

SECTION FOUR

Opinions from Two Traditional Leaders

In this final section of the book, we hear from traditional leaders themselves. Two senior traditional leaders, both hailing from the Eastern Cape and with many years of experience in traditional governance structures, offer reflections about the evolution of traditional leadership in a democratic South Africa. In contrast to the rest of the book, these are not scholarly chapters, but works of personal reflection. The authors do not state their sources upfront and many of the claims they make are contested (including by other contributors in this book). Indeed, these final chapters remind us just how fiercely contested traditional leadership is, as well as what is at stake for those who hold the institution dear. It is crucially important that readers, policymakers and practitioners understand how traditional leaders themselves understand the history, role and future of their institution. Implicit in the reflections presented by these two traditional leaders are questions related to identity, authenticity, ‘postcolonial’ society and the very definition of democratic practice.

Traditional Leaders in a Democracy

Before the colonialists took over the land and imposed their system of governance, which ironically has been embraced by all democratic governments in Africa, traditional leaders and their communities led wars of resistance. They paid supreme sacrifices as many were brutally killed.

– NKOSI MWELO NONKONYANA

Development and service delivery in rural Africa continues to suffer because politicians do not want to give due recognition to the role of the institution of traditional leadership. Where there is cooperation and mutual respect between government and traditional leaders, the people benefit.

– NKOSI PHATHEKILE HOLOMISA