

by ONYEKACHI WAMBU Foreword by JOHN GITHONGO

and inspiring leadership at all levels is increasingly recognised to be the key to social and political change. Leadership is thus one of the critical issues facing Africa, often seen only as a space of famine, conflicts, bad governance and falling statistics. A book of essays by 10 distinguished thinkers and leaders testifies to hope on the horizon in our societies. Journalist and film-maker Onyekachi Wambu harvests fresh insights from leadership cultures in different African contexts, identifying the weaknesses and the strengths that block or advance development. This book is essential reading in every society where the philosophy and practice of leadership are urgently debated.

EDITORS: Chinua Achebe, Taddy Blecher, Jean-Benoît Biderman, Chukwu-Emeka Chikozie, Chinyere Chimezie, Eyo Godwin, Wangui wa Goro, William Gumedo, Parasolelo Kantal, and Juliet Mbuli, Ali A. Mazrui, Kimani Njogu, Ndiidi Nwuneli, Mariama Ouse, Paul Zolotor.

A timely, wide-ranging book whose resonance will further lease out the contemporary debate about the location of the modern African, and the nation state in a globalised world.

John Githongo, Kenyan journalist and anti-corruption campaigner.

A must-read for all those, global Africans and others, who care about the continent's future. Wambu has assembled a great heavyweight cast to shed light from deep past to present, from north to south, from top downwards and upwards – on a matter that probably more than any other has affected our fortunes these last fifty years: leadership.

John Moyo, novelist and author of *My Once Upon a Time* and *Some Kind of Black*

BRITISH COUNCIL Counterpoint

The British Council is the United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. Its purpose is to build mutually beneficial relationships between people in the UK and other countries and to increase the awareness of the UK's creative ideas and achievements. Counterpoint is a series of books that explore the cultural relations (think-tank) of the British Council, was founded in 2003. For more information, visit www.britishcouncil.org.



9 780863 555862

THE TREE OF TALKING LEADERSHIP FOR CHANGE IN AFRICA Edited by ONYEKACHI WAMBU Foreword by JOHN GITHONGO

Counterpoint

UNDER THE TREE OF TALKING
LEADERSHIP FOR CHANGE IN AFRICA
Edited by ONYEKACHI WAMBU Foreword by JOHN GITHONGO

PEACEFUL. WHEN THE
OVERFLOWS, IT COMES
THROUGH THE MOUTH. WATER IS
THE MEDICINE FOR POVERTY. ONE
WHO TELLS THE TRUTH
NEVER WRONG. KNOWLEDGE
IS LIKE A GARDEN: IF IT IS
NOT CULTIVATED, IT CANNOT BE
HARVESTED. STICKS IN A BUNDLE
ARE UNBREAKABLE. IF YOU
ASK QUESTIONS, YOU CANNOT
AVOID THE ANSWERS. TALKING
WITH ONE ANOTHER IS LEARNING FOR
ONE ANOTHER. HE WHO LEARNS FROM
A WISE PERSON WHO KNOWS
PROVERBS, RECONCILES DIFFERENCES.

Mandela and Mbeki: contrasting leadership styles, but shared visions for Africa's renaissance

William Gumede

William Gumede is the author of the ground-breaking book, Thabo Mbeki and the Battle for the Soul of the ANC. He is a former Deputy Editor of The Sowetan, the largest-selling newspaper in South Africa. And as a journalist, he has chronicled the achievements of the post-apartheid African National Congress governments, led since 1994 by Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki. Inspired by the vision of an African renaissance, these governments have arguably become the most respected and successful African governments of recent years, in a short period establishing a non-racial democracy with effective checks and balances, a stable economy, and programmes of social justice that have housed and empowered millions. Gumede explores the differing leadership styles of Mandela and Mbeki, and looks at the legacy the two 'Ms' leave for those who will take over the mantle of leadership in the future.

Vision

Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki, though having contrasting leadership styles, have both tried to use individual exemplary leadership to take their country from the ashes of the crippling racial divisions and inequality of apartheid to the uplands of unity, peace and economic development that would match the industrial West

leadership, they would set a new gold standard for African leadership, not only one that others might emulate, but one that would bring to an end the widely held negative perceptions of African political leadership both on the continent and in the West.

Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki shared similar visions for their country and their continent. Both believed that they were not only leaders of South Africa, but were destined to provide leadership to the whole of Africa and the developing world, by virtue of South Africa's unique experience of achieving peace and democracy – on a continent not viewed as a beacon of peace – and where 'Balkanisation' appeared to be the norm elsewhere. Both Mandela and Mbeki argued that the end of apartheid in South Africa would be the beginning of an African political, economic, cultural and social awakening that would spread through the continent, and once and for all would slay the perception of the continent as 'lost', and indeed, would trigger an African renaissance.

Both Mandela and Mbeki believed that a predominantly black leadership in South Africa should also give moral and political leadership to other developing countries, beyond Africa. Mbeki made lobbying for a just world for Africa and developing countries into a pillar of his presidency: giving more voice to African and developing countries in international bodies such as the UN. His aim was to make the international trade and financial regimes – skewed in favour of the rich industrial West and against poor developing countries – more equitable. Mbeki was one of the key drivers in organising developing countries into the G20 bloc. Here for the first time they became a force in global trade negotiations against the hypocrisy of the West, which argues that developing countries should practise free trade, while at the same time refusing to lift impregnable trade barriers to products from the developing world. Beyond trade, Mandela and Mbeki often publicly criticised unilateral US action, for example in Iraq or against Cuba. Both argued rightly for greater democracy rather than unilateralism in global decision-making, including over ways to resolve threats to international security.

Upon taking power Mandela and Mbeki were intent on disproving negative perceptions of Africans and Africa both by whites within South Africa and the 'white' West. Successive white apartheid governments claimed if blacks came to power, the economy would be mismanaged. They frequently pointed to mismanagement north of the Limpopo – the river border between South Africa and its northern neighbours. Mandela and Mbeki went out of their way to prove the African National Congress (ANC) to be a black government that could manage the country's economy prudently. During the first decade of South Africa's democracy the ANC was

cut social spending to its expectant supporters – leaving them destitute rather than expand welfare and risk being tarnished by the brush of profligacy often associated with many African countries. Indeed, the ANC under Mbeki has now gained a reputation for economic efficiency, after restoring macro-economic stability to a country that was on its knees following decades of Nationalist Party misrule. But in so doing, it has postponed making a frontal assault on the terrible legacy of apartheid by focusing on redistribution and extending welfare services to South Africa's expectant poor black people, instead perpetuating the huge inequality between a predominantly rich white elite and poor black majority.

Mbeki has worked extremely hard on changing negative perceptions of African economic management that plagued the continent. A few months into his presidency in 1999, he launched the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), a continent-wide policy blueprint based on good governance, democracy and human rights. So a central ambition for Mbeki is to slay the dragon of Afro-pessimism by engineering an internal change in the governance culture of Africa – and so portray a more positive image of the continent. Underlying this is the idea that Africans themselves should take the initiative to resolve their problems – African solutions for Africa's problems'. In both his philosophy of the African renaissance and its policy platform (NEPAD) the basic tenet is not to reinvent new ideas, but to combine African institutions and policies that work with relevant ones from the West. Furthermore, Mbeki argues that since the end of the Cold War there has been a growing international consensus on human rights and good governance. NEPAD is an attempt to secure wide Africa buy-in to the consensus and to link the marginal continent back into the global political and economic market chain. Africa will be lifted up to the level of the developed world, by using globalisation to its advantage and piggy-backing on existing technology such as IT, and also by better utilisation of Africa's own resources.

Mandela made a point of limiting his presidency to one term. This was a message to other African leaders that overstaying their welcome has created a major problem of African leadership and has certainly contributed to negative perceptions of the continent. Mandela was deeply disappointed in Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe for not taking this important lesson to heart and to insist on staying on, so reinforcing the ugly perception of African leaders as preferring to die in power rather than relinquish it. Mbeki has made it clear that he will not extend his presidential stay beyond two terms. White opposition parties in South Africa have tried to show that Mbeki is likely to follow other African leaders and change the constitution to stay on beyond

therefore lobbied many African leaders, including Zambia's Frederick Chiluba, Nigeria's Olusegun Obasanjo, Mozambique's Joaquim Chissano and Namibia's Sam Nujoma, not to overstay their terms in government.

Both Mbeki and Mandela have exhibited great political flexibility. Mandela was the first to abandon the ANC's bedrock of nationalisation when it became an albatross around the movement's neck in the early 1990s. He did so when most of the ANC's membership was not in favour of dropping it. Similarly, Mbeki was one of the strongest proponents of the ANC to abandon the armed struggle when it prepared for negotiations with the apartheid regime. At the time the ANC's militant wing demanded the continuation of the armed struggle. Years before, Mbeki was among the first ANC leaders who, in the mid 1980s, began talking to white leaders and businessmen linked to the apartheid regime to sound them out about negotiations for a democratic South Africa. Many ANC cadres attacked Mbeki on both occasions as 'soft' and a 'sell-out'. Indeed, Mbeki most probably set a great example in South African leadership, showing that leadership does not mean populism or demagoguery and that there is a place for a leader without charisma and popular appeal.

Gandhi and Nehru

Mandela and Mbeki have had a complex relationship with each other, partly due to their often contrasting leadership styles. For the closest historical parallel, one has to jump continents: the relationship between Mahatma (Great Soul) Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, India's Prime Minister at independence.¹ Mandela admits to having drawn inspiration from Gandhi. Gandhi pushed Nehru to the top of the Indian Congress Party. Mandela's blessing of Mbeki – even if reluctant, as it turned out later – sealed his rise to the presidency against very formidable rivals such as Cyril Ramaphosa, Mathews Phosa and Tokyo Sexwale.

All over the world the figure of Mandela has become the grand symbol of South Africa's transition from the brutalities of apartheid to that of a liberal, non-racial democracy. Often, the transition is described as a political miracle: many believed the conflict in South Africa was so intractable that a peaceful solution and reconciliation between black and white was nigh impossible. Mandela, who spent almost three decades imprisoned by the apartheid regime for his political activism against the brutal system, became a symbol of the 'miracle transition'. His ability to seemingly forgive and to look towards the future was symbolic of the incredibly 'fairy-tale' foundations of the new democracy.

Mandela's historic contribution to the infant democracy was to help cobble together a broad-based consent for the new democratic order. His

cut social spending to its expectant supporters – leaving them destitute rather than expand welfare and risk being tarnished by the brush of profligacy often associated with many African countries. Indeed, the ANC under Mbeki has now gained a reputation for economic efficiency, after restoring macro-economic stability to a country that was on its knees following decades of Nationalist Party misrule. But in so doing, it has postponed making a frontal assault on the terrible legacy of apartheid by focusing on redistribution and extending welfare services to South Africa's expectant poor black people, instead perpetuating the huge inequality between a predominantly rich white elite and poor black majority.

Mbeki has worked extremely hard on changing negative perceptions of African economic management that plagued the continent. A few months into his presidency in 1999, he launched the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), a continent-wide policy blueprint based on good governance, democracy and human rights. So a central ambition for Mbeki is to slay the dragon of Afro-pessimism by engineering an internal change in the governance culture of Africa – and so portray a more positive image of the continent. Underlying this is the idea that Africans themselves should take the initiative to resolve their problems – 'African solutions for Africa's problems'. In both his philosophy of the African renaissance and its policy platform (NEPAD) the basic tenet is not to reinvent new ideas, but to combine African institutions and policies that work with relevant ones from the West. Furthermore, Mbeki argues that since the end of the Cold War there has been a growing international consensus on human rights and good governance. NEPAD is an attempt to secure wide Africa buy-in to the consensus and to link the marginal continent back into the global political and economic market chain. Africa will be lifted up to the level of the developed world, by using globalisation to its advantage and piggy-backing on existing technology such as IT, and also by better utilisation of Africa's own resources.

Mandela made a point of limiting his presidency to one term. This was a message to other African leaders that overstaying their welcome has created a major problem of African leadership and has certainly contributed to negative perceptions of the continent. Mandela was deeply disappointed in Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe for not taking this important lesson to heart and to insist on staying on, so reinforcing the ugly perception of African leaders as preferring to die in power rather than relinquish it. Mbeki has made it clear that he will not extend his presidential stay beyond two terms. White opposition parties in South Africa have tried to show that Mbeki is likely to follow other African leaders and change the constitution to stay on beyond

therefore lobbied many African leaders, including Zambia's Frederick Chiluba, Nigeria's Olusegun Obasanjo, Mozambique's Joaquim Chissano and Namibia's Sam Nujoma, not to overstay their terms in government.

Both Mbeki and Mandela have exhibited great political flexibility. Mandela was the first to abandon the ANC's bedrock of nationalisation when it became an albatross around the movement's neck in the early 1990s. He did so when most of the ANC's membership was not in favour of dropping it. Similarly, Mbeki was one of the strongest proponents of the ANC to abandon the armed struggle when it prepared for negotiations with the apartheid regime. At the time the ANC's militant wing demanded the continuation of the armed struggle. Years before, Mbeki was among the first ANC leaders who, in the mid 1980s, began talking to white leaders and businessmen linked to the apartheid regime to sound them out about negotiations for a democratic South Africa. Many ANC cadres attacked Mbeki on both occasions as 'soft' and a 'sell-out'. Indeed, Mbeki most probably set a great example in South African leadership, showing that leadership does not mean populism or demagoguery and that there is a place for a leader without charisma and popular appeal.

Gandhi and Nehru

Mandela and Mbeki have had a complex relationship with each other, partly due to their often contrasting leadership styles. For the closest historical parallel, one has to jump continents: the relationship between Mahatma (Great Soul) Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, India's Prime Minister at independence.¹ Mandela admits to having drawn inspiration from Gandhi. Gandhi pushed Nehru to the top of the Indian Congress Party. Mandela's blessing of Mbeki – even if reluctant, as it turned out later – sealed his rise to the presidency against very formidable rivals such as Cyril Ramaphosa, Mathews Phosa and Tokyo Sexwale.

All over the world the figure of Mandela has become the grand symbol of South Africa's transition from the brutalities of apartheid to that of a liberal, non-racial democracy. Often, the transition is described as a political miracle: many believed the conflict in South Africa was so intractable that a peaceful solution and reconciliation between black and white was nigh impossible. Mandela, who spent almost three decades imprisoned by the apartheid regime for his political activism against the brutal system, became a symbol of the 'miracle' transition. His ability to seemingly forgive and to look towards the future was symbolic of the incredibly 'fairy-tale' foundations of the new democracy.

Mandela's historic contribution to the infant democracy was to help cobble together a broad-based consent for the new democratic order. His

be indelibly associated with the early formative years of the new democracy. The new policy-making process, building the new institutions, the legislative overhauls, and the early trust building – so essential – between the different groups who once stared at each other over the barrel of a gun. Throughout the transition, his leadership helped to maintain the majority black poor's trust and loyalty towards the ANC, as well as ease the fears of the predominantly white middle class, pampered and pandered to during white rule, and frightened of black majority rule.³

Mandela, like Mbeki, is very conscious of his position in history. He wants to be remembered by future generations as the amazing man who emerged from 27 years in prison, without rancour, to lead a divided South Africa to racial reconciliation. Mandela said as much when he addressed mainly students at the University of Potchefstroom in February 1996. 'I will pass through this world but once,' he said, 'And I do not want to divert my attention from my task – which is to unite the nation.' Even more revealing was Mandela's next sentence in that address. 'I am writing my own testament because I am nearing my end. I want to be able to sleep till eternity with a broad smile on my face knowing that the youth, opinion-makers and everybody is stretching across the divide, trying to unite the nation.'⁶

Mandela's leadership comes from his moral authority. Indeed, Mandela's broad societal authority was akin to that of a benign patriarch, guided by the principles of inclusivity. For Mandela the moral integrity of a leader is crucial. Through moral integrity, he believes the real leader exercises leadership and is able to lead people to a consensus. Mandela broadly centred his presidency on the concept of a traditional chief presiding over his community. The South African public law expert George Devenish writes that although the common view is often that the chief 'possessed unlimited power and was able to impose any tyranny he wished', the reality was 'vastly different'.⁶ 'The chief was accountable and his power subject to checks and balances ... An important safeguard against the abuse of power by the chief was the influence of his group of councillors, the *amapakati* or middle ones. The chief governed on their advice. Although he was head, he dared not veto a decision of his court except at the peril of his reputation and authority'. Devenish calls it 'ubuntu-style management': 'its emphasis not on differences, but on accommodating these'.

Mbeki also on occasion looked towards the more enlightened elements of African tradition, norms and values. When he was criticised – even by Mandela – for not being consultative enough Mbeki adopted the policy of holding *lekgotlas*, or traditional community forums, where ordinary citizens in far-flung rural areas and townships could petition him in person on

more consensual. He started to refer to the values of *ubuntu* as conceptual frameworks, particularly when the public started criticising the values of enrichment at all costs, fostered in part by Mbeki's emphasis on black economic empowerment and rapidly expanding the black middle class, creating black business tycoons and entrepreneurs.

Mandela is close in sentiment and experience to the generation of post-independence African leaders such as Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, Tanzania's Julius Nyerere and Zambia's Kenneth Kaunda – they were symbolic leaders, the personification of father figures. The political views of Mandela's generation of black nationalists in South Africa were deeply shaped by the anti-imperialist struggles waged by Africans against colonial occupiers. Moreover, Mandela's generation viewed leadership as something like that of Winston Churchill or Franklin D. Roosevelt – grand statesmanship that by individual example could galvanise the energies of their people into collective action. For Mbeki's generation of black South African anti-apartheid intellectuals – many of whom were influenced by British and Soviet leaders – the British Labour Party's Harold Wilson and the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev were the heroes. Both represented the quieter, practical, behind-the-scenes leadership and 'leading from behind' rather than the brash, larger-than-life styles of a Churchill or a Roosevelt.

Although Mbeki is not in the mould of the 'founding-father' leaders of post-independence Africa, his style has tended towards the philosopher-king styles personified by the likes of Nkrumah and Nyerere. Many of these leaders constructed intellectual frameworks that defined the debates of their era: Nyerere with *Ujamaa*, Kaunda with Humanism and Nkrumah with Nkrumaism. Mbeki ushered in the concept of the African renaissance – or at least redefined and brought it to life again. Furthermore, he established his presidency on the philosophy of 'African solutions for Africa's problems'. Mbeki has based a large part of his presidency on that of Pixley Ka Isaka Seme, one of the founders of the ANC (ANC president 1930–37) and a big proponent of the mix of pan-Africanism and African 'self-help' philosophy – both in economic development and in searching for solutions for social and political problems. The problem with presidents being philosopher-intellectuals emerges when they set out their policies as 'authoritative pronouncements' that carry the weight and legitimacy of the highest office in the country. This in itself can limit and stifle public debate and engagement – as Raymond Suttner, a leading ANC member, has argued.⁷

However, most of the time Mbeki's image is commonly associated with that of a visionary 'can-do' politician. Goals are set out and the path towards them more clearly mapped out. The erudite analyst Hein Marais⁸ says that

South Africa's political map, the role then of Mbeki would be to direct the actors to start acting out their new roles. The change from Mandela to the Mbeki era was from a focus on reconciliation, compromise and forging new symbols emphasising unity, to the much more hands-on governance and management, and fine-tuning new institutions. It also represents an era in which new configurations of power and political relations are being established and entrenched.⁹

Black empowerment

Indeed, the Mandela era was about soothing the fears of minority groups and other powerful interests (such as the still influential white right wing or conservative black traditional leaders) on the one hand, while maintaining the cohesion and unity of the liberation movement on the other, as the change from opposition movement to governing party brought its own internal turmoil in the ANC. Mbeki's era is also about building, realigning and consolidating powerful new forces, from the old liberation movement (and new or other forces not necessarily associated with the liberation movement) into the ruling bloc of democratic South Africa.

Mbeki still has to find his way through the same fragile path between black hope and white fear.¹⁰ So while he also emphasises racial reconciliation, he has focused much more on transforming the apartheid economy and bringing blacks into the mainstream economy. Mbeki would like to be remembered as the person who brought economic benefits and equality to black South Africans and who led a change in the economic fortunes of the African continent. For sure, Mbeki is diligent about reassuring whites that they belong on South African soil. But not for him the hackneyed argument that whites have already done enough: he makes it clear that this means they also have their obligations.¹¹

Ironically, it was Mbeki who wrote most of Mandela's major speeches during the Mandela presidency, and who coined many of the reconciliatory words spoken by Mandela. For example, his fingerprints are all over Mandela's much-quoted first speech to the Organization of African Unity in June 1994, where he outlined his vision of a 'non-racial society whose very being would assert the ancient African values of respect for every person and commitment to the elevation of human dignity regardless of colour or race'. In August 2006, Mbeki volunteered himself to the ANC's provincial executive committee in the Western Cape following racial tensions there. Mbeki thinks that racial unity is so important that he will personally see that it is achieved if the local ANC leadership fails in their efforts to heal racial divisions. Indeed, both Mbeki and Mandela have studiously tried to pursue a

Africa's disadvantaged majority on a par with its white, predominantly well-off, community, but also bring South Africa on a par with developed countries, to make it 'modern'.

Mandela often publicly lambasted white South Africans, but his warnings were softened because of his smiles and hugs.¹² Mandela is a great proponent of the description of South Africa, coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, as a 'rainbow nation', with a diversity of people, unmatched in the world, who can live together, using their differences as strength rather than as a source of divisions. To Mbeki citizenship is defined by civic and universal, rather than ethnic, criteria, and is inherently inclusive. There are certain parallels in Mbeki's use of the state as a tool to forge a new nation and that of India's Nehru. Nehru saw the distinctive model of the Indian state as an important framework for identity: a model committed to protecting cultural and religious differences rather than imposing a uniform 'Indianness'.¹³

Mbeki views the state as an important matrix for a new South African identity based on diversity. The peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy is seen as unique, as are the Constitution, the Bill of Rights and the early government of national unity, all deemed worthy of export to other conflict zones, much as the French Revolution gave rise to the idea of France being a unique carrier of civilisation to other parts of the world. Mbeki has been attempting to cobble together a political consensus in South Africa based on the post-war political consensus in post-Second World War Germany, where the opposing political parties agree on a vision for their country, but still have different political views. Mbeki has worked hard to woo whites and blacks who have never voted for the ANC and opposition parties and groups to strike strategic alliances with the ANC. That is not bad, but it has often meant that those not sharing in the centrist consensus have been pushed to the margins, with no access to the policy-making process – raising the spectre of people feeling so excluded they seek political redress through violence and other means.

Party experience

The difference in leadership style between Mbeki and Mandela is also connected to their different experiences of the ANC. It is not only that they represent two totally different generations of the ANC, but their personalities are totally different. Mbeki's experience of the ANC was of an exile movement, where its armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, was its hope and mantra, and where obedience to rules and discipline from the top was essential for survival. The ever-present danger of infiltration by apartheid agents meant that decisions were made in highly secretive ways by a select

consultation happened only among the top leadership, and lower-level members were simply expected to accept and obey.¹⁴ Mbeki treats relationships in terms of power and ascendancy and often divides people into those to be cajoled and those to be stared down. He even sees his own political career as a chess game, where opponents need to be checkmated.

Mandela, meanwhile, lived for 27 years in prison, where consultation and co-operation were key ingredients of the political culture. Moreover, in the ANC of the 1940s, 50s and early 60s – in which Mandela cut his political teeth – the democratic spirit was premium. ANC political prisoners at Robben Island took their cue from that tradition of the ANC, and developed it further into a complex but effective network of consultation, negotiation, discussion and decision-making that recognised the equity of all, with an aversion to one person having overriding authority.¹⁵ The black student movement that emerged was re-energised in the 1970s, after the formation of the Steve Biko inspired South African Students' Organisation (SASO) in 1969, which also rested firmly on a leadership culture that valued consultation. 'This did not mean only the consultation to win over a proposal but the creation of an atmosphere where individual opinions were considered and taken seriously. They were valued equally.'¹⁶ Furthermore, individual members were encouraged not only to express their views freely but were allowed 'much scope for independent initiative'.¹⁷ SASO's successor – formed in 1979 after SASO was banned by the apartheid regime two years before – the South African National Students' Congress (SANSCO), was also based on the same pillars.

Furthermore, the trade union movement that re-emerged in the 1970s, and was consolidated in 1985 by the formation of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) from new unions and old ones that survived apartheid oppression, also had widespread consultation, debate and an atmosphere that encouraged differing viewpoints, as its pillars. So too did the United Democratic Front (UDF), formed in 1983. I came from a generation whose political culture was influenced by the trade unions, student movements and the UDF. Not surprisingly, the political culture that has been associated with Mbeki, whereby the president and the top leadership decide policies and ordinary members and citizens are instructed to follow unquestionably, is quite frustrating. Moreover, South Africa's representative and participatory democracy not only demands full participation by citizens in all decision-making, but the idea that there are limits to the power of the state, and that the state and public leaders must defer to ordinary citizens, and not the other way round, is an important underlying principle. Indeed, citizens and watchdog bodies, such as

power of the state and executive. Worryingly, the very opposite has been the case during the Mbeki presidency.

Nevertheless, to paraphrase Jeremy Cronin, one of the main theoreticians of the Left in South Africa, the real contrast between the leadership of Mbeki and Mandela lies between 'the leadership of example' and 'the leadership as a vision'. 'Mandela leads by example. What he does is the leadership he offers. Mbeki leads by seeking to articulate a vision.'¹⁸ Mbeki is the quintessential behind-the-scenes man. He prefers to lead from the 'back', rather than the front, in a bold, populist way. Critics often use Mbeki's rather secretive style to support their assessment of him as a conniving, ruthless politician, but he often acts as a prophet in the wilderness.¹⁹ At the height of the struggle he engaged in such taboos as talking to white South African businessmen to lure them to the side of negotiations and compromise. He called on the ANC to formally end the armed struggle, without securing any guarantees in return from former President F. W. de Klerk's government. This when the armed struggle was the symbol of the ANC's resistance to apartheid and many believed that ending it was premature and nothing less than meek capitulation to the enemy.

Mbeki's upbringing was also instructive of his later political style. To start with, he comes from a powerful ANC family dynasty. His father, Govan Mbeki, was a pioneering African communist and intellect. Interestingly, in 1952, Govan Mbeki was narrowly defeated by Chief Albert Luthuli for the presidency of the ANC. The ANC's Left had nominated him for the presidency, but the centrist – and Christian Democratic – wing of the ANC, including the likes of Mandela, pushed for Luthuli, who won. Perhaps, his father's narrow loss of the ANC presidency made Mbeki more determined to succeed where his father faltered. Mbeki's upbringing certainly made him stand out as a potential future leader.

Sartorial symbolism

The differences between the leadership styles of Mbeki and Mandela are evident even in their respective sartorial styles. Mbeki is very formal, Mandela is informal. A typical Mbeki, when addressing a rally, would look as if he is ready for a corporate board meeting: he would be wearing flannel trousers, a starched shirt with a white collar and a tie. He smiles professionally and seldom laughs aloud spontaneously. Though his sharp suits and cosmopolitan air charm outsiders, he looks an awkward figure in the rough-and-tumble of the townships. When the rest of the ANC dances and sings at rallies he is far happier surveying it all from his chair. For him, rightly, competence is far more important than doses of charisma. He is intensely reclusive, and rarely talks about his private life. Even Mbeki's

Mandela is tall, he laughs easily – in speeches he often endearingly pokes fun at himself, he wears loose shirts even on formal occasions and he has opened up many aspects of his life, including his messy divorce from Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, to public scrutiny.²⁰ Mandela has also turned out to be a deft politician. Like Gandhi, he is a master of communication. He has a genius for the simple gesture that speaks to his countrymen's souls.²¹ During the 1995 Rugby World Cup, Mandela endeared himself to whites by sporting captain François Pienaar's number 6 shirt. In 1996, Mandela gave the national cricket-team a surprise 'good luck call'. Though Mandela himself was a child of the pre-television age – he grew up in the golden age of the radio, the newspaper and the telegram – he became what was most probably South Africa's first television president.

Such gestures have always come hard to Mbeki. Early in his presidency his managers worked hard to get him to 'soften' up the image of the president. He then appointed the warm Bheki Khumalo as spokesman, to break down the cast-iron aura of inapproachability that surrounds him, later appointing Mukoni Ratshitanga in a similar role when Khumalo left for the private sector. All of this had an impact and as his confidence soared he started to relax more. However, Mbeki still had to hire image-makers to advise him on securing the 'common' touch, something that comes very naturally to Mandela.

All this has meant that under Mbeki, the stiff, aloof intellectual, the ANC government has come across as 'uncaring' and distant. Mandela's popularity had a lot to do with showing empathy to the worst-off in society and seemingly in deeds making good the ANC's promise of building a caring society. Though Mbeki's aim is to improve the lot of the poor, he comes across as lacking empathy. His statement that he did not know anybody suffering from AIDS, while millions are dying from the disease, is a case in point. His rebuff of the 12-year-old AIDS activist, Nkosi Johnson, who lay dying on his hospital bed, by making a point of not visiting him while everybody else concerned about combating the pandemic did so, portrayed Mbeki as cold and callous. Incredibly, Mbeki allies, such as Finance Minister Trevor Manuel, often contemptuously dismiss calls for a safety net to the poor as promoting a 'culture of dependency'.

Mbeki, extremely confident in his own capabilities, but inherently shy, is a hands-on president, a workaholic, and tends to want to manage even the smallest detail himself – at times overstretching himself. Mandela once even suggested privately that Mbeki take a holiday. Mbeki declined to do so, and when asked if he did not have too much on his plate replied: 'I don't know how much too much is, but there are so many things that needed to be done.'²²

party – and indeed does so – which requires stitching together a motley collection of support across the intellectual and interest spectrum of the party. Mbeki came to power when the novelty of having a black government in power for the first time in South Africa had worn thin and criticisms were starting to appear of the government's lack of delivery. And unlike Mandela, Mbeki did not inherit the sainthood that comes with forgiving your jailers after 27 years in jail.

Mbeki has had to fight for the throne, by whatever means, like any other political leader. Though he was the crown prince, he had to keep on fighting to the bitter end. He advanced his career by forcing respect, or at least fear, rather than being loved. Mbeki was the gatekeeper to two great leaders of the ANC, Mandela and Oliver Tambo. He was the one who could advance one's career, or could hold one to account, by virtue of controlling access to the top men. Deal-making is the basis on which Mbeki runs the government. While Mandela operated on the wave of public empathy that greeted his every announcement, Mbeki worked by stealth, assembling a critical mass of constituencies within the ANC to back his refashioning of the party's economic policy into laying the basis of the market-friendly Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (Gear).

Next to a man like Mandela, whose principles and honour are thought to be impeccable, Mbeki's readiness to cut political deals could seem rather underhand. Yet, perhaps, a bit of opportunist deal-making is what South Africa needed to consolidate its infant democracy. Against the instincts of trade unions, communists and most of the ANC's once powerful Left, Mbeki introduced the conservative economic Gear policy in 1996. His success in getting the ANC to adopt the policy, 'kicking and screaming', was due partly to his grasp of the economic detail, partly to his skill at building an alliance of what to the outsider looks like competing groups behind him, and partly to his effectively sidelining those who stood in his way. Mandela, on the other hand, comes out as very saintly with his acts of turning the other cheek, embracing his enemies.

AIDS and gender equality

Both Mbeki and Mandela's leaderships failed on AIDS. When Mandela was in government, the focus was so much on creating political stability, dealing with the economic inequities of apartheid under the cloud of public finances on the verge of collapse because of earlier mismanagement, and getting to grips with the new government, that AIDS was not on the public policy agenda. Mandela often said, when asked about AIDS, that his generation did not talk publicly about sexual matters. However, when out of power

philosophising on the causes of AIDS, and so undermined the fight against the disease in a country that demanded firm leadership on the issue. In the end, when criticism against his questioning of whether AIDS is predominantly transmitted through sexual intercourse reached a peak, he decided to withdraw from the public debate – thus continuing policy uncertainty. In contrast, Mandela admits public policy failures much more easily than Mbeki. In the end, instead of being criticised, admission of his failures often has the effect of people trusting Mandela more and being more forgiving. For example, Mbeki has been privately saying that his quiet diplomacy towards the crisis in Zimbabwe has not been working, but he has found it difficult to say so publicly.

Mandela – although he was not sexist – could have done much more to promote gender equality. His generation still saw women's issues as separate. For example, when his former wife Winnie Madikizela-Mandela challenged him politically in the early 1990s, he expected her to defer to him as the leader of the ANC. Furthermore, when Madikizela-Mandela expressed her ambition to become leader of the ANC in her own right, Mandela did not think it was the 'right' time.

In spite of his awful gaffe during the 2004 election campaign when he joked that he would slap his sister if she married a particular opposition party leader, Mbeki went out of his way to promote women's leadership. Mbeki appointed a generation of women politicians to his Cabinet, as provincial premiers and to important public bodies. He also groomed two women leaders, Foreign Minister Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma and Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, as potential presidential successors. Although non-sexism and the notion of gender equality were important objectives of the South African liberation struggle, especially following the October 1955 women's march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria, in practice the political culture was highly sexist and male-dominated. This was true across the liberation movement, from the unions to the student movement. Even the student movement of the 1980s and early 1990s, where there was an active effort to build an indigenous African feminist movement, non-sexism was often only a slogan, its practice was a distant dream. In fact, former South African Deputy President Jacob Zuma's appalling statement during his rape trial in 2006 – that he could see by the way a woman dresses that she was looking for sex – is indicative of a widespread phenomenon of sexism in society, in spite of South Africa's model constitution that calls for gender equality. The pervasive sexism in South African society can be seen in the vigorous opposition by many of the idea of a woman president of the country.

In November 2006, Foreign Minister Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma decried

largely related to huge gender inequality – demands that gender equality is not only a slogan, or nice words in the constitution, but that it becomes practice in everyday life.

Managing the opposition

The eminent South African sociologist Sakhela Buhlungu has talked of the shift from 'Madiba magic' to 'Mbeki logic'. Mandela's style was to 'win the voluntary co-operation' of all interest groups (within the alliance). In contrast, Mbeki 'demands co-operation' from the different groups.²³ Mbeki has attempted to contain his biggest trade union critics, by offering them powerful jobs in government or in related areas. Mhazima Shilowa, the articulate and powerful former general secretary of Cosatu, was made the premier of Gauteng province, South Africa's economic and financial heartland.

Under Mbeki the space for debate has visibly shrunk from what it was under the Mandela presidency. Mbeki generally takes criticism of government policies personally. Often Mbeki 'suspends' internal democracy in the ANC to push through policies that will meet with resistance. This approach has backfired when ANC members rebelled against this kind of leadership and undermining of internal democracy in the ANC. Mandela usually dealt with critics by publicly embracing them, blunting their criticisms. Mandela even hugged his former jail master. It would be indeed hard to persist in attacking an opponent who keeps on holding your hand and embracing you. It is instructive to look at the way Mbeki dealt with two of the ANC alliance's most influential critics of current government policy's failure to create jobs, and to reduce inequality and poverty: Cosatu General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi and President Willie Madisha. Unfortunately for Mbeki, both have so far been rather resistant to the seduction of government office, in return for muting their criticisms of government policies. Both have, however, been publicly ridiculed and totally marginalised by the President and his allies. For more than two years, Mbeki even refused to meet them.

Mbeki rarely speaks to the media. Mandela, on the other hand, gave interviews liberally. Mandela's openness to the media was also his strength. Negative press was rather rare. Mbeki's dislike of the media and his secrecy has also made him even more vulnerable, as the media are left to speculate. Although under Mandela, the ANC suffered from the same bitter and racist attacks from white expatriates and some Western media, Mandela was never obsessed with countering such negative perceptions. He dealt with it by opening up even more. Mbeki and his strategists are almost obsessed with perceptions, and how to deal with them, rather than just let the

it's surely a waste of energy and resources to be preoccupied with combating such negative perceptions.

Mbeki rarely appears in parliament and treats the opposition with contempt. Essop Pahad argues that as President, Mbeki is not an MP, and does not need to be accountable to parliament. Pahad says Mbeki's deputy, Jacob Zuma, is in charge of government business in parliament. Mandela, on the other hand, used every opportunity to put his views across in parliament. Mandela, like India's Nehru, made a determined effort to establish a respect for parliament as a symbol of the new democracy's representative institutions. Nehru²⁴ went out of his way to show respect for the parliamentary opposition, even if they may have been insignificant, to inculcate a democratic culture in the newly independent India. Mandela did the same during his term as president.

Overall Mbeki has a frosty relationship with opposition party leaders. Mandela, on the other hand, arranged a special forum for parliamentary opposition leaders where they could discuss policy differences with him or where he could listen to their concerns. As a result opposition party leaders were less inclined to aggressively attack Mandela for shortcomings, as they would attack Mbeki during the rare times he appears in parliament.²⁵ Furthermore, Mandela went out of his way to include opposition groups within his government of national unity. This is one practice continued by Mbeki – and which has been promoted by Mbeki as a policy solution to other African countries trying to make peace after protracted conflicts. Later in his presidency, from 2004 onwards, as his own confidence increased, Mbeki increasingly started to make use of the same reconciliatory public gestures – he emphasised the importance of white South Africans in the rebuilding of the country – so successfully practised by Mandela. Mbeki even praised the efforts of his rival, the acerbic Tony Leon, the leader of the mainly white opposition conservative Democratic Alliance. Furthermore, Mbeki started a recruitment programme to recruit white South Africans who had left the country to return and take jobs in government. Mbeki also started frequently to point to Mandela's example of reconciliation and to point South Africans to the concept of *ubuntu* as a guiding principle his countrymen and women should embrace.

Mbeki ideologically aligns himself with the generation of centre-left leaders including Tony Blair, Gerhard Schroeder and Swedish Social Democratic leader Goran Persson. They use the same ideological theme, the 'Third Way' – less government, using the market to deliver, distancing themselves from the unions, and moving closer to business. Essentially, Mbeki sees his presidency as running a business, South Africa Inc., of which

concentrated in the CEO. In contrast, former president Nelson Mandela operated 'more like a ceremonial head of state, more like a constitutional monarch, submitting himself with a strong sense of duty to the disciplines of party democracy through the Cabinet or ANC NEC'.²⁶

Mbeki, as CEO, is not someone for the big hall meeting. He excels in cobbling together policy in bilateral meetings of small groups. He would deal with problems by talking separately to conflicting parties, securing separate agreements. Policy is increasingly developed at such bilateral meetings.²⁸ Mandela made an issue out of consulting with party leaders and supporters – even if not always implementing their proposals. Often those consulted would appreciate being included – and their criticisms when their policy proposals are not implemented would often be muted.

Leadership styles do matter. Mbeki is often accused of technocratic policymaking, rather than wide consultation, lest it would compromise his policies or his ability to embark on them single-handedly because he thinks it is for the greater good of the country and the recipients. Often he would say, 'I've been elected by the people to govern, if the people have problems with me or the party, they will vote me out: if they don't, it means they are happy with my policies.'

The danger with this approach is that in the end, society learns that it can vote for but not choose; legislatures feel they have no role in policy-making; and civil society groups perceive that their voices do not count. This kind of policy style 'tends to undermine representative institutions'.²⁷ Consultation and negotiation among representative institutions is necessary to channel political conflicts. If decisions are made elsewhere, representative institutions wilt. At his deathbed Nehru realised this – too late. Midway during his presidency, Mbeki appears to have learned that lesson. However, his great challenge now, for the remainder of his presidency, is to convince a sceptical ANC membership and South Africans that he has indeed taken that lesson to heart.

For the leaders who will follow in governing a free and democratic South Africa, the models of Mandela and Mbeki provide an important legacy of achievement and warning.

Notes

- 1 See Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre (1997), *Freedom at Midnight: The epic drama of India's struggle for independence*. HarperCollins, London, p. xii.
- 2 Hein Marais (2002), 'The logic of expediency: Post-apartheid shifts in macro-economic policy', in Sean Jacobs and Richard Calland, *Thabo Mbeki's World: The politics and ideology of the South African president*. Pietermaritzburg, Natal University Press, pp.83–103.
- 3 Sagra Rykief (2002), 'Does the emperor really have no clothes?: Thabo Mbeki and ideology', in Sean Jacobs and Richard Calland, *Thabo Mbeki's World: The politics and ideology of the South African president*. Natal University Press, pp.105–120.
- 4 Nelson Mandela, speech to the students of the University of Potchefstroom. February, 1996.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 George Devenish, 'Understanding true meaning of ubuntu is essential in politics', *Cape Times*, 17 May 2005.
- 7 Raymond Suttner (2005), 'The character and formation of intellectuals within the ANC-led South African liberation movement' in Thandika Mkandawire, *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development*, Unisa and Zed Books.
- 8 Hein Marais, *op.cit.*
- 9 Sakhela Buhlungu (2002), 'From "Madiba magic" to "Mbeki logic": Mbeki and the ANC's trade union allies', in Sean Jacobs and Richard Calland, *Thabo Mbeki's World: The politics and ideology of the South African president*. Pietermaritzburg, Natal University Press, pp. 179–200.
- 10 See, for example, Anthony Simpson (1999), *Nelson Mandela: The Authorised Biography*, London, Jonathan Cape.
- 11 *Ibid.* See also 'From Mandela to Mbeki', *Houston Chronicle*, 8 July 1996.
- 12 Anthony Sampson, *op.cit.*
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 See Stephen Ellis and Tsepo Sechaba (1991), *Comrades against Apartheid: The ANC and the South African Communist Party in exile*, Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press and James Currey. Or see Tom Lodge (1987), *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*, Raven Press, Johannesburg. See also William M. Gumede (1997), 'The Battle for the Soul of the ANC', *The Sunday Independent*, September.
- 15 Anthony Sampson, *op.cit.* Also see Adrian Hadland and Jovial Rantao (1999), *The life and times of Thabo Mbeki*, Zebra Press. Stephen Ellis and Tsepo Sechaba, *op.cit.* See also Charlene Smith, 'Two Faces of the Struggle', *Saturday Star*, 20 June 1998.
- 16 Lindy Wilson (1991), 'Bantu Stephen Biko: A Life', in Barney Pityana, Mamphela Ramphele and Malusi Mputwana (eds.), *Bounds of possibility: The legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness*, London: Zed Books.
- 17 Saleem Badat (1999), *Black Student Politics, Higher Education and Apartheid: From Saso to Sanso, 1968–1990*, Human Sciences Research Council, p.111.
- 18 Author interview with Jeremy Cronin.
- 19 See Mark Gevisser, 'The 60s anti-hero', *The Sunday Times*, 30 May 1999. But see also Anthony Sampson, 'President select', *Observer*, London, 10 June 2001; or Anthony Sampson, 'Mbeki: The Anglophile With Roots in a Tangle', 18 April 2004.
- 20 *The Star*, 10 May 1995; Anthony Sampson, *op.cit.* See also 'From Mandela to Mbeki', *Houston Chronicle*, 8 July 1996.
- 21 See Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre, *op. cit.*
- 22 *The Star*, 10 May 1995.
- 23 Sakhela Buhlungu, *op. cit.*
- 24 See Sunil Khinani (2003), *The idea of India*, Penguin. London, 2000 and Judith M. Bro, *Nehru: A Political Life*, Yale University Press.
- 25 Anthony Sampson, *op.cit.*
- 26 Author interview with Moss Ngoasheng, 6 March 2000.
- 27 *Ibid.*