

# The quest for Great Heart Leadership to activate and promote the ending of violent conflict in Africa

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## **Abstract**

Inspired by the never-ending quest for the end of violence in some African communities, the author asks what kind of leadership is required to lead a community from violent conflict to peaceful coexistence. The aim of the article is to propose some principles for leadership in situations characterised by violent conflict. By departing from a conceptual framework to explain holistic leadership, conflict leadership and peace leadership, the author explains what Great Heart Leadership is, citing several examples to illustrate these concepts. The author argues that a leader with a 'great heart' is a leader who is able to apply analytical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual/normative leadership to activate peaceful change. This argument is applied to the challenge of leading people towards lasting peace in Africa, offering the specific case of a San community in South Africa to illustrate Great Heart Leadership.

**Keywords:** Holistic leadership, Great Heart Leadership, African conflict, peace, conflict, San community

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## Introduction

When a person stands on the beaches of Normandy in France, overlooking what were the main battlegrounds of World War II, one can only be awed when thinking about the courage and other virtues that were required from thousands of people who had to storm and defend these beaches. One gets the same kind of feeling when driving into Lesotho from South Africa, remembering the resistance the Basotho nation put up against invading colonialists, or when talking to the South African soldier who escaped execution by child soldiers in the Central African Republic when he was there on a peace mission. A different kind of feeling crawls up the spine of the observer when looking at the well-preserved skeletons of thousands of people killed during the genocide in Rwanda.

The student of leadership will ask: what kind of leadership was involved in all these cases? What kind of person was leading these big and small ventures, and why were they followed by so many? Maybe it is, as Tolstoy (2008:85) put it, that the accepted method for people to decide disputes is not by discussion but by killing one another. Maybe we should accept the warning of Hannah Arendt (1970:118) that every decrease in power is an open invitation to violence because those who hold power have always found it difficult to resist the temptation to defend the loss of power by means of violence. Alternatively, is there another way, as professed by many such as Mahatma Gandhi or Nelson Mandela, who learned and believed that peaceful relations are a better alternative to combat?

It is against this background that the research question arises: what kind of leadership is required to lead a community from violent conflict to peaceful coexistence? The aim of the article is to propose some principles for leadership in situations characterised by violent conflict. The proposed principles may be of crucial value in situations of persistent conflict in Africa.

The author sets the hypothesis that a leader with a 'great heart' is one who is able to apply analytical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual/normative leadership to activate peaceful change. The argument is informed by a study of the literature on the theoretical concepts of violent conflict, key

historical texts on the causes of conflict in the Platfontein community, as well as the results of community-engaged participatory research that was conducted by Unisa with the San of Platfontein from October 2013 to March 2015, focusing on dispute-resolving practices. Moreover, the author has had the privilege of direct experience with cases of violent conflict prevention and resolution, which inform the reflections and interpretation of recorded data.

Departing from a conceptual framework to explain holistic leadership, conflict leadership and peace leadership, the author explains what Great Heart Leadership is, citing several examples to illustrate its conflict-resolving value and providing supporting evidence from field research. These concepts are then applied to the challenge of leading people towards lasting peace in Africa, with the specific case of a San community in Africa as illustration.

### **Conceptual framework**

Theories on leadership are extensive. Therefore, it is important to establish a specific approach to a paradigm for leadership as a framework for discussion. The conceptual framework followed for this article is the holistic leadership paradigm, applied to conflict leadership.

### **Holistic leadership**

Quatro et al. (2007:427) explain the four distinct but interrelated domains of holistic leadership. According to them, the analytical domain is about leaders who can analyse and manage complexity, explained in terms of the analogy 'managing the individual trees in the forest'. The traditional approach to leadership development is to develop this kind of leader. A second domain, the conceptual domain, contains leaders 'who can manage the forest in which the trees are growing', meaning leaders who are not only capable of managing complexity, but who can also cultivate creativity and innovation. In the third domain, the emotional domain, leaders are skilled and knowledgeable on how to leverage human emotion as a source of energy and to shape and influence the behaviour of followers. The fourth

domain is that of spirituality, where the leader facilitates achievement of a mission through the connection of basic moral and ethical values. It implies a recognition that followers are no longer motivated by lower-order needs alone and an awareness that people are searching for reconciliation of their daily living with 'higher-order beliefs'. Today people feel more comfortable with a harmony among spiritual and religious traditions and spirituality that recognises their humanity. In this paradigm, critical interdependencies between the analytical, conceptual, emotional and spiritual domains are depicted.

Critical reflection refers to analysing and challenging the validity of assumptions and assesses the appropriateness of our knowledge, understanding and beliefs in current contexts (Mezirow 1990). According to Brookfield (1990:177) critical reflection involves three sequential phases. Phase One is identifying the assumptions that inspire our thoughts and actions; Phase Two is assessing these assumptions in terms of 'real-life' experiences and the current context; and Phase Three involves transforming these assumptions into more inclusive and integrative knowledge. This newly integrated knowledge is then used to inform our future actions.

According to Daniel Goleman, emotional intelligence (EQ) is 'understanding one's own feelings, empathy for the feelings of others and the regulation of emotion in a way that enhances living'. Goleman's model of EQ describes five domains that are divided into four quadrants. Two of the domains are associated with personal competence and two relate to social competence. According to Goleman:

The criteria for success at work are changing. We are being judged by a new yardstick: not just by how smart we are, or by our training and expertise, but also by how well we handle ourselves and each other (Goleman 1995:1).

Orlov (2003:1) defines holistic leadership as:

a) being able to lead from the mind, the heart, and the soul; b) to apply a methodology that encompasses a developmental systemic approach in order to impact oneself as leader, others as followers, and the environment; and c) lastly, this process should reflect a journey that leads toward transformation at the individual, team, and organizational/community levels.

Velthuizen (2007:75) refers to a culture of learning that involves the expansion of people as ‘intellectual capital through learning’. A culture of learning involves both the development of personal knowledge and the transfer of knowledge between individuals with the purpose of emancipating people. A culture of learning emerges through the implementation of formal best practices or by means of spontaneous and informal interaction, facilitated by the leader.

These assertions imply that personal competence as a leader means being in touch with and accepting the self, and is a point of departure for creating relationships with other people, accepting them as followers and recognising their competencies and personal challenges. When this kind of relationship is established, the leader has a point of departure to facilitate the challenges to existing assumptions and get people to find a better way, risking spontaneous and informal interaction to do the right things better. In this interaction, the leader may find and accept that there is no place for imposing personal ideas on other people beyond the basic values of respect, demand for integrity and humaneness. Moreover, it is expected that the leader be aware that most people recognise one or other form of spirituality (even if they do not openly declare it, or call it different things). In many cases, spirituality is aimed at inner peace and certainty in the face of a sometimes demanding cosmology consisting of the workplace, the family, the community, broader society and the uncertainty of where the person fits into the totality of being. The holistic leader needs to be able to facilitate this quest, or at least not to disrupt it, as a way of managing conflict by collaboration, innovative thinking, leveraging emotions and recognising values that inspire people.

### **Conflict-resolving leadership for peace**

According to Runde and Flanagan (2007:115), the most effective leaders are extraordinarily competent at handling conflict by responding to it constructively. Conflict leaders keep harmful situations under control and discover hidden options, solutions and possibilities. Good conflict leaders embrace conflict not as an adversary but as an opportunity for growth

and a source of creative energy. However, Jansen (2014) points out that not every kind of conflict is constructive and the often used expression ‘the better versions of ourselves’ implies that there is a ‘worse’ version of ourselves, displayed in the mentality that created the genocide in Rwanda, international terrorism and war in general. During the International Conference on Conflict, Memory and Reconciliation: Bridging Past, Present and Future, 10–13 January 2012 in Kigali, Rwanda, where many genocides were analysed, it was concluded that most people are able to kill others. All they need is a leader to convince them that the ‘others’ are less human than they are and do not have the right to live.

With the realisation that violent conflict can seldom be positive, the concept ‘peace leadership’ was developed. Lederach (1997) suggests that peace leadership is a building block for peace. Leaders can come from any domain in society including politics, diplomacy, defence, economics, education, media, religion, health, the ruling ‘elite’, ‘middle class’, or the ‘grass-roots level’. It does not matter where the peace leaders originate, as long as there is a critical mass of leaders to sustain peace. Reychler and Stellemans (2005) affirm that leaders at the international and domestic level may be political or military leaders, or other highly respected individuals who occupy formal positions of leadership in any sector of society. Peace leaders are successful when their influence is stronger than that of the spoilers in a peace process.

From the assertions above it can be seen that violent conflict is a ‘wicked’ problem, meaning a problem that is harmful, difficult or impossible to solve. Information is often incomplete; contradictory and fluid conditions exist that are often difficult to recognise. If leaders try to solve one facet of a ‘wicked’ problem, complex interdependencies create other problems. One of the aspects a conflict leader has to deal with is that of the ‘evil’ mind, such as an instigator of genocide and war. Therefore, the conflict leader is also a peace leader, who together with other peace leaders forms a gathering of leaders critical to resolving conflict and sustaining peace.

## Great Heart Leadership

In the 'leadership compass' of Bob Larcher (2011:13), the heart, body, head and soul are at the centre. From here leadership activities develop, such as facilitating, campaigning, influencing, persuading, guiding, structuring, rewarding and motivating. According to Orlov (2003:1), what is in a person's heart is important and cannot be ignored. Orlov claims that 'the heart is the core of what motivates, inspires and drives us'. In the new era of creative self-expression and where relationships are the organising energies, the leader needs to release control to create community and tap into the power that resides in people's souls. The concepts 'transformational leadership' and 'servant leadership' both emphasise the soul as a source of empowerment, enlightenment, motivation and growth.

The claims of Larcher and Orlov probably originate in the Egyptian belief that the heart was the source of personality, memory, human wisdom, emotions and the soul (Waking Times 2012). Nowadays this perception of the function of the heart is seen as more symbolic than real. However, ongoing scientific research indicates that the heart is not only a bodily organ and pump: it is a complex system, which includes a wave that carries information, infusing every cell in the body, about 60 times greater in amplitude than that of the brain. The electronic field of the heart functions as an 'antenna' which tunes into electromagnetic fields and responds to the magnetism produced by the hearts of other people (Institute of HeartMath 2012).

Whether symbolic or merely a sensory organ, the limited literature on this topic affirms that not all hearts are 'great'. To be great, a heart has to be the source of goodness, inspiration and connection with other souls. A leader's heart would contain all these positive traits.

## Great Heart Leaders

The main distinction between 'great leaders' in history and 'Great Heart' leaders is the way they dealt with violent conflict. The stereotyped 'great leader' is a person who faces the reality of applying strategies that include

violent action. The ‘Great Heart Leader’ is an idealist who deals with violent conflict as a complex and evil problem, always having conflict avoidance and peacebuilding in mind. The following examples illustrate Great Heart leadership.

### **Mahatma Gandhi**

Travelling through India and talking to the Indian people, it becomes evident that most Indians still feel awe and respect for the message of peace brought by the late Mahatma Gandhi. Over the world there are many statues of this humble man. There is even one on the shores of Lake Victoria at Jinja in Uganda, near what is believed to be the source of the White Nile.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (2 October 1869–30 January 1948), also known as Bapu to the Indian people, was a political and spiritual leader. He practised a non-violent and civil disobedience approach to conflict. He was one of the leaders who guided India to independence and inspired civil rights and freedom all over the world. Before 1915, he first employed this approach in South Africa (Gandhi 2006:172). After his return to India in 1915, he organised peasants, farmers and urban labourers to protest against land taxes and discrimination. He became the leader of the Indian National Congress in 1921. In this capacity, the simple-living Gandhi led campaigns for poverty alleviation, women’s rights, building goodwill between religious and ethnic groups and ending ‘untouchability’– and helped to achieve self-rule for India. He was imprisoned on several occasions in both South Africa and India. Gandhi’s vision of a free India, based on religious pluralism, was challenged mainly by the Muslim population. In August 1947, Britain granted independence to India, but it was partitioned into a Hindu-majority country and Muslim East and West Pakistan. Consequently religious violence broke out in the Punjab and Bengal. Gandhi visited the affected areas to promote peace, undertaking several fasts (the last at the age of 78) to promote religious harmony (Khan 2007:18). On 30 January 1948 Gandhi was assassinated by a Hindu nationalist.

### **Nelson Mandela**

Nelson Mandela (18 July 1918–5 December 2013) was an inspirational South African political leader. He demonstrated in his life of imprisonment and as President of South Africa that courage and standing for what a person holds to be true are some of the distinguishing characteristics of great leaders, especially when that leader expresses thoughts on behalf of a less powerful minority or champions the poor. He believed that forgiveness is one of the most powerful and healing gifts a leader can possess, allowing him or her to engage with other people in ‘a creative and liberating way’. He asserted that great leaders are people who create trails that a rich diversity of personalities can follow towards their own greatness (Kalunga-Banda 2008:119).

The examples above illustrate that a Great Heart Leader is, like any other leader, just a human being with good and bad personal traits. What they have in common with all other leaders is courage, competitiveness and patience in what they want to achieve as individuals. However, they are only human and had to learn how to deal with bad temper, mitigate their personal ambition and break away from fundamentalist religious or ideological beliefs in order to become leaders of a diversity of people.

Secondly, they are analysts and critical thinkers who manage knowledge and wisdom, applying their knowledge to the complex and evil problem of violence. They have gained their knowledge from unique experiences such as leading civil disobedience against the mighty British Empire (Ghandi), or using 27 years of incarceration to become a leader (Mandela). Wisdom comes from an awareness of our holistic existence in a cosmology where people are connected with everything else in the universe. Great Heart Leaders display a unique management style, enabling them to manage ‘all the trees in the forest’ as well as all that influences the forest.

Thirdly, the Great Heart Leader is also competent in applying diplomacy and politics to avoid conflict, making the most of people’s distaste for violence, but never hesitating to apply non-violent strategies to confront hegemony and class consciousness on behalf of the less powerful. However,

the Great Heart Leader focuses on building goodwill among a diversity of people, leading to peace.

Fourthly, and maybe most important, Great Heart Leaders are connected to the hearts of a diversity of people and inspire them, irrespective of their faith or culture, also guiding them to connect to each other in a spirit of respect, integrity, freedom and forgiveness, creating a pathway to peace while doing so.

### **Great Heart Leadership for peace in Africa**

Africa is not a violent continent, but there are people in Africa who have to deal with persistent and endemic outbreaks of violence. This section deals with the type of leadership and the values that are required to be a Great Heart Leader in Africa.

### **Leadership to end violent conflict in Africa**

In 2009, Jesse Driscoll, a Ph.D. student in Political Science at Stanford University, wrote: 'A growing fraction of the world's civil wars seem to be breaking out on the African continent, and in the last few decades it has acquired a reputation as a hotbed of violence and warfare'. His view represents the pessimistic and popular view of Africa by outsiders, which unfortunately, is sometimes true. A realistic view from an insider perspective is that of the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in South Africa, which reminds us in a recent publication (Cilliers and Schünemann 2013) that many African countries did experience violent transitions after independence in the form of civil wars and mass killings, and predicts that violent conflict and insecurity will continue, mostly due to the scarcity of resources in poor countries. Combined with weak governance, overflow of violence from bad 'neighbours' and extensive unemployment of the youth, the outlook is not positive. Although the International Monetary Fund, in its latest Regional Economic Outlook for sub-Saharan Africa, projects the regional GDP growth to increase from about 5 per cent in 2013–14 to 5,75 per cent in 2015, this positive outlook is spoiled by the forecast that countries such as the Central African Republic and South Sudan

will remain violent. In anticipation of these challenging circumstances, leadership remains a vital element to prevent violence or at least mitigate its consequences when it occurs (Pani 2014).

Ngambi (2010) suggests that the type of leadership required for Africa is leadership that can influence other people, enabling them to realise their full potential with passion and integrity in achieving a shared vision. Good leadership means that the African leader should lead with the 'head' (combining cognitive intelligence, analytical and strategic thinking), with the 'hands' (action orientation, empowering, coaching and mentoring) and with the 'heart' (applying spirituality, emotional intelligence, culture, integrity and trust).

This kind of leadership is founded on the fundamental African value of human togetherness, described as the spirit of *Ubuntu* (in Nguni languages), *Botho* (in Sesotho), *Kparakpor* (in the Yoruba language) and *Ujaama* (in Swahili). Many authors attempt to articulate the humanistic principles embedded in these traditional African concepts, but this is difficult; these principles have to be experienced. Faris (2011) describes these concepts as humanistic principles, encompassed in compassion, sharing, reciprocity, upholding of dignity of personhood, responsibility to others, the recognition of shared humanity and interdependence. These are ethical and moral ideals for individual and social values.

Brock-Utne (2001:6–7) explains how traditional leaders in Africa rule through arbitration and reconciliation to maintain harmony, during which the Elders of the clan always consider the social context, including the values, beliefs, fears, suspicions, interests, needs and attitudes of the people. She explains the humanistic value system using the concepts 'warp' and 'weft' (used in the practice of weaving), to describe the traditional African practice of family and neighbourhood negotiation (warp) and the mind-set of togetherness (weft). Nabudere (2012:191) describes this value system as 'holistic' and 'glocal' and suggests a holistic consciousness that calls for a new moral and 'glocal society' with 'glocal citizenship', founded on justice and peace, that would emerge through restorative learning

and an understanding of the ‘divine word’ from the ‘divine source’, what Nabudere calls ‘the heart’.

### **Restorative leadership in African communities**

Odora-Hoppers (2010:9) asserts that transformative actions should enable restorative action and sustainable human development in Africa and elsewhere. In this regard, she emphasises that democracy is a ‘key means’ for people to choose their leaders and to hold them accountable for their policies and conduct while in office, aspiring to governance founded on the consent of those who are governed. Sovereignty of the people is a precondition of leadership. Real power flows from the people to leaders, who hold power only temporarily. Odora-Hoppers (2010:17) reminds leaders to go further than just respecting the rights of others or holding regular elections, moving towards implementing concepts such as trust, solidarity, love, caring, respect for nature, integrity, honesty, character, forgiveness, non-violence, generosity and sacrifice for the common good. Peacebuilding draws from the positive norms of diverse cultures and creates ‘ethical growth points’. Haruna (2009) emphasises that community-based leadership is based on community norms and is the one important catalyst that has a chance of fostering social change and institutional transformation.

According to Steffen (2012:276) of the Restorative Leadership Institute, who conducted most of her research in Africa:

Restorative leadership demonstrates a fundamental belief in human potential and the power and wisdom of community. Embracing an ethic of community, restorative leadership is guided by core values to do no harm, to serve collective wellbeing, and to bring the highest benefit to all. It is leadership that utilizes a community-centred approach, engaging social networks to forward and sustain hopeful possibilities.

According to the community leadership model of Ngambi (1999:31), membership of any community is voluntary, and a leader should not force ideas on members of the community, but involve as many people as

possible in discussing and making decisions on issues that concern them. Ngambi (1999) identifies behaviours associated with effective community leadership. Positive behaviour includes encouraging people to believe in and pursue their dreams and encouraging full participation and shared leadership through dialogue and open-air events. Effective community leaders educate people in new positive values, listening to and taking the lead from the community, creatively handling disappointments, inspiring confidence, securing the cooperation, discipline and respect of others without a show of authority, mobilising and using resources responsibly. Emotionally mature leaders establish strong relationships and provide emotional support to group members, helping them to learn from their mistakes.

If the statements above are analysed, it is found that a Great Heart Leader in Africa needs to be human, a person of the people and with the people, and not some royal or elite figure with perceived superpowers. The Great Heart Leader in Africa is a person who can access and manage the knowledge coming from the minds of other people, analyse it and reflect on it in a critical way – thus complementing his or her own interpretation with the wisdom of others. This can especially be valuable in communities that have to deal with phenomena such as violent conflict and insecurity. Furthermore, the Great Heart Leader in Africa displays exceptional competence in ‘weaving’ consensus through networking, reconciling people, creating harmony and goodwill and mustering human potential. By influencing others, encouraging learning and creative problem solving and providing emotional support, the leader reinforces positive visions of the self-development of people and the restoration of positive values. In such a way, the Great Heart Leader in Africa connects to ‘the hearts’ of many people as a source of inspiration to forgive and to live with one another according to the positive values of respect, integrity, avoiding doing harm to others, freedom, justice and peace. In achieving that, the leader is sensitive to the norms of the community that follows him or her, but recognises that diverse cultures may have different norms, such as democratic norms where governance by the people for the people is a fundamental value. If a

leader can achieve these ideals, he or she may not create a full pathway to peace and growth, but will at least clear a way through the forest together with the many good people in African communities and prevent and resolve conflict, restore security for the people living there and contribute to making the vision of growth real.

### **The case of leadership in a San community**

The San community of Platfontein near Kimberley, the capital of the Northern Cape province, was selected as a case study for two reasons. The most important is a history of being involved in violent conflict for centuries, which gives the people and leaders of the community unique knowledge on how to deal with violent conflict. A further reason is that a wealth of data is available from Community Engaged Participatory Research (CEPR) conducted with the leaders and people of Platfontein, providing special insight into the challenges facing a community leader in Africa today.

### **The San community of Platfontein**

The San community of Platfontein is seen as one of the First People of Southern Africa, whose origins can be traced to the ‘Mitochondrial Eve’ from whom all Africans originate (Oppenheimer 2004:40). Today there are different San language groupings, with dialects that are not mutually intelligible. The two San languages spoken by the San of Platfontein originate from Kwedam (which is used by San living in Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe), and !Kun used by the San in northern Namibia, north-west Botswana and southern Angola (Bleek and Lloyd 1911).

For many centuries the Khwe lived along the Kavango and Kwando rivers as cultivators and cattle-herders in close contact with the Bantu groups of the Kavango region of Namibia and the Cuando-Cubango province of Angola. The !Kun were mostly hunter-gatherers living in remote savannah areas. During colonial rule by the Portuguese, the !Kun and the Khwe served as trackers (called ‘flechas’) in separate units of the Portuguese military. When Portugal withdrew from Angola in 1974, the !Kun and Khwe were

formed into a military unit (31 Battalion of the South African Defence Force) to participate in counter-insurgency operations in Angola and Namibia against guerrillas of the South-West African Peoples' Organisation (Swapo). After the independence of Namibia in March 1990, the San were offered resettlement in South Africa by the South African government. Consequently, they settled together with other San soldiers from Namibia and their families at Schmidtsdrift on the Vaal River in the Northern Cape province. In June 1999, the late President Nelson Mandela handed the title deeds for the farms Platfontein, Wildebeeskuil and Droogfontein to the community (Robin et al. 2007:2).

The San community of Platfontein is therefore a suitable unit of analysis for studying leadership in Africa. Not only did they survive pressures from both European and other African cultures, they also survived the Cold War that brought violent rivalry to Africa, and the demands of many years under the apartheid government. The result is that a leadership core emerged that displayed many of the traits proposed as those of Great Heart Leaders.

### **Research with the community**

Since September 2013, the Institute for Dispute Resolution in Africa (IDRA), in the College of Law at the University of South Africa (Unisa), has conducted community-engaged participatory research with the San community of Platfontein. The research project, which started in September 2013 and concluded in November 2015, discovered some important information related to leadership.

During the discovery phase, 250 research reports were obtained from semi-structured interviews; focus-group meetings; interpretation conversations and solution design workshops. These reports were captured and collated in what is called the San Dispute Resolution Oral Archive.

The research team, consisting of the Chief Researcher, an Assistant Researcher from Unisa and eight San field researchers, used conflict mapping to process the wealth of information obtained from community members (200 community members participated in the research).

Interpretative conversations were also conducted with the Elders and the leaders of the #Khomani San community of Andriesvale (230 km north of the town of Upington, about 600 km from Platfontein) and scholars from different disciplines.

The design phase brought community leaders, scholars and practitioners from several disciplines together at a writers retreat and international conference to design dispute resolution architecture for and with the community. The findings of the research are therefore a synthesis of the results of several research activities. More detail on this research is available from the San Dispute Resolution Oral Archive (<http://uir.unisa.ac.za>).

## **Discovering leadership in the San community**

### **The causes of conflict in the Platfontein community**

The community of Platfontein is characterised by severe poverty, which is the root cause of disputes in the community. A feeling of hopelessness and depression, especially among the youth, leads to alcohol abuse and general disrespect for others, theft accompanied by vandalism and violent behaviour. Furthermore, the relationship between the !Kun and Khwe remains tense, characterised by many misunderstandings over trivialities, disrespect and distrust of the 'others'. The two groups do not trust the existing leadership, their perception being that some leaders in Platfontein do things for their own benefit and not for the community. Each 'house' also claims its own leadership and do not recognise any central leader (Gebregeorgis 2014, 88).

### **The origins of leadership in the community**

In the field research with Unisa, Velthuisen (2015b:10) found that before leaders were appointed by outsiders in military ranks during the 'bush war' or elected to modern governance structures, there was no formal hierarchy among the 'San leaders'. Velthuisen (2015b:18), together with community elders, discovered that a new leadership style is required for Platfontein. The leader should be a facilitator of harmonious relationships; a person who the group is willing to follow because of mutual trust; a servant of the

community who is always available; a voice of the people on governance issues and an able facilitator of community gatherings. Furthermore, a regular change of leadership is required in the case of elected leaders, different from traditional leaders who gain power through heredity.

As described by Katjarra:

It was not a big issue in Angola and Namibia about leadership, because people were living separate from each other with their own leader who represented their small groups. They did not have one leader who commanded the whole tribe (Sibongo 2014).

Alfred Tsimuna describes his experience since the two groups started living together in a military unit in Namibia:

We began to encounter leadership problems because of being joined with other communities. Due to the many differences among us, we did not understand one another. Furthermore, everyone wanted to be a leader because their blood relatives in some villages in Angola were leaders (Mahongo 2014).

To complicate the situation, elected political leaders from the different South African political parties also had to execute their mandate. When leaders are elected, people vote according to kinship and trust gained from living together. They vote for the person who they believe is able to assist the San community with jobs and career opportunities and who can negotiate on behalf of the community (Sewdass 2014:10).

These research findings highlight the complexity of leadership in African communities. Most people feel comfortable with the leadership of their clan leader, who probably has the personality traits to meet their expectations of peaceful coexistence and growth. Furthermore, it is expected that a leader will promote harmony among people from all groups and create opportunities for clan members to be in collaboration with others and not in competition with them. Moreover, a leader is expected to practise the positive values he or she preaches, always being mindful of what other people consider to be good, so that opportunities begin to open up for the

whole community. The desired end state in a community is that leaders not only look after the growth of their own few trees, but also together with other leaders manage all the trees as one forest, ensuring that whatever is needed for growth is collectively pursued.

### **The ability to manage community knowledge**

Sewdass (2014:12) found that the current leaders of Platfontein are good at connecting people with each other to share tacit knowledge and attend events with the intention of learning. The leaders continually create opportunities to revive knowledge and help people to find and use the knowledge of others. There is also an expectation in the community that people who have gained new knowledge through their interaction with the modern world would convey it to community members. In this regard, some leaders are good at sharing knowledge in an inspirational way through storytelling.

Sewdass (2014:10) also discovered that, in most cases, clan leaders make decisions by first consulting the senior traditional leader in the community, who then goes to other traditional leaders to decide what has to be done to resolve a dispute. A date is then set for all the parties involved in the dispute to tell their side of the story before a decision can be made. Once the decision is made, it is accepted by both parties.

It therefore appears that the current San leadership has the ability to manage community knowledge, especially in terms of creating opportunities for community members to develop themselves and to learn the positive values identified with modern democracy and peaceful society. The vision is that the application of community knowledge will lead to consensus, reconciliation and harmony. However, a system of good practices founded on positive values, guided by 'peace leaders', needs to be developed.

### **Uniting a diversity of people and activating peace**

Bejene (2014:115) found that the current leadership of the San community in Platfontein is not working closely enough with the rest of the community,

compromising harmony and unity and increasing the likelihood of violent conflict erupting within the community.

Velthuizen (2015a: 92) confirms this diagnosis. He discovered that the traditional system of conflict resolution in Platfontein is not fully functional. The conflict resolution practices that worked well in the past need to be revived and reinforced with modern good practices that work well in similar situations. The endogenous knowledge of the community about how to avoid conflict, together with values such as mutual respect, integrity and humanity, are essential for lasting peace; but these values have collapsed since the San arrived in South Africa. The need is for individual peacemakers to take the lead in weaving a web of relationships to find the truth about what happened in the past, urging personal forgiveness for the wrongs of the past and promoting healing and reconciliation.

Moses and Thoma (2006:3) blame this situation on the San losing their traditional land and resources, which limits their prospects for living according to their age-old culture. The San consider their cultural practices to be the moral fibre of a healthy and socially intact community. Disruptions to the indigenous culture affected the community in such a way that they are today unable to uphold their traditional democratic practices through decisions founded on community consensus. If a decision did not have the broad approval of the members of the community, it was never implemented. Colonisation devastated the social and political institutions of the San communities.

From the above research findings, it is evident that a special kind of leader is required to achieve unity in a community that has continually been disrupted over a long period of time. The disruption caused by cattle-herders from the north of Africa who invaded the land the San lived on, soldiering for European colonial powers, and the apartheid regime have all devastated their conflict-resolution practices. The land settlement that was given to them out of goodwill increased the demands and pressures on the community, and the community failed to function as a single

entity, despite groups living closely together. Creating unity out of such complexity requires leaders with great hearts.

### **Restoring the connection**

Uniting diverse peoples into a unit characterised by respect, integrity and togetherness requires understanding of a new cosmology that allows people to connect to each other. The popular notion is to explain the cosmology of the San in terms of ‘trance dance’, which is well documented by people who have observed and claim to have experienced it. Researchers explain the dance as the central event in the expression of religion for the !Kun. During the dance a spiritual state is reached ‘parallel with cosmology’, where participants pass from one level of consciousness to another. It is claimed that the dance in general takes place to relieve tension in and among the people. A specific form of dance is the ‘healing dance’, which is used to heal physical and social ills. Most dances are held at night after a good meal, with everybody joining in, using all kinds of instruments such as rattles to make a noise. Diviners (‘shamans’) play a specific role in this ritual (Lewis-Williams and Pearce 2004:83–85). ‘People clap, dance, sing and talk to create a spiritually charged and socially cohesive atmosphere that launches shamans to the Spirit World’ (Ouzman 2008:221).

However, to see this as the most significant part of spiritual expression is to fall victim to the showmanship of the most researched people on earth, who know how to perform and tell stories to people who seldom if ever display insight into what they see or hear. Still, despite the protective showmanship there is little doubt that the dance serves as a way of relieving tensions and bringing people together, as in any society where people get together to dance.

San cosmology does not only provide spiritual experiences but also presents an all-encompassing world-view that extends into every dimension of their existence (Yates and Manhire 1991:3). Ouzman (2008:223) explains it in terms of separate Spirit and Ordinary worlds that always intersect. San cosmology is not conservative and ancient but a fund of beliefs, places,

objects, skills and stories that allow people to innovate and to make an impact in the modern world. Contemporary circumstances such as the 'syncretic' adoption of Christianity, and real social problems such as alcoholism, domestic violence and abuse, and how the modern San deal with these, cannot be ignored.

In a conversation on 18 February 2015 in Kimberley with Reverend Mario Mahongo, a community leader and leader of the !Kun, he explained that the trance dance plays a very limited role in the community, though it is still practised by some people to resolve problems. The dance takes place during the night and before sunrise when the diviner disappears to communicate with the spirits, bringing back the solution to the people afterwards. Yet most leaders are Christians and get their wisdom from connecting with one God (Ferguson 2015).

According to Batha (2014:40), the community of Platfontein is in transition from a traditional faith system, which recognises the San God and ancestral spirits, to Christianity. The transition has an impact on a whole host of social, behavioural, ethical, moral and cosmological issues. Some elders in the community are formal Christians but still have reverence for the traditional faith system. Some people appreciate the two faith systems, but find the conflicting moral values confusing. The older people remember the significance of the God of the San and the ancestral spirits in healing, rites of passage and rituals performed, expressing frustration with the difficulty of going back to the indigenous faith system.

Analysing the statements above reveals that the link with traditional spirituality has been disrupted and replaced by imported religious values to deal with social ills such as violent conflict. A complementary belief system has developed, however, and opens the way for connecting the hearts of many people in a positive way. Furthermore, it opens the way for forgiveness and closes the door on vengeful thinking. However, it calls for simplifying morality by eliminating a complex system of rules and taboos and replacing it with the simple principle of 'do no harm to others' as the

foundation of morality, peace and justice. If this can be achieved the leader will enjoy an uncomplicated approach that will encompass traditional cultural norms, modern religion and democracy, gradually eliminating harmful norms and practices such as violence for the sake of revenge or simply as 'a way of doing things'.

Research by Sewdass (2014:4) shows that the community needs to accept leaders on the basis of how the community perceives the leaders to be people who accept the reality of their role as leaders in the community. The community asks itself how the person who claims to be a leader can change things for the better.

This very important finding shows that to be a Great Heart Leader in an African community, a leader must be trusted by the people to lead them on a pathway through deserts, forests and deteriorating villages towards lasting peace, security and growth.

## **Conclusions**

This work began with a research question asking what kind of leadership is required to lead a community from violent conflict to peaceful coexistence. Acknowledging that this is a complex problem, the author simplified the challenge by proposing three principles for leadership in situations characterised by violent conflict. The principles are the result of analysing the concepts of holistic leadership, conflict leadership and peace leadership, explaining what is meant by 'Great Heart Leadership' and applying it to the leadership challenges of Africa. The case of leadership in the San community of Platfontein in South Africa was offered as an illustration of the requirements of Great Heart Leadership in the real world.

It was found that the Great Heart Leader in Africa should be able to apply analytical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual/normative leadership to activate peaceful change. The following principles for Great Heart Leadership are proposed:

**Peace activism.** It was found that a leader with a ‘great heart’ is required to prevent and manage conflict among people. To achieve this, the leader has to live the virtues of being a non-dualistic person who builds relationships; a facilitator of personal healing and growth; and a person who can activate unity in a community. The peace leader in Africa should have the skills to influence others through visible peacebuilding actions guiding relationships.

**Restorative learning.** A leader should create an intellectual atmosphere where a diversity of people, with no exclusions, is allowed to engage in restorative learning, and where the leader is an active mentor and teacher, continually challenging negative thinking, behaviour and vocabulary that instigate conflict.

**Great Heart inspiration.** Furthermore, the Great Heart Leader is a person who can inspire people by leveraging the tacit and explicit mix of spirituality, democratic practices and a morality that prevents harmful behaviour. The virtue of inspiring and connecting a diversity of human souls to peaceful behaviour makes a person a Great Heart Leader.

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