. For instance, Ngugi (1977: 6) makes it clear that his works are a tool in the fight against colonialism and its subjection of African culture.

The African writer found his image of the past distorted. Through his colonial, middle-class education, he found that he had no history... Hegel, one of the best minds of Europe has said this of Africa [Philosophy of History]: Africa proper, as far as history goes back, has remained for all purposes of connection with the rest of the world, shut up...The Negro exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality, all that we call feeling, if we would comprehend him. There is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character. At this point we leave Africa never to mention it again for it has no historical part of the world. It has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movement in it, that is in its Northern part, belongs to the Asiatic or European world. What we properly understand by Africa is the unhistorical, undeveloped spirit still involved in the condition of mere nature.

In his *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986: 2) Ngugi again stresses the need for African literature to become a tool of struggle for the socio-economic liberation of Africa.

I shall look at the African realities as they are affected by the great struggle between the two mutually opposed forces in Africa today: an imperialist tradition on one hand, and a resistance tradition on the other. The imperialist tradition in Africa is today maintained by the international bourgeoisie using the multinational and of course the flag-waving native ruling classes. The economic and political dependence of this African neo-colonial bourgeoisie is reflected in its culture of apemanship and parrotry enforced on a restive population through police boots, barbed wire, a gowned clergy and judiciary; their ideas are spread by a corpus of state intellectuals, the academic and journalistic laureates of the neo-colonial establishment. The resistance tradition is being carried out by the working people (the peasantry and the proletariat) aided by patriotic students, intellectuals (academic and non-academic), soldiers and other progressive elements of the petty middle class. This resistance is reflected in their patriotic defence of the peasant/worker roots of national cultures, their defence of the democratic struggle in all the nationalities inhabiting the same territory. Any blow against

imperialism, no matter the ethnic and regional origins of the blow, is a victory for all anti-imperialistic elements in all the nationalities.

In this passage he also identifies with the Marxist conception of society as being divided into two big camps: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. It should be noted that Ngugi places the political leaders of post-colonial Africa in the camp of the bourgeoisie: "The imperialist tradition in Africa is today maintained by the international bourgeoisie using the multinational and of course the flag-waving native ruling classes." Using Marxist line of reasoning, Ngugi makes the point that this camp of the bourgeoisie in alliance with the native ruling classes is 'opposed' by the working people comprising the peasantry and the proletariat.

Ngugi can therefore be said to articulate a Marxist view of African society. First, he regards African society as divided along Marxist lines into the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Second, he regards these two groups as being locked along Marxist lines in a 'struggle'. Third, he regards himself as a writer who on the one hand exposes what in Marxism is called the contradictions in the class of the bourgeoisie and on the other hand extols what in Marxism is called the heroism of the proletariat.

7.2 CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Ngugi's Marxist conception of African society is reflected in his structure of characters in *Petals of Blood*. There are there are two main categories of African leaders in the novel. The first category comprises the institutional leaders such as the leaders in political parties, churches and business. These are the people who have taken over from the colonial masters. Ngugi presents these institutional leaders as hypocritical, greedy and even down-right evil. Such leaders are Chui, Kamera, Mzigo, Nderi wa Riera and Rev Kamua alias Jerrod.

The second category of leaders comprises the leaders of the peasants and the proletariat. These leaders of the 'people' are not institutionalised in the sense that the social and institutional structures of power do not recognise them. Hence, the novel presents these leaders of the 'people' as engaged in a 'struggle' with the institutional

leaders. They are presented as people who are perpetually harassed and persecuted by the institutional leaders. For that reason, Ngugi presents these leaders of the 'people' as heroes. These leaders are Karega and Munira.

7.3 INSTITUTIONAL LEADERS WHO EXHIBIT NEGATIVE QUALITIES OF A LEADER

7.3.1 Deceitful Religious Leaders

7.3.1.1 *Ezekieli*

Ezekieli is a senior member of the Presbyterian Church establishment. He is also big land owner and a wealthy farmer. That makes him an important member of the wealthy class. For these two reasons, Ezekieli is regarded in the society as a leading member of the religious and business establishments and respected as such. The novel presents him as a person who uses his religion as a cover to be mean to his own family and to be tight-fisted to his workers.

This is how he is presented as father who is mean to his own household.

His father Ezekieli was tall. Severe in his austere aloofness, he was a wealthy landowner and a respected elder in the hierarchy of the Presbyterian Church. He was tall and mean in his holiness. He believed that children should be brought up on boiled maize grains sprinkled with a few beans and on tea with only tiny drops of milk and no sugar (pp. 13-14).

This is how he is presented as an employer who is tight-fisted towards his workers.

Two of his labourers had remained in his employment ever since Munira could remember – still wearing the same type of patched up trousers and nginyira for shoes. They nearly all had one thing in common: submission to the Lord. They called him Brother Ezekieli, our brother in Christ, and they would gather in the yard of the house after work for prayers and thanksgiving. There were of course some who had devilish spirits? One of them attempted to organize the workers into a branch of the Plantation Workers' Union... He was denounced in a church sermon

(p. 14).

In addition, he is also presented as a hypocrite. This man who displays his piety to all by demanding that his family and all his workers live a life of self-denial and everywhere he goes he sings the words 'wash me, Redeemer, and I shall be whiter than snow (p. 90)' is revealed to be having an adulterous relationship in secret with another man's wife.

It was at Elburgon that Karega's father and mother quarrelled...He beat her in frustration. She ran back to Limuru where she begged for cultivation rights from Munira's father. At first Brother Ezekieli had refused. But looking at her eyes, he had felt a sudden weakness in the flesh and he had allowed her to build a hut, but he made sure that she built it where he could visit her without being seen (p. 58).

7.3.1.2 *Reverend Kamua*

Rev. Kamua is a fraudulent person. He has fraudulently changed his surname from Kamau to Brown so that he can enjoy the benefits of the white colonialists and white missionaries. One of these benefits is living in the areas which were exclusively white residential areas.

At the next gate they took care to first read the signpost. Their hearts beat with hope and indecision. Rev. Jerrod Brown, Karega read again...The Reverend came out and stood just outside the door, and they could hardly believe their eyes. Rev. Jerrod Brown was a black man. Munira's heart missed a beat. He recognised the man: he had, once or twice, seen him at his father's house. But at home he was known as Rev. Kamau. Jerrod and Brown were his Christian names. He was one of the most respected men in the Anglican hierarchy (p. 147).

The novel does not explain how Kamau has been able to move from the township into such an exclusive residential area but it can be assumed that he managed to it by changing his name to 'Jerrod Brown'. This change of name in order to benefit is a crime in the legal sense; and this fraudulent crime is committed by a person who is 'one of the most respected men in the Anglican hierarchy'.

This 'man of God' is also presented as a mean person who uses the Bible to deceive people. This is clearly shown when the delegation asks him for water and food. Instead of giving them the water and food, he quotes the Bible for them.

The Reverend after fetching a Bible from the shelf had already asked them to join him in prayers. He prayed for the poor in spirit; the crippled in soul; for jobless wanderers, and all those who were hungry and thirsty because they had never eaten the bread and drunk the water from the well of Jesus... 'Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer... and a man lame from birth... seeing Peter and John he asked for alms... But Peter said, I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk (pp. 147-8).

Rev Kamau tells the delegation that as the apostles, Peter and John gave only spiritual support but not material support, he too has prayed for them to be filled with the Holy Spirit!

7.3.2 Exploitative Wealthy Leaders

7.3.2.1 *Kimeria*

Kimeria is a wealthy man who uses his wealth to seduce young girls. Wanja was one of the girls who he has exploited. This is how Wanja describes the affair.

A certain man came and bought a plot very near our home... He was married, with two girls... He was also the proud owner of a small lorry and a bus... He was tall and strong and wealthy and envied and respected by everyone. I was drawn to him from the very first time I saw him in his bus acting as a conductor. He did not charge me and fare the second time, saying you are the daughter of so and so... He became friends with my father and he soon became a frequent visitor. But his visit was always a sign between us that he wanted to see me the following afternoon (p. 38).

When Wanja noticed that she had become pregnant, she went to inform him. This was his reaction:

He told me not to be funny, he was old enough to be my father, and

anyway he was a Christian (p. 40).

As a result of this, Wanja, who was a brilliant pupil and would have progressed in school to become an important member of society, had her life ruined.

7.3.3 Oppressive Civil Service Leaders

7.3.3.1 *Mzigo*

Mzigo is an educationist, to be exact, a school inspector. Although his job specification as a school inspector requires that he should travel to schools to inspect their facilities and progress of work, Mzigo has never done that. He rather uses his position to serve as a local agent of politicians. How he operates is shown when Munira goes to him to request for additional teachers in his school:

‘Aa, Mr Munira, good to see you again and again. How is the school?... I’m sorry I have not been to your school yet: but I’ll be coming shortly... ‘Teachers? But Mr Munira, I told you almost two years ago that you could recruit any help you needed.’ Munira was about to go out when Mzigo called him back. ‘By the way, here is a letter to the Headmaster of Ilmorog School.’ Muniira took the envelope and opened it...Kamwene Cultural Organisation (Ilmorog Branch) invited the Headmaster of Ilmorog School and all his staff to join Nderi wa Riera in a delegation that would go to tea at Gatundu (p. 87).

This invitation to tea, as both Mzigo and Munira know, is simply a cover-up for monetary donations. What it means is that Munira, in his capacity as Headmaster, must collect money from all his teachers and send it to Mzigo who will then forward it to Nderi wa Riera, the member of parliament for the area. All other Headmasters in the area must do likewise. Mzigo will, of course, take his commission from this these donations. The reader is made to assume that these donations which are channelled through the office of Mzigo are not once-off events but regular activities.

7.3.4 Selfish Political Leaders

7.3.4.1 *Nderi Wa Riera*

Nderi wa Riera is a politician; he is the member of parliament for the constituency which includes Illmorog. We have already seen how he and Mzigo have been using their positions to force teachers to make monetary donations to them. The only time he visits Illmorog is during elections when he wants them to vote for him and even then he forces them to give him money. This is how his political promises backed with extortion of money from his constituents is described.

Who was their MP? A heated exchange would follow. Some could not remember his name. They had heard of him during the last elections. He had visited the area to ask to be given votes. He had made several promises. He had even collected two shillings from each household for a Harambee water project, and a ranching scheme (p. 18).

7.3.5 Spies and Agents of Colonialists

7.3.5.1 *Chui*

Chui is one of those people who are described as 'born leaders'. In school he dressed well, studied well, and participated actively in sports, drama, and all other school activities. He was loved by teachers and fellow students alike. Hence, he was appointed a school leader. In the days of the anti-colonial protests, schools also participated in the protests and, once again, Chui was in the forefront of the action. This is how Munira describes Chui's leadership role during the anti-colonial protests.

Chui – who else? – led us in a strike. We wanted all our former rights restored: we would have nothing to do with khaki shorts and certainly not with mbuca and other wadudu-eaten beans, no matter the amount of proteins in the insects. And why should teams from European schools get glucose and orange squash after a game while our own teams only got plain water?...Chui and I plus five other were expelled (p. 29).

As a result of the expulsion, Munira and the other co-leaders lost the prospect of

furthering their education. Chui, however, seemed to have benefitted from the strike action: “was later heard of in South Africa and then in America” (p. 30). The implication is that while Chui was parading himself as a student leader encouraging people to demonstrate against the colonialists, he was actually their spy and agent. This is proved by the fact that Chui would emerge later as a wealthy businessman.

7.4 LOW CLASS PEOPLE WHO DEMONSTRATE POSITIVE QUALITIES OF AN INDIGENOUS LEADER

7.4.1 *Munira*

Munira is the first son of Ezekieli and by traditional custom, the father was grooming him to take over his fortune. Munira’s expulsion from school changed all that. From a favourite son, Munira became a despised son. His father, Ezekieli, never minced his words in telling him that he is a failure in life.

‘I don’t need to tell you that you have been a disappointment to me. You are my eldest son and you know what that means. I sent you to Siriana: you got into bad company and you were sent home. If you look at some of the people you were in school with you can see where they are: you go any ministry, go to any big company, they are there’ (p. 94).

As a result of this constant humiliation and harassment, Munira has fled from his home and gone far away to Ilmorog, which the novel describes as a “a wasteland” (p. 5). As it turns out, it is rather this person who is abused and humiliated and told by his father that he has failed in life who builds up the school. This is how the school is when he first came to Ilmorog.

The school itself was a four-roomed barrack with broken mud walls, a tin roof with gaping holes... The pupils were mostly shepherd boys, who often did not finish a term but followed their fathers in search of new pastures and water for their cattle (pp. 5-6).

Munira improved conditions in this dysfunctional school to such an extent that enrollment increased and he had to go to Mzigo, the school inspector, to request for additional teachers. As a result of this immense achievement, Munira earned the

respect of the community of Ilmorog and although he is a stranger in their midst they received him well: 'he became one of us' (p. 10).

7.4.2 Karega

Karega is also a person despised by in own community. As already mentioned, his father was constantly beating his mother to the extent that she eventually ran away from him. Karega is therefore the product of a broken home. Like Munira, he too was expelled from school. Hence, Karega can be said to have a miserable past and an uncertain future.

Just as Munira had turned the school around, Karega also is able to turn the community of Ilmorog around. He is the one who comes up with the idea of sending a delegation to their member of parliament to present him with their problems of social amenities and by so doing he teaches the community that their destiny lies in their own hands and that they should not think that a god somewhere has decreed that their life should not be easy.

'A donkey has no influence on the weather. No animal or man can change a law of nature. But people can use the laws of nature' (p. 114).

As a result of this, the people of Ilmorog become active in pressing for their rights. They form unions to organise for better conditions of employment.

7.5 CONCLUSION

Petals of Blood presents the reader with a model of leaders which is not traditional in the sense that the normal leadership structure that exists in African societies is turned upside down. The normal structure of leadership in Africa is that leadership is closely related to institutional structures in society. Some of the institutional structures are patriarchy, clan, religion, and wealth. Hence, a son or daughter inherits the social responsibilities and roles which these structures possess. For instance, the children, or to be precise the first son, of patriarchal leader, clan leader, religious leader or

wealthy leader inherits all the social responsibilities and roles of the parents and he is treated with due respect. Under normal circumstances, such a son would have been groomed well during his youth in order for him to be aware of his position. The son would therefore live up to his reputation and he would therefore merit the respect that is accorded to him by the community.

Ngugi has turned upside down this normal state of affairs in this novel. The institutional leaders who are accorded respect by the community are shown to be charlatans and imposters who have risen to the top of the social ladder through theft, crime and sabotage. Ngugi uses his Marxist ideology to conclude that these leaders must be eradicated before there can be any meaningful progress in Africa.

CHAPTER 8

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The literature on leadership, as discussed in Chapter 2 under literature review, shows that most studies of the subject of leadership tend to focus on United States of American phenomena which stress aggressive and self-centred traits as models of a good leader. The literature also shows that many of the concepts of a leader have been influenced by Webber who holds the view that just as societies develop so also do leaders develop; they develop from a static leader who exists in a traditional society, through a charismatic leader who exists in an industrial society, and finally into a complex leader who exists in a technological society. Hence, many researchers tend to equate a good leader with someone in the corporate and business world 'who delivers the goods'. Such a person is considered to be good because he/she is successful in using aggressiveness and self-centredness to reap maximum rewards in profits for his/her employer.

This study reveals that the indigenous African concept of a leader is completely different. All the selected texts show that indigenous African societies regard aggressive and self-centred behaviours as very bad traits that must be avoided. In contrast, the selected texts applaud leaders who show humility, sympathy and compassion to others. Hence, one important significance of this research is that it shows that the indigenous African concept of a good leader is very different from that the United States of America-influenced global model of a leader as an aggressive and self-centred person.

Another significance of this research is that it contradicts the impression that is held by many people that traditional authorities are undemocratic, tyrannical and repressive. All the selected texts show that indigenous African leaders have a council of elders who are consulted by the leaders and who give their views freely and without threat or molestation.

This finding therefore confirms the traditional saying or proverb that *hosi i hosi hi vanhu* (a king or chiefs is so because of people).

The literature review also shows that global information on a leader is often confusing and misleading. This study reveals a different situation about indigenous African leaders. All the selected texts revealed clear and informative data on positive and negative characteristics of indigenous African leaders.

Some positive qualities of an indigenous African leader that are revealed in all the texts are:

- . Respectful and honourable
- . Fearful and strong
- . Kind and compassionate
- . Intelligent and diplomatic
- . Resourceful and benevolent.

Some negative qualities of an indigenous African leader that are revealed in all the texts are:

- . Blood-thirsty and vengeful
- . Oppressive and wicked
- . Rude and dictatorial
- . Narrow-minded and rigid
- . Mean and deceitful.

Mhudi deals with a period in the past when the ideal in traditional African societies was fighting neighbouring societies and subjugating them. Fearlessness was therefore a mark of honour and respect in those days. This fearlessness is amply displayed by Prince Langa and he is highly praised for it. But at the same time, he is reminded that he has brought dishonour to the nation by his brutal and merciless slaughter of women and children. Plaatje uses this episode to show that indigenous African societies value

bravery and fearlessness in leaders yet they condemn using these to harm and destroy women and children. *Mhudi* is therefore significant because it gives clear information not just about the positive and negative characteristics of an indigenous African leader but also about the dos and don'ts of traditional African life. *Things Fall Apart*, like *Mhudi*, also deals with a period in the past when bravery and hard work were highly valued. Okonkwo, who came from a poor and undistinguished background, used his bravery and hard work to rise to the top of the social ladder and for that achievement he was highly respected and praised. Indeed, he became a model to the youth in the society. Yet, the society did not hesitate to turn against him because of these values of bravery and hard work, he became inflexible and began to subjugate those who had not excelled like him. The story of Okonkwo is significant because it shows that indigenous African societies value bravery and hard work but they also value compassion.

Maru deals with an indigenous society that not only believes that it is better than the neighbouring societies, but even regards these societies as sub-human. The chiefs and elders of this society, as the custodians of the moral values of this society, uphold this situation of discrimination. Maru, the supreme leader of the chiefs and elders of this society, is bold enough to stand against this age-old discrimination. The significance of this novel is that it shows that although chiefs are the custodians of tradition and culture, yet indigenous African societies expect them to use their own initiative to recommend change in order for African societies to develop.

Petals of Blood is different from the above-mentioned texts in the sense that while they deal with indigenous African societies it deals with a modern post-colonial African society. *Petals of Blood* is significant because it shows that, in many ways, the indigenous structures of leadership have been destroyed and the institutional leaders no longer uphold the indigenous values of honesty and devotion. The novel is significant because it shows that these age-old indigenous values, which are no longer found in the institutional elite of society, can still be found among the ordinary people. This means that even in the modern post-colonial African societies, the indigenous principles of leadership are still relevant.

8.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. My study dealt only with novels. I therefore recommend that the research should be expanded to include oral literature.
2. Praise poems tell a lot about the characteristics of indigenous African leaders. The research should also cover them.
3. Literature written in indigenous African languages should be covered.
4. The research should be done nation-wide.
5. Traditional leaders play a vital role in the rural areas; they should be empowered to assist in local government.
6. The government has initiated to give traditional leaders (indigenous African leaders) some legislative and judicial powers. This initiative should be supported as long as the traditional leaders (indigenous African leaders) pledge to rule democratically.
7. Research funding should be made available for this kind of research nation-wide.

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