

The Changing Landscape in Religious Leadership: Reflections from Rural African Faith Communities

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Religious leadership is a contested field of study in the process of finding a footing in the academic world. In Africa, a long history of hierarchical leadership is experienced - not only in the spheres of politics, economics and culture but also in the sphere of religion. Many factors influence the changing landscape in religious leadership. The purpose of this article is to present a descriptive-empirical investigation into some of the processes of leadership transformation by listening, amongst others, to the voices of rural African postgraduate students studying theology at the Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University, South Africa. The empirical results are read through the lenses of Social Identity Theory (SIT). As part of the interpretation of the data, four clusters of theories are used as heuristic tools, while different perspectives on leadership in Africa inform the discussion. Codes are used to analyse the data. The codes mould into themes. The themes that emerge are: 1. Uniqueness of faith communities. 2. Tensions between leadership images that exist. 3. New leadership identities are forming; they are ... leadership is chosen, relational, in service of the community, and pedagogical. This is also done with a keen interest to see whether the concepts of leadership that are in use are still adequate, and to search for new understandings of religious leadership identities that might emerge.

KEYWORDS rural church, leadership, South Africa, empirical

Introduction

Desmond Tutu, Beyers Naudé, Alan Boesak, Kwame Bediako ... These are but a few of the well-known religious leaders in Africa. Africa is the birthplace of humankind and science traces the first forms of human life back to this continent (Van Zyl, 2009). Africa has shown its immense talent, not only as leaders on the sports field but also in the arenas of literature, art, technology, innovation and also

theology. Over the last few decades, Africa has produced nine Nobel laureates, six of which were peace prizes. Yet, today, the existence of the so-called ‘African’ leadership construct is questioned.

That is why this article – written partly from a theological perspective – focuses specifically on *religious* leadership in Africa, using two research questions: (a) What is *unique* about religious leadership in African communities; and (b) what are the important *images* on leadership they use? For answers the authors will listen to the voices of a group of postgraduate students from remote and poor rural African backgrounds. All of them hold leadership positions in their congregations.

First, however, this article discusses four different leadership theories and then investigates various perspectives on leadership in Africa, as seen in the literature. The authors look at the use of some of the concepts from the Social Identity Theory (SIT) as a contribution within the ‘relational and constructionist paradigms’ towards religious leadership in Africa.

The concept of religious leadership

According to Bolden and Kirk (2009), the leadership construct has been, and always will be, a contested concept. In his chapter ‘Religious Leadership’ in the new *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, Jinkins (2012), for instance, points out: ‘Though leadership has been an essential aspect of religious life from antiquity, its precise role and significance remain contested to this day in the academy and the church’ (p. 308). Bolden and Kirk (2009) developed four categories of leadership theories to help clarify some of the conceptual contestation on religious leadership: (a) *Essentialist theories* focus on identifying leadership traits and behaviours. Leadership is thus considered to be situated within the person and identity of the leader. (b) *Critical theories* contend that leadership is used to maintain power and status, rather than empower followers. (c) *Relational theories* see leadership as a group quality that resides within the relationship between leaders and followers and emphasizes the distribution of influence and expertise amongst them. (d) *Constructionist theories* evaluate how leadership constructs meaning and helps people to make sense of situations. Leadership is exercised in narratives used by the leader to help communities to reframe their understanding of social problems, and to solve them.

This basic framework provides a platform for understanding the complexity of religious leadership in the African context.

Perspectives on African leadership emerging from the literature

When the literature is reviewed, various perspectives on African leadership become apparent, confirming that this phenomenon can be studied through different theoretical lenses.

The ubuntu perspective

The Nguni word *ubuntu* conveys the meaning that a person is only a person through others (Poovan, Du Toit, & Engelbrecht, 2006). Ubuntu refers to social values based on the collectivist way of life within African cultures. Mbigi (2005), extracted five social values that he feels best represent ubuntu: survival, solidarity,

spirit, compassion, respect and dignity. These social values characterize the leader, but should also be nurtured within the relationship between the leader and his or her followers, and within the larger community.

Van der Cloff (2003) identified three other social values of ubuntu as regards African leadership: (a) *Leadership legitimacy*, which refers to the characteristics that leaders should reveal, such as integrity, transparency, accountability, adaptability, and flexibility. This social value links to the early essentialist theories; (b) *Communal enterprise*, which stresses the idea that people should work together in teams to alleviate problems, gain competitive advantage, and build communal networks. This value relates to the more recent constructionist theories. The third social value is *value sharing*, which draws together many other ubuntu values, such as interconnectedness, respect, dignity, development, empowerment and mutual appreciation. According to this social value leaders ultimately serve the people, but they should also be able to follow (Khosa, 2008). Value sharing relates to relational and constructionist theories of leadership.

The diversity perspective

This perspective focuses on fostering acceptance, accommodation, and multiculturalism. It aims to strengthen the African identity (Khosa, 2008) and therefore emphasizes the importance of language, discourse, and culture (Karsten & Illa, 2005; Kuada, 2010). From this definition one can derive that the African leader fulfils a facilitator role within a multicultural context. Africa, consisting of 42 countries and seven island nations (Van Zyl, 2009), is a vastly diverse continent in terms of cultures, tribes, languages and religions. The African leadership context therefore asks for the promotion of diversity and cultural sensitivity. African leaders encourage their followers to transform and learn from one another's cultures so as to cross language and racial barriers that separate people (Kuada, 2010). In the diversity perspective the influence of the essentialist, relational and constructionist theories is once again apparent.

The transformational perspective

According to Khosa (2008) the transformational perspective focuses on bringing about fundamental change and moving a nation from passivity to engaging in developmental actions. African leaders need to emphasize change, proactivity and long-term visions and goals; they should have charisma and inspire followers to think critically; they should inspire people to stretch themselves as individuals and as a nation to surpass the bonds of the average and the ordinary. Van Zyl (2009) concludes that African leaders need to transform the image of Africa in the eyes of the people. The transformational perspective is embedded in the essentialist, critical and constructionist theories of leadership.

The ethical perspective

Lastly, literature points to important underlying ethical perspectives prevalent in African leadership discourses. In order to understand these phenomena it is important to comprehend Africa's history. In his book, *Leadership in the African context*, Van Zyl (2009) provides a brief historical overview: Africa has always

been a pawn in European politics and power struggles. The continent was primarily utilized for its resources and became a point of trade for other countries. Warfare and slavery stripped African tribal leaders of their power and influence and the African people lived oppressed lives. At the beginning of the twentieth century many independence movements came about in various African countries and Africa fought for its liberation. However, when Africa regained its independence, many of the leaders took justice and power into their own hands. The leaders became postcolonial elites and the power of the people was quickly forgotten.

Mbeki (as cited in Van Zyl, 2008) states that ‘... the postcolonial era has been characterised by African elites/rulers who, instead of focusing on development, took the wealth for themselves, moving much of it overseas, with local farmers and other workers getting little of the benefit’ (p. 53). Corruption and bribery became the order of the day. The desire for personalized power (Yukl, 2013) grew rapidly whilst productivity decreased. As much as 25% of Africa’s GDP is lost as a result of corruption which translates to \$148 billion each year (Boucher, 2013). The postcolonial leadership style – where leadership is used to maintain power and status, rather than to empower – relates to the critical theories that focus on the influence that power and political dynamics exercise in communities and organizations.

To conclude this section, one can say that literature on this subject reveals African leadership as a complex and multilayered concept which encompasses different perspectives and is located in various leadership theories. At its deepest core African leadership is situated within the wider community and African context. It is not selfish and individualistic, but strives towards ubuntu, diversity, transformation and integrity.

The Social Identity Theory

Before the authors get to the empirical part of the research, they look in this section at the Social Identity Theory (SIT), which is a combination of the relational, constructionist and critical theories put forward by Bolden and Kirk (2009). The origins of SIT are found in the pioneering work of Henri Tajfel and John Turner (as cited in Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011, pp. 45–64). At the heart of this approach to the study of social groups one finds the notion of ‘social identity’, which is ‘an awareness that one belongs to a particular social group and that this group membership is important and meaningful’ (Tajfel & Turner 1979, p. 35). One can determine why social identity is important for this study, by asking the question that leaders of religious groups would want to ask: Why do people become part of a group? In answer to this, Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher and Wetherell (1987), for example, found that human beings become part of a group on a personal level because they really want to; and on a group level, because they believe that it is the right thing to do.

Phases in theory formation

According to Haslam *et al.* (2011) theory formation around social identity has developed through two phases. Tajfel & Turner (1979) found that in the *initial*

phase human beings accept a certain group identity as their own in terms of their subjective self-definitions, and that they tend to describe their own group favourably by positively distinguishing it from other groups in terms of their own values. This is called ‘positive distinctiveness’. Many factors come into play with positive distinctiveness. There is always a connection between the nature of the group and the social context, and the meaning of social identity can shift depending on with whom the group compares itself. This brings us to the *second phase* in the theory forming of social identity, namely, the *self-categorization theory*.

Self-categorization theory

A study by Turner *et al.* (1987) clearly shows that self-categorization or self-definition plays the biggest role in group attendance. Thus human beings participate in group activities to the extent that it is possible for us to think of ourselves as ‘we’ and not just ‘I’. While the SIT forms the basis for the *action* of the group, the self-categorization theory emphasizes the *psychological process* that underlies the transition of behaviour – that is the behaviour that is informed by a person’s understanding of his or her social identity. This leads to the argument that because definitions about identity have such important social and political consequences, leaders search for ways in which to use these definitions for their own purposes. They often have to work hard to determine a specific version of identity. In this regard images, metaphors, narratives and anecdotes play an important role.

Method

Procedure

The empirical research design works with an *interpretive perspective in qualitative research*, which has its roots in hermeneutics, being the study of the theory and practice of interpretation (Henning, Van Rensburg, & Smit, 2004). The aim of this kind of empirical research is to provide contextually valid descriptions and interpretations of human actions, based on an insider’s perspective on people and their world. The research was done by means of a semi-structured interview schedule (eight questions) using a sample of students from rural faith communities where they exercise various leadership functions. The SIT formed the basic framework for the development of this semi-structured questionnaire. In some of the questions interviewees were asked to describe and tell stories about their experiences. Such semi-structured interviews, allowing openness for narrative and lived experience, still need interpretation to make sense of the data. Semi-structured interviews were used because it allows for the openness of narratives and lived experiences. However, this method of inquiry produces data that still needs interpretation in order to be able to draw inferences. The theory presented in sections two to four are used as the backdrop against which the data was analysed.

Instrument

The eight questions in the questionnaire that were developed according to the basic concepts of Social Identity Theory (SIT), we posed in the following way: (1) You are in conversation with a group of friends. Someone starts to speak about his/her congregation. Describe how you would designate to them what makes your congregation unique and in what way it differs from other congregations in your vicinity. (2) You are attending a worship service, prayer meeting or church function and look at the people around you. Describe the emotions and thoughts going through your mind while watching these people. Can you tell a story to illustrate your point? (3) If you are currently in a leadership position in your congregation, tell a story illustrating that you and your team really started to 'click'. If you are not yourself the leader, relate an incident that best describes the way that the leader in your faith community plays this role (of getting people committed). (4) What does 'being just/righteous' personally mean to you? What do you think is the significance of 'being just' in your community? Can you relate an incident (story) where a leader acted justly or unjustly in your group? (5) You and a group of people in your congregation want to tackle a new project in response to some need in your context. You reflect on your experience in other projects where you lead a group of people or where you were part of a group of people that were involved in the community. Tell more about such a project as well as what motivated you to participate and in what way the community reacted. What was the leader's role in the project? (6) When you think about the minister(s) and or the Church Board, what would you say is the 'image' of them in the community? Can you record an incident or experience to illustrate your thoughts? (7) You are chosen to represent your congregation at the next circuit, conference or synodical meeting where they ask you to describe the leadership of your congregation. In other words, you are asked to describe or relate an incident or experience that gives a good illustration of the leadership. (8) How would you describe the context of your congregation or community while looking at what is happening around you? We asked that in the answers to these questions the students must at least write 150–200 words to create the necessary space for narratives and images, producing rich data.

Participants

Many students from a rich variety of backgrounds and contexts enrol annually for the Postgraduate Diploma in Theology at the University of Stellenbosch. The diverse contexts of these students include countries (culture and language), denominations, social locations, leadership positions, gender, etc. As stated before, the two basic research questions the research addresses are: (a) What does one learn about religious leadership from these African students that is unique to their communities and (2) what are the most important images on leadership they use?

The authors decided to use the intake of students during 2012 as our unit of analysis. The population of students was 20, but authors made use of the responses of only 10 students. The focus was on students coming from rural backgrounds in order to get a picture of what religious leadership looks like in remote and very poor African communities. One of the assumptions the authors worked with was

that most of the data would represent ‘essentialist theories’ because the literature on leadership in Africa almost always concentrates on trait and style theories of leadership. The authors resolved to concentrate mainly on the answers to two of the eight questions, namely Question 1 and Question 6.

The respondents were:

Respondent 1: Pastor of a rural congregation of ECWA (Evangelical Church Winning All in Nigeria), male and middle-aged.

Respondent 2: Youth pastor of a rural congregation of ELCIN (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia), male and middle-aged.

Respondent 3: Pastor of a rural congregation of the RCZ (Reformed Church in Zimbabwe), male and middle-aged.

Respondent 4: Youth worker of a congregation of the SDAC (Seventh Day Adventist Church in Guguletu, South Africa), female and middle-aged.

Respondent 5: Youth pastor of a rural congregation of ELCIN (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia), male and middle-aged.

Respondent 6: Church coordinator of a rural congregation of the Church of the Nazarene in Mozambique, male and middle-aged.

Respondent 7: Pastor of a rural congregation of the RCZ (Reformed Church in Zimbabwe), male, middle-aged.

Respondent 8: Student/youth minister of a rural congregation of the UPCSA (Uniting Presbyterian Church in KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa), female and middle-aged.

Respondent 9: Pastor of a rural congregation of ECWA (Evangelical Church Winning All in Nigeria), male and middle-aged.

Respondent 10: Pastor of a rural congregation of the RCZ (Reformed Church in Zimbabwe), male and middle-aged.

Analysis

The coding process started with an initial reading of the text and then dividing it into segments and identifying codes. Based on the theory presented in sections two to four codes were developed which were used to analyse the texts. After the initial coding process, it became apparent that certain codes combined into themes, whilst others did not show enough repetition to inform a unique theme.

Results

Question 1

You are in conversation with a group of friends. Someone starts to speak about his/her congregation. Describe how you would define to them *what makes your congregation unique* and in what way does it differ from other congregations in your vicinity? The following are the four most prominent codes that emerged from the analysis of the data with some examples.

Code 1: The Church as place of koinonia (Ubuntu)

Many of the respondents saw their churches as places where they experience intimate relations strengthening the sense of community, *Ubuntu*:

My congregation values culture and takes care for each other and the environment. One of my congregation's projects is Take Care. It takes care of the elderly and the disabled. (Respondent 8, female, South Africa)

My church started under the shade of a tree which is still standing beside the church today. The vision to establish the church came in order to unite believers who came to the community from other parts of the country. So the church comprises different people representing different tribes in the Middle Belt of Nigeria. (Respondent 9, male, Nigeria)

My church has a strong and vibrant youth fellowship, women's fellowship and men's fellowship. The congregants support its pastor in a tremendous way and is self-supportive, self-governing and self-expanding. (Respondent 10, male, Zimbabwe)

Code 2: The Church as culture and value bearer

Quite a number of the respondents pointed to the important role of culture and values in their respective communities:

We took months during Sunday worship service, mid-week activities, conducting seminars and inviting guest speakers to speak on living a holy life. The reason ... because of a high rate of fornication and adultery that helps in spreading HIV/AIDS. (Respondent 1, male, Nigeria)

Ours is an African congregation that applies the culture and tradition in worship services. We believe that theology can only be done from within the community of the faithful. (Respondent 5, male, Namibia)

My congregation has integrated some of the cultural practices into the church. These are rituals concerning burials, birth, wedding and the virginity test. This is done with the aim of preventing HIV/AIDS and helping our youth from immoral practice. (Respondent 8, female, South Africa)

Code 3: The Church as promoter of care, health and well-being

From literature and ministerial experience, we know that health issues and care occupy a central place on the African stage (see Louw, 2008):

Our congregation is unique because it has three projects such as a HIV/AIDS support group, a kinder garden and day care and communal group. The communal group meets on Tuesdays to discuss spiritual needs, make proposals for the development of the community and how to face the challenges. (Respondent 2, male, Namibia)

The lifestyle promoted in my faith community is different. We are encouraged to live as vegetarians. For those who still eat pork meat is an exception. One of our major tasks is to spread the health message to the entire world. (Respondent 4, female, South Africa)

Code 4: The Church as community developer

There is a growing body of literature on the role of religion and churches concerning community development (cf. Swart *et al.*, 2010). Quite a number of respondents referred to community development projects in their faith communities. These are

important examples of the transformation of identity and leadership that is taking place in these communities:

We invited people specialized in business orientation to conduct seminars. Topics like: How to start and grow a business? How to eradicate poverty in our community? And, Business is not only about earning money but rendering service to humanity... were addressed. (Respondent 1, male, Nigeria)

Together with other organizations and community leaders, we are in search for the best solutions to the challenges that affect our society. Through local initiatives, my congregation is involved in literacy education activities for children of 0–9 years of age. The congregation is also involved in community development through farming association of women. (Respondent 6, male, Mozambique)

Most of the youth are idle due to poverty. The congregation has therefore started a project to help youths with registration fees for further education for those who have passed matric. Uniforms are also given to the needy in the community. (Respondent 8, female, South Africa)

Question 6

When you think about the minister(s) and or the Church Board, what would you say is the *image* of them in the community? Can you record an incident or experience to illustrate your thoughts? The following are the four most prominent codes that emerged from the analysis of the data with some examples.

Code 1: The ‘chosen and respected one’

It is interesting to see how many of the respondents referred to the notion of ‘calling’ (chosen, set apart) as the image of the person or group of leaders:

This means they are people who are chosen by God to serve Him through serving the community. The needs and welfare of the community are their focus. (Respondent 1, male, Nigeria)

The church board are chosen people helping others with their problems. (Respondent 2, male, Namibia)

Ministers are the most respected people in our community. They are considered to be teachers, comforters, leaders and councillors. (Respondent 3, male, Zimbabwe)

Ministers are people that are put aside by God for his work. There are times when the vision fades in the minds of the ministers. (Respondent 4, female, South Africa)

Code 2: The ‘one with authority and power’

Linked to the image of the leader as ‘chosen and respected’, as we expected, we also find images of authority and power:

The minister of the word in our church is the leader of the congregation, chairperson of the church council and in church polity is referred to as teaching elder. (Respondent 3, male, Zimbabwe)

Our minister’s strong leadership was discovered when he solves conflict and/or lead the congregational meetings. Our pastor solved many problems between families and neighbours. He lives by his preaching and walks by his faith. He encourages the

congregation to discuss many issues concerning the community. (Respondent 5, male, Namibia)

The leaders of our Church are seen as the makers of things. They are seen as the sole decision making body. Nothing goes smoothly within the Church and even in its relation to the community without their consent. (Respondent 9, male, Nigeria)

Code 3: The ‘servant and comforter’

To serve the people came out as an important image for some of the respondents, also in the form of comforter:

Talking about the minister and our church board, in my understanding and experience their image in the community is that of servants. This means they are people who are chosen by God to serve Him through serving the community. The needs and welfare of the community are their focus. (Respondent 1, male, Nigeria)

The minister of my church and the Church Board are together projecting a good image of the church in the community and our minister participates actively in the life of the community, serving them. (Respondent 6, male, Mozambique)

Our minister is a God servant ... he is not a king but the one that serves the community. (Respondent 8, female, South Africa)

Also our minister is regarded as a comforter, counselor ... to counsel the bereaved through the word. (Respondent 10, male, Zimbabwe)

Code 4: The ‘sage and educator’

Many of the respondents saw in the leadership the qualities of the sage (wisdom) and a person educating others:

The minister of the word in our church is in the church polity referred to as the teaching elder. The minister is considered as the father/mother of the community where people seek advices. (Respondent 3, male, Zimbabwe)

Our minister is flexible. He first learned the culture of our people because he is not from our area. (Respondent 5, male, Namibia)

Our minister managed to get the local government and other community development agencies to build extra infrastructures for the local church to run children’s literacy and other social activities. (Respondent 6, male, Mozambique)

Our minister is also called ‘Mfundisi’, that means ‘the one who teaches the community’, especially concerning moral matters. (Respondent 8, female, South Africa)

In our community the Church leader is seen as an educator of the community hence he is often called ‘Malam’, that means ‘teacher’, that makes the people within the community to always come to consult him on certain issues that they need more clarity of good advice for the right course of action. (Respondent 9, male, Nigeria)

Ministers are respected people in our society. Particularly in the rural areas, the minister is the Father/Mother. With this respect he/she is consulted to give his/her views before or after the family decision is made – e.g. decision on the proposed marriage. (Respondent 10, male, Zimbabwe)

Discussion

The interpretation of analysed data should be done in relation to the research questions (Mason, 2002, pp. 183–187). The two questions directing the research in this article were: (a) With regard to religious leadership, what do the authors learn from these African students that is *unique* to their communities, and (b) what are the most important *images* on leadership they use? The different aspects pertaining to the uniqueness of faith communities and images of leadership thus became categories in the analysis of the interview data.

Based on the codes the following three issues will be discussed: (a) different perspectives on the uniqueness of faith communities, (b) tensions of multiple leadership images, and (c) constructing identities as religious leaders.

Different perspectives on the uniqueness of faith communities

In the introduction the authors discussed the ubuntu, diversity, transformational and ethical perspectives on religious leadership in Africa that emerged from the literature. The findings presented in this article relating to ‘what makes your congregation unique?’ clearly support the notion that the four mentioned perspectives could all be found in the ‘self-categorization’ (SIT) of the respondents. The ubuntu perspective, with social values based on the collectivist way of life within African cultures, was expected, but the ethical perspective proved to be more prominent. In this regard topics like the role of local culture, hospitality and living a holy life were notable.

Apart from one respondent (Respondent 9) the diversity perspective, in terms of cultural diversity, did not really feature in the data. Surprisingly, however, the transformational perspective came up in different ways. It is clear that the churches in these rural communities play a very important role towards transformation of the community: promoting care, health and well-being. If this role is linked to the emphasis on community development one understands why authors like Swart, Roscher, Green, and Erasmus (2010) mention the enormous contribution of Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) in social and community development. The social capital generated through communities of faith should never be underestimated.

Tensions of multiple leadership images

Under the heading ‘the concept of religious leadership’ in the introduction, the authors looked at four categories of leadership theories. It was originally anticipated that many respondents would make reference to traits and behaviours (essentialist theories) when reflecting on ‘images’ of their leaders. Yet, although references to concepts of power and authority did appear in the data, concepts related to ‘relational theories’ were much more frequent. Specifically with images of the leader as ‘servant and comforter’, it was interesting to see how often the image of leadership as serving the community was emphasized. Tension between ‘authoritative’ and ‘relational’ concepts in some of the responses was noted, pointing to the fact that multiple concepts and experiences of leadership were frequently held by the same individuals and co-existed with varying degrees of comfort.

Concepts concerning ‘critical theories’ did not really feature in the data, but quite a number of respondents made use of concepts relating to ‘constructionist theories’. In this regard it was noted that the description of the leader as ‘sage and educator’ become important. Most of the respondents also made reference to the constructionist category where the leader helps the people to construct meaning in their lives, make sense of situations, and reframe their understanding of social problems. It is specifically in names like ‘Mufundisi’ (Xhosa) and ‘Malam’ (Nigerian dialect), pertaining to the leader as ‘the one who teaches the community’, that one sees the prominence of the construction of new identities.

Constructing new identities as religious leaders

In conclusion the following common themes can be identified as part of constructing identities as religious leaders within some rural African communities.

Leadership is to be chosen: The data shows convincingly that the ‘calling’ of the leader and being respected for that is an important aspect of taking up the leadership role in these communities.

Leadership is relational: In the data the emphasis placed on fellowship, the experience of ‘belonging’ and taking care of each other, especially of the elderly and the disabled, points to the central importance of Ubuntu, the concept that claims ‘a person is only a person through others’.

Leadership is for the service of the community: The realization that leadership is not in the first place self-serving but service to others (the community), was prominent in the data. Theories on ‘servant leadership’ can be of great help to further explore identity construction in this regard.

Leadership is pedagogical: The respondents emphasized the role of educating, guiding and teaching as an important part of empowering the community. Leadership is in a certain sense a moral obligation and a duty expected to be enacted for the benefit of the community.

Looking at these common themes one can see what Haslam *et al.* (2011) calls a ‘new psychology’ of leadership identity, where the shift is from the emphasis on the leader as the ‘I’, with specific leadership traits and characteristics (many times very authoritative), to the ‘we’, revolving around the central idea that effective leadership is grounded in a shared social identity. This shift can also be seen as part of the changing landscape of religious leadership identities that are taking place in African faith communities.

Conclusion

Religious leadership in Africa remains a complex phenomenon. Although different perspectives on this matter were identified, various concepts of African religious leadership still need more clarification. Some unique features were, however, discovered. Codes were used to analyse the data. The codes moulded into themes. The themes that emerged were: 1) uniqueness of faith communities; 2) tensions between leadership images that exist; 3) new leadership identities are forming, whereby leadership is chosen, relational, in service of the community, and pedagogical. Bolden and Kirk (2009) summarize by stating that, although African

leadership has many similarities to other leadership styles, cultural and contextual factors play a big role in the way these styles are constructed and enacted. In their opinion, greater attention should be given to understanding the leadership discourse that shapes African identities and moves African people to action. With the help of categories of leadership theories, different leadership perspectives, the SIT and some empirical work, the authors hope to contribute to the discourse on religious leadership in African contexts, specifically to better understand the changing landscape of leadership identities taking shape in the African context.

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