

# **TransAfrica as a Collective Enterprise: Exploring Leadership and Social Justice Attentiveness**

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## **Abstract**

This essay is focused on TransAfrica, the oldest and largest non-profit African American human rights and social justice advocacy organization in the United States. The goal is to review and summarize literature on leadership, with a focus on issues and dilemmas the organization has or may confront, describe how ethical and creative leadership differs from other forms of leadership, explain how attentiveness to social justice is present in the organization, and how in general, attention to social justice can qualitatively improve group dynamics.

## **Introduction**

TransAfrica is best known for its 'Free South Africa Movement' act of civil disobedience on November 21, 1984 which created the momentum that set Nelson Mandela free in 1990, after he served 27 years of a life sentence for his political activities. The drama began in Washington, D.C. after a meeting with South Africa's ambassador to the United States, held by TransAfrica executive director Randall Robinson, former U.S. Civil Rights Commissioner Mary Frances Berry, Georgetown University law professor Eleanor Holmes Norton, and former Washington, D.C., delegate Walter E. Fauntroy with singer, songwriter, actor and social activist Harry Belafonte as the initial financial sponsor (Doucette 2009). The group decided to occupy the embassy and not leave until Mandela was freed, and apartheid was dismantled, which became the first of more than 5,000 people to be arrested for peacefully protesting apartheid during the next two years. And in 1986, the U.S. Senate overrode President Reagan's veto to impose sanctions on South Africa via the Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986 (McCoy 1992, Nesbitt 2004).

Organizationally, TransAfrica was formed in 1977, in Washington, D.C. by Randall Robinson (now a Distinguished Scholar in Residence at the Pennsylvania State University Dickinson School of Law) with Herschelle Challenor and Willard Johnson. The group grew from “a two-person, one-room organization to a national lobby with more than 15,000 members and international influence” developed from a ‘Black Leadership Conference’ convened by the Congressional Black Caucus in September 1976. In 1981, TransAfrica Forum, the research and educational affiliate of TransAfrica was founded to collect, analyze and disseminate information about Africa, the Caribbean and U.S. foreign policy affecting those regions. TransAfrica lobbied the U.S. Congress and the administration with nontax exempt contributions while TransAfrica Forum has tax-exempt status and provides the educational focus for TransAfrica, hence their boards are interlocked. In 1992 the nonprofit had an \$800,000 annual budget based on funds from corporations, corporate grants and individual donations (McCoy 1992, Dickson 1996).

Today, the Washington, D.C. headquartered organization (TransAfrica) remains the senior, largest and most well-known African American human rights and social justice advocacy organization in the United States. Thus, TransAfrica serves as a think tank and program organizing and leadership development center that advocates for justice for people of African descent around the world in relationship to U.S. foreign policy. Actor, humanitarian and political activist Danny Glover is currently the chair of the board, consisting of nine members (Doucette 2009).

In this essay, it is suggested that TransAfrica is a collective enterprise that involves people who have a relationship to each other, developed through a concern for equity in United States foreign policy and social justice for people of African descent around the world. Secondly, it is argued that literature on organizational leadership offers some insights into some of the issues and dilemmas faced by organizations like TransAfrica, although their ethical and creative leadership may differ from other forms of organizational leadership, such as ‘the great man theory’ (Carlyle 1888, Harter 2003, Marturano 2008: 67-71), toxic leadership (Whicker 1996), or the messiah type of leadership (Western 2008: 126). And last, it is suggested that the attentiveness to social justice as presented by TransAfrica is present, and therefore, its group dynamics has opened space for similar organizations to learn from its successes and challenges as a time-tested social justice advocacy organization.

### **Author Disclosure**

In the ethic of full disclosure, the writer selected TransAfrica because during the early 1970s he was an active member of the African Liberation Support Committee, an organization founded by Owusu Sadaukai (now Howard L. Filler, Distinguished Professor of Education at Marquette University).

Sadaukai upon his visit to Tanzania and the liberated areas of then occupied Mozambique learned that the best way African Americans could help African liberation in Africa was to organize protests and mass demonstrations, along the lines of the anti-Vietnam discordance of the 1960s in the U.S., which put pressure on the U.S. government to end its dealing with the colonial state of Portugal.

Subsequently, Sadaukai returned to the U.S. to a national college and community speaking tour (this writer was introduced to him at the College of Alameda in Alameda, California). In September 1972, Sadaukai organized a conference in Detroit, Michigan to plan mass demonstrations for 'African Liberation Day' hosted by the African Liberation Day Coordinating Committee which later became the African Liberation Support Committee that involved leaders of several shades of political opinion, including members of the Congressional Black Caucus, leaders of mainstream civil rights organizations, and those in the Black liberation movement. Hence, a broad coalition was also created that organized the first African Liberation Day demonstration in May 1972 which drew 60,000 demonstrators in cities across the U.S. and Canada, which grew to 30 cities with approximately 100,000 participants in 1973 (Erhagbe 2011:30). The writer participated in the African Liberation Support Committee in northern California wherein he assisted in the organization of 'African Liberation Day' in San Francisco and Oakland, California from 1972 until 1976 as a member of the Pan African People's Organization (formerly the Afro-American Institute/Malcolm X Unity House, San Francisco, California) headed by Oba T'Shaka, professor emeritus in the Department of Africana Studies at San Francisco State University (Johnson 2007: 131-172, Nesbitt 2004: 76-80).

### **Literature on Leadership**

As posed above, literature on organizational leadership offers some insights into some of the issues and dilemmas faced by organizations like TransAfrica. And often in a scramble for a definitive definition of leadership, the literature spans a host of perspectives ranging from myth and conjecture to psychology. Nevertheless, according to Joanne B. Ciulla (2003: xii-xiii) its meaning is "determined by the way people in a culture use it and think about it" and actually "tells us about the values and paradigms of leadership in a certain place and at a certain time", an assessment this writer is in agreement with because in a historical context, people define and understand leadership differently, based on time and geography.

### **History**

In ancient Egypt (1274 BC), for example, the 29 year-old pharaoh Ramses II in the fifth year of his 67 year reign was surprised by a rival army of 47,000 and 35,000 chariots in a military trap laid by adversary Muwatalli II. Hence, in a series of protracted counter attacks at the battle of Kadesh, Ramses II saved his army from destruction which propelled his image and reputation as a warrior-king.

Despite his arrogant impetuosity, he saved the day through his use of particular tactics, demonstrating his self-conscious courage in war (he was in the battle) and leadership skills. In the space and time of this young pharaoh, leadership was defined as a person who did not shirk from the responsibility of his or her actions (especially at the point of crisis), and therefore he got out in front of his troops in a chariot and demonstrated what really had to be done to lead (Cotterell 2006: 2-9).

Secondly, in ancient China the emotional intelligence of Si Shimin, the second Tang emperor of China illustrates another paradigm of leadership based on how people understood their environment. Thus, via Shimin, and the good advice of his civil service minister Wei Zheng, the people of China gained a new belief in the value and reality of a unified China. Si Shimin captured the capital city of Chang'an in AD 618, he placed his father on the throne, and in AD 626 he violently took control of the empire with popular approval of the army and gained heroic admiration by people at large. Here, the definition of leadership was one who could make a decision, act on the decision and simultaneously accept good advice from his senior officials and trusted civil service minister, e.g., Wei Zheng (Cotterell 2006: 183-194).

These examples show that indeed, leadership is determined by “the way people in a culture use it and think about it” and thus, it “tells us about the values and paradigms of leadership in a certain place and at a certain time” (Ciulla 2003: xii-xiii). However, leadership is a complex process with several dimensions and approaches, each with their own particular definitions, and again depending on the values and paradigms of place and time. And in this mix, according to Northouse (1997:20), “there have been as many as 65 different classification systems developed to define the dimensions of leadership” and within the roster Bass (1990, pp. 11-20) suggest that “some definitions view leadership as the focus of group processes” wherein the leader is at the center of group change and activity, and therefore he/she embodies the will of the group.

### **Theory**

There are multiple definitions that attempt to conceptualize leadership and formulate leadership theory, yet most of the theoretical context of leadership can be found in six constructs, i.e., great man theory, trait theory, behavioral theory, contingency theory, transactional theory and transformational theory. These constructs and their affiliated theories, for example, role theory in a behavioral context, or situational leadership, path-goal theory and cognitive resource theory in contingency theory, form the essentials of leadership literature, and therefore they offer insight into some of the issues and dilemmas that groups like TransAfrica confront.

The first theory of ‘great men’ posed by Carlyle (1907) in an essay played with the idea that a good leader was a person with the ability to gain the attention of many people. Thus, the great leader was centered upon birth, although there was and is no way to scientifically posit what human characteristics or combination of traits are responsible for producing great men, with the complete exclusion of women. Such thinking is based on the notion that women could not be ‘great’ or heroes, in the topic of his study of influential men.

Thus the ‘great men’ theory of Carlyle didn’t apply to TransAfrica nor did the theory of his predecessor, Francis Galton. Galton was a man who focused on the hereditary background of ‘great men’ in an attempt to suggest that the basis of great leadership is inheritance. Galton in his book *Hereditary Genius: Its Laws and Consequences* stated that “I propose to show in this book that a man's natural abilities are derived by inheritance, under exactly the same limitations as are the form and physical features of the whole organic world.” Not content, Galton further states that through a careful selection “it would be quite practicable to produce a highly-gifted race of men by judicious marriages during several consecutive generations” (Galton 1892:1).

### **TransAfrica Applicability**

The leadership of TransAfrica consisting of Randall Robinson, a Harvard educated lawyer, a former U.S. Civil Rights Commissioner in the person of Mary Frances Berry, a Georgetown University law professor in the person of Eleanor Holmes Norton or a former Washington, D.C., and a delegate named Walter E. Fauntroy would not qualify for the great men title using the data of Carlyle or Galton. The reasons are because two women are involved, and secondly, their heredity did not have “relationships of a large body of fairly eminent men, namely, the Judges of England from 1660 to 1868, the Statesmen of the time of George III., and the Premiers during the last 100 years” so that one could “obtain from these a general survey of the laws of heredity in respect to genius” as Galton suggested (Galton 1892:1).

Conversely the ‘great men theory’ had no utility in the organizational scheme of TransAfrica, and likewise, the trait theory of the 1930s-1940s also did not apply, because it argues that people are born with particular qualities that will make them successful leaders. Secondly, its proponents overreaching efforts focused too much on what combination of characteristics are uniform among leaders rather than particular skill sets leaders had, and in general, their trait research was generally never-ending roster of attributes and inconclusive theories. Western (2008: 29-33) in his review of trait theory notes that the trait approach takes an individualistic approach, thus one of the most common ways it defines leadership is through “observing individual leaders and analyzing their internal personality traits” to decide on what actually makes them a successful leader’. Further, in a critical assessment, trait approaches suggest a preferred style of leadership (self-confidence, intelligence, extroversion, etc.), a dominance-elite approach to leadership, and a need for homogeneous results that usually ignore personal differences, gender; creativity, racial or other aspects of cultural diversity outside an individualistic paradigm.

In the formation of TransAfrica, there seemed to be no need to select a leader based on a list of traits, although one can hypothesize that there were expectations of the leadership. Randall Robinson began his activism by demonstrating personal skill by requesting information from the American Committee on Africa, a group formed in 1967 to challenge South Africa's administration of South West Africa (now Namibia) that activist relied on to provide them information and leadership in the then small realm of antiapartheid organizing (Hostetter 2006:11, 35). Yet, there was no person or organization examining his or others level of leadership in terms of personality traits or character. In a seasoned response that may better fit the profile of TransAfrica and other organizations, Mumford (1909) rightfully suggests that a leader comes forth via abilities and skills that allow for the solving of social problems in times of stress, change and adaptation, and therefore, leadership is an acquired skill, not a set of genetically endowed traits. Hence, in the same vain, TransAfrica emerged by virtue of the intensity and visibility of antiapartheid activism in the African American community in the 1970s, with the added organizational push of the Congressional Black Caucus, founded in 1971 by Congressman Charles Diggs (TransAfrica was his vision) which became a linchpin for local and national progressive social change (Hostetter 2006: 35).

In a critical assessment, the above behavioral approach of trying to define what part of a personality makes a good leader in an attempt to locate what part of a personality will allow a person to be a good leader does not apply in an organizational context. And although each organization has its particular goals and mission, they like people don't fit into neat classifications absent of diversity. TransAfrica's key role on creating the 'Free South Africa Movement' crystalized the importance of diversity as many of the protest activist "included a broad coalition of activist, elected officials, labor unions, and student, civil rights, and church groups orchestrated a series of well-publicized arrests outside the South African embassy and at its consulates around the United States" (Culverson 1999:146).

In understanding TransAfrica, perhaps 'contingency theory' (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967) may explain its history, a theory that argues that there is no single way of leading, and that every leadership style should be based on certain situations which show that there are certain people who perform at a high level in certain places, but also that do the opposite when taken out of their environment. In the pre-TransAfrica era (1972), this may have been the situation when Randall Robinson and Chris Nteta (late Methodist minister and professor at the University of Massachusetts at Boston) of the Boston-based Southern Africa Liberation Committee began planning for a national boycott of Gulf Oil's oppressive (colonial) role in Africa. Harvard refused to divest its stocks, and thus, Robinson joined the Harvard Law Students Association to lead a six-day occupation of the office of Harvard's president (Nesbitt 2004: 101). Further, when the African Liberation Day planning committee headed by Owusu Sadauki decided not to support a national boycott of Gulf Oil, headed by Robinson. Through collaboration with the African Heritage Studies Association Committee for Positive Action and the Southern Africa Liberation Committee however, they spent a year and a half to promote the boycott, and in 1974 Portugal's rule in Africa ended (Nesbitt 2004: 101-102).

For TransAfrica, ‘contingency theory’ allows for a full consideration of situations in respect to organizational style and their related demands. For example, deciding between letter campaigns and visiting power brokers in person. Secondly, ‘contingency theory’ does not require that the organization be effective in all situations or feel a need to ‘be all things to all people’ in the course of its operation. However, the drawbacks to the theory according to Barbour (2008:29) is that contingency theorists are “limited in their conceptualization of leadership and the empirical strength to support the various arguments”, and often there is an oversimplification of complex and unpredictable situations and circumstances for most organizations. Likewise, Northouse (1997:80, 2015) contends that it “fails to explain adequately what organizations should do when there is a mismatch between the leader and the situation”, and further, it “does not advocate teaching leaders how to adapt their styles to various situations as a means to improve leadership in an organization (ibid.)”.

Additionally, transactional leadership offers another perspective on the relationship between leaders and followers that may enhance an understanding of the workings of TransAfrica. In his seminal work on leadership, Burns (1978) defines transactional leadership as the first form of interaction between leaders and followers. Hence, transactional leadership is most often explained in a capitalistic context as a cost-benefit exchange between leaders and their followers (Kuhnert and Lewis 1987) wherein there is a transaction or exchange that involves something of value

between what the leader possesses or controls and what the follower wants in return for services (Yukl and Van Fleet 1992). Therefore, it essentially involves leaders clarifying goals and objectives, communicating to organize tasks and activities with the cooperation of their followers to ensure that wider organizational goals are met (Bass 1974: 341), which depends on the acceptance of hierarchical differences, and the ability of people to work in this mode of exchange.

In the opinion of this writer, TransAfrica did not seem to operate based on transactional leadership. I don’t think TransAfrica operated within the scope of a transactional leadership which is based on the idea that subordinates and systems work better under a clear chain of command. Hence, one can reason that with a staff of less than ten and after working for Congressmen (William L. Clay and Charles Diggs), and spending a year raising funds and building a membership base in the African American community with Mayor Richard Hatcher of Gary, Indiana as the first chairman of the board would accept a transactional structure. This is especially true as TransAfrica decided not to accept donations from foreign governments or from companies doing business in South Africa, and consequently, there was no room for a leadership confined to rewards and punishment compliance in a leader-follower mode (Nesbitt 2004: 103-105). Instead, TransAfrica seemed to operate in a transformational leadership manner, because its aim was to motivate followers by encouraging them to transcend their self-interests for the sake of the organization and shared goals. Whereas transactional leaders aim to “predetermine what their followers should do to realize their personal and organizational aims”, transformational leaders did the opposite, and thus encouraged their members to surpass their self-interests, and thus direct their energy to a higher level of motivation, linked to the interests of the organization or the larger world community (Bass and Avolio 1994).

This message of transformative social change came alive for TransAfrica during the 'Free South Africa Movement', and according to organizer Cecelie Counts (TransAfrica political director 1983-1988, now legislative representative at AFL-CIO), "the format of the demonstrations allowed people to use their organizational identities as a way to come to the movement." Hostetter (2006) observed that "the daily ritual of volunteer 'messengers' stepping forward from the picket line to risk arrest by refusing to leave until they were arrested for demonstrating within five hundred feet of an embassy provided an entry level, low risk activity through which people could show their commitment to the cause". Thus "the dignified, nonviolent nature of the protest helped garner sympathetic media attention while expanding participation beyond the cadre of activists for whom apartheid had been a long-held concern" (Hostetter 2006:83).

Furthermore, the TransAfrica coalition (Free South Africa Movement) provided leadership to a symbolic revival of an alliance akin to the civil rights coalition of the 1960s that included African Americans, labor, Christian and Jewish groups, women, and students; and made American opposition to apartheid visible in a way that had not previously occurred. And without fully expecting it, TransAfrica had managed to bridge divides that had previously separated segments of the anti-apartheid movement (Hostetter 2006:83). This action was indeed about transformational leadership in its concern for "changing people's values and moving them to a new vision" (Nouthouse 1997:146), although the decision to highlight the arrests of prominent people disturbed long-time activists. According to David Scott of TransAfrica, the celebrity presence (Rosa Parks, Stevie Wonder, Amy Carter, Desmond Tutu, Jesse Jackson, etc.) assured media coverage and legitimized the movement in the eyes of viewers unfamiliar with its goals and objectives. He stated that 'the purpose is never to exclude anyone, but to include people who never have been involved in anti-apartheid activities before and had never participated in an act of civil disobedience. The question is how do you bring those people in? At least, part of the answer is to get people like Senator Lowell Weicker and Coretta Scott King and the Kennedys involved" (Culverson 1999:148).

This review of literature on leadership relevant to aspects of the issues and concerns of TransAfrica is in no way comprehensive, but rather an introductory survey with an acknowledgement of associated perspectives such as authentic leadership, participatory leadership or servant leadership. The review shows a preference for a transformational approach that encourages people to act as social justice advocates, and therefore continuously in a state of motivating through inspiration, stimulating intellectual foresight, and in giving individualized consideration to the needs and goals of member and non-member participants.



## **Differentiating Ethical and Creative Leadership**

Ethical and creative leadership involves elements of moral choice and responsibility that can introduce new challenges and possibilities for innovative approaches to change. Thus, it is an exercise in paying attention to moral standards that cross organizational and cultural boundaries. Secondly, it is an assessment of the actions of organizational leadership that set the ethical tone and standards for an organization. And third, it is an understanding that a person in leadership is severely incomplete, if he or she does not consider the ethical, creative and moral particulars of leadership.

Ethical leadership has been the concern of people and organizations for ages, but how it is defined remains a question of perspective, perception or approach. However, Eisenbeiss (2012) in her definition maintained that it comprises of the “moral person” and the “moral manager” with the moral person aspect referring to a leader's personality, which includes attributes like honesty, integrity or altruistic motivation. Hence, the moral manager is viewed as a leader with intentional efforts to influence others and guide the ethical behavior of followers to engage in communicating ethical standards, and in correcting those who show unethical behaviors and other action that demonstrated poor personal behavior. And in juxtaposition, the creative blend of ‘ethical and creative leadership’ is concerned with ambiguity, change and with a general ability to bring something new to a situation which may involve working without the support or approval of others; and in an organizational posture, having an ability to pay attention to the signals people are sending regarding their needs, vision and beliefs.

Considering this unity of the ethical and creative aspects of leadership to form ‘ethical and creative leadership’, there are indeed others forms of leadership that expand issues and dilemmas of culture, society and difference. Such approaches include heroic leadership (Jones 2008), destructive leadership (Einarsen 2007, Krasikova 2013) and messiah (Western 2008: 126) leadership styles, to name a few.

### **Heroic Leadership**

Heroic leadership has been assigned to a person that “exhibits extraordinary courage, firmness or greatness of soul in the course of some journey or enterprise” (Jones 2008:74), and in that vein, one may tend to think of people like Fannie Lou Hamer, Nelson Mandela or Mother Teresa. In the business world, there is a constant buzz about the leader in ‘heroic management’, based on idea of how a person took a company from humble beginnings to riches and fame, and in the age of world war, each nation seems to be in a race to find the newest hero to suggest that extraordinary courage and greatness is among their population. In such an environment, usually the military or military-inspired organizations are watched because the public expect them to be acknowledged as the next hero, hence, the production of a Ramses II (as mentioned above) or a George Patton of the U.S. Army.

In the scheme of ethical and creative leadership however, there is no real need to exhibit talent or skill so that one can be seen or thought of as special, because he or she is usually concerned with the welfare of the group and the organization, rather than individual success. For example, in 1985 Jesse Jackson and African National Congress president Oliver Tambo led an anti-apartheid rally, attended by thirty thousand people in London, England, but their efforts were not generally thought of as heroic, although it was historic, and thus, done to support the struggling masses in South Africa and to bring notice to the evils of apartheid as their leadership centered on creative and ethical foundations (Nesbitt 2004:136-137).

### **Destructive Leadership**

Secondly, destructive leadership is obviously contrary to ethical and creative leadership in that according to Einarsen (2007), it is behavior defined as “the systematic and repeated behavior by a leader that violates the legitimate interest of the organization by undermining and/or sabotaging the organization’s goals, tasks, resources, and effectiveness and/or its motivation or well-being”. Ethical and creative leadership instead is the opposite in its quest by the leader to systematically advance the legitimate interest of the organization by promoting the organization’s goals, tasks, resources, and effectiveness, motivations, and well-being. There are many that can qualify as a destructive leader, but a rarely mentioned person is former youth assistant to Martin Luther King, Jr., Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr. (interim president and CEO of the National Newspaper Publishers Association, co-founder with Russell Simons the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network composed of a coalition of hip-hop artist and recording industry executives, president of the board of the Washington Office on Africa, president of Education Online Services Corporation, this year he helped in the organization of the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Million Man March: Justice or Else movement in Washington, D.C.), and the former director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Ben Chavis was forced to resign from the NAACP in August 1994 after disclosures surfaced that he had used scarce organizational money to pay a settlement to a woman who accused him of sexual harassment. He joined the Nation of Islam (appointed East Coast Regional Minister), became Chavis Muhammad and consequently was suspended by a regional association of the United Church of Christ. He left the Nation of Islam after being accused of sexual harassment (Nossiter, 1997). Here, perhaps the work of Krasikova (2013) and others can explain the past performance of Chavis via their framework for understanding destructive leadership, pseudo-transformative leadership and their manifestations, antecedents, and consequences.

## **Messiah Leadership**

The position of the messiah leader or messiah leadership is based on a belief or worldview that a person is a savior or liberator of people. Thus, the person is surrounded by ritual, symbols, moral narratives and practices designed to increase follower faith in the leader. Such leaders have included, Jim Jones (1931-1978) who described himself as ‘Christ’ and in 1978 led a mass murder-suicide in Jonestown, Guyana, Harriet Ross Tubman (c.1821-1913) who led 300 formerly enslaved people to freedom and was called the Moses of her people, and Elijah Muhammad (1897-1975), leader of the Nation of Islam who became the ‘prophet and messenger of Allah’. Charisma and/or an unquestionable dedication to a cause placed each of these persons into leadership, for good or for bad, as people sought a person that would deliver them from their present conditions. In contrast, ethical and creative leadership involves greater leader choice (of beliefs) and responsibility that can withstand new challenges and possibilities, whereas messiah leader or messiah leadership often functions as a fixed worldview of compliance to directives from the anointed. The above differences are noteworthy because there are many forms of leadership that are not compatible with the goals and objectives of ethical and creative leadership. And in retrospect, members of the TransAfrica ‘Free South Africa Movement’ realized the importance ethics of creative leadership. For example, Hill (2004) note that,

*While TransAfrica and its President, Randall Robinson became the symbol of the leadership of the anti-apartheid movement within the United States, it is important to remember that the ultimate success of the legislative sanctions strategy depended on all of these long term organizations that had honed their expertise and capability in ways that could sustain pressure against the USA government and transnational corporations. It's also important to realize that the media focuses its attention on a leader and the actions of the moment in order to shape their stories and images. It is these stories and images that expanded the base of the movement. The Free South Africa Movement recognized that the many facets of the work to be done could never have been accomplished by any one organization.*

## **Attentiveness to Social Justice**

There is certainly attentiveness to social justice in transformational leadership, and also in ethical and creative leadership endeavors. In the case of TransAfrica’s ‘Free South Africa Movement’ its overall aim to create a “world where Africans and people of African descent are self-reliant, socially and economically prosperous, and have equal access to a more just international system that strengthens independence and democracy” is a testimony to the utility of an ethical and creative transformational leadership. Hence, that kind of ethical and creative transformational leadership was present when Desmond Tutu held up a copy of the ‘Freedom Letter’, a petition condemning apartheid signed by a million people in the U.S. at a demonstration in front of the South African embassy in Washington, D.C. in January 1986 with Randall Robinson and other anti-apartheid protesters, and thus, stated that the protest is a moral issue as they questioned the audience, saying “Are you for justice or injustice?”

Are you for freedom or repression? ('Freedom Letter Given Dr. Tutu', *Baltimore Afro-American*, January 18, 1986, p.B-5). Secondly, in April of 1985 an ethical and creative transformational leadership was present when in support of the demand of justice in South Africa, Jesse Jackson spoke to a group of students participating in a thirteen-day sit-in at Rutgers University in New Jersey and called on those not involved in the sit-in to "abandon the selfishness and self-centeredness and materialism of Yuppie-ism", to not gain a degree and lose their soul, and that their involvement in the anti-apartheid movement is the "highest calling of our day." (Nesbitt 2004:136).

Furthermore, the ethical and creative leadership endeavors of TransAfrica and other like organizations engage "leadership for social justice [as] a process that is continually reconstructed in response to shifting needs in the local context" (Brooks 2007). And here, social justice is defined as action oriented and transformative, committed and persistent, inclusive and democratic, relational and caring, reflective, and oriented for a socially just pedagogy (Brooks 2007), and as Blackmore (2009) contends, social justice "encompasses a range of terms—some more powerful than others—such as equity, equality, inequality, equal opportunity, affirmative action, and most recently diversity" and, further, that each term "takes on different meanings in different national contexts" (Blackmore 2009:7). However, "due to such widely varied meanings [of social justice], it is possible for different groups to act in opposition to another, yet each can do so under the aegis of social justice", according to Boyles, Carusi, and Attick (2009:37).

Also within the social justice paradigm is the previously mentioned leadership enterprises of heroic, destructive and messiah leadership, although there is a wide variety of applications. For example, in the messiah leadership of Elijah Muhammad of the Nation of Islam, in addition to a religious component, there was also an economic, social justice and self-esteem component wherein according to Karanga (2010:233), Muhammad argued that justice is a "key demand and divine requirement for life and the basis of the judgment of God on the world", and that "justice is the eventual working out of the will of God as indicated in the principles of truth" (Muhammad 1973:2). And despite the destructive leadership of Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr., he coined the phrase "environmental racism" which he defined as "racial discrimination in environmental policy-making and enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of communities of color for toxic waste facilities, the official sanctioning of the presence of life threatening poisons and pollutants for communities of color, and the history of excluding people of color from leadership of the environmental movement" (Yang 2002:9). Chavis thus contributed to the construction of the social movement and interdisciplinary field of environmental justice defined as "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies" (Bullard 1999:5,15). The heroic orientation also has social justice in its qualification of a hero as a person who has the qualities of courage, resilience, clarity of vision/intellect for deep understanding and insight, and a talent for calmness when under pressure.

For example, the CNN effort to honor unheralded heroes (everyday people) such as Pushpa Basnet as viewers were shocked to learn that children in Nepal were living with their parents in prison, thus in 2005, Basnet started a children's center that has provided housing, education and medical care to more than 140 children of the incarcerated; and second, how Derreck Kayongo and his Atlanta-based Global Soap Project that collects used hotel soap from across the United States that would end up in landfills to instead to produce clean and reprocessed soap for shipment to impoverished nations such as Haiti, Uganda, and Kenya is an attentiveness to social justice in the sharing of the heroic elements of selflessness, resilience, and in the ethic of sharing.

Consequently, the attentiveness to social justice echo an ethics of sharing addressed by Karenga (2010:476) that “emerge from reflection, discussion and action rooted in a profound concern with achieving the good life and an ethical understanding of the conditions for human freedom and human flourishing in society and the world”. And therefore (paraphrased by this writer), it is an ethics based on the dignity and rights of the humankind; the well-being and flourishing of family and community; the integrity and value of the environment; the reciprocal concern for solidarity, cooperation and mutual benefit of shared status; shared knowledge; shared space; shared wealth; shared power; shared interests; and shared responsibility.

This perspective accordingly (Karenga 2010: 476-479), illustrates some of the goals of good leadership steeped in social justice particulars such as: shared power which articulates the right of self-determination and self-governance; shared interests that stresses the need for common ground in diversity; and shared knowledge via the human and social need for knowledge for development and growth. Others include; shared space requiring a meaningful recognition that sharing land requires the sharing of space with others in an equitable and ethical way. And also, shared wealth that calls for a humanistic distribution of wealth based on the understanding that the right to a life in dignity includes the right to a decent life in which people have the basic necessities of food, clothing, shelter, health care, physical and economic security and education. And finally, shared responsibility which acknowledges the need for a commitment to building a viable society and world community.

### **Social Justice: Facilitating Improved Group Dynamics**

The group dynamics of TransAfrica is reflected in its aim to be: the senior African American human rights and social justice advocacy organization in the U.S.; a think tank and program organizing and leadership development center that would advocate for justice for people of African descent around the world in relationship to U.S. foreign policy; an organization that would lobby the U.S. Congress and the administration; and a supporter of authentic equity in U.S. foreign policy. In retrospect, the organization became a collective enterprise of friends, colleagues, volunteers, politicians, celebrities, and everyday people who felt a need to speak out and stand up against the injustice of apartheid.

Such commitment was recalled by 'Free South Africa Movement' steering committee member Sylvia Hill who explained the demographics of the protest at the South African Embassy, stating that "not only is the movement multiracial and multidenominational, but there is also political and ideological diversity. Different sectors of the American people are becoming involved, at least at the physical level, to show some kind of viable option to apartheid" (Culverson 1999:147), and how she talked to "a very old woman and she came and she walked back and she came, and she said to me, she said, "I tried all my life to never go to jail. This is very hard for me because I tried to be a good person, you know." And I could just talk to her about our protest against apartheid, hence, she said, "I just don't feel like it's right there and I want to show that, I don't agree with it, you know." And in conclusion, Hill said, "so, the symbol of it I think, resonated with people in terms of their own personal consciousness" (Culverson 1999:149-150).

TransAfrica is a success oriented group, and therefore, not willing to risk failure, however during the relative calm of post-election rituals in Washington, D.C., contrasted sharply with the violence unleashed by South Africa's cosmetic constitutional revisions, when some felt that the group was going nowhere, the 'Free South Africa Movement' launched its public phase in this temporary serenity in an effort to move ahead to break action barriers, overcome conflicts, and improve group performance. Yet, the group needed a new strategy, and forthrightly, the groups staff person Cecilie Counts described the circumstances that provoked a new strategy, stating:

*[O]ur response was triggered by those terrible incidents in '84 when they sent those troops into the townships, so, again, Richard Hatcher, who was mayor of Gary, Indiana, and, at that time, chairman of the board of TransAfrica, they basically said to Randall Robinson, "We have to do something, we've done the lobbying, we've done the picket lines, we've done the white house, we've done the candlelight vigil, we've got to do something else." So we really went to the stage of daily demonstrations at the embassy and all of that out of desperation, frustration with traditional lobbying. We were never going to be the Christian Coalition or these big right-wing think tanks that were starting to come up during the Reagan years. Human Events and all these other far right groups with the money and the resources -we could never match that. We weren't even successfully keeping our fingers in the dikes. So, when it came to South Africa and our degree of desperation we said, "To the streets!"*

Consequently, this change is what made TransAfrica a key player in the 'Free South Africa Movement' and an unforgettable organization led by African Americans willing to challenge U.S. government policy in apartheid South Africa, and in other parts of the world, where people of African descent live (the Caribbean, South America, Africa, etc.). And this writer finds, in general, that the literature reviewed generally did not reveal any major organizational problems, conflicts between individuals or factions within TransAfrica that would create seemingly contradictory situations or paradoxes that could have prevented the group from reaching its goals. Thus there was no discovery of problems that paralyzed group members, nor was there any hidden dynamics that may have prevented the group from functioning effectively.

Yet, for the future, perhaps a more extensive study can be executed, this this writer recommends: a theoretical framework for understanding leadership, culture and authority in organization; an examination of the issue of race, class and gender in the formation and maintenance the group; an investigation of the social roles, norms of the leadership, a look at the process strategies for leadership, the dynamics of entering, joining, and leaving the group, and a review of the leader-follower dynamics within the organization.

This exercise has focused on TransAfrica, the oldest and largest non-profit African American human rights and social justice advocacy organization in the United States in an introductory manner. Hence, an entity motivated by common issues and interest in an attempt to share and exercise political and social power and to make decisions in a consensus-driven context based on a trend of thought that favors equality for everyone. And most interesting, in the tradition of public engagement in social and political action in the African American community at-large and even specifically, the hip-hop community was influenced by the TransAfrica movement. For example, in the 1980s rap artists of lore voiced strong opposition to apartheid, hip-hop acts such as Run DMC, Kool Herc, Melle Mel, Kurtis Blow and Afrika Bambaataa created several versions of a protest track, “Sun City”, rappers like Kool G Rap mentioned Mandela’s release in 1990 on the track “Erase Racism,” and groups like Public Enemy verbally checked South Africa and apartheid in 1987 on the track “Timebomb”, the Hip Hop Against Apartheid 12-inch single released in 1990, “Ndodemnyama (Free South Africa),” featured greats such as Queen Latifah, U.T.F.O., Lakim Shabazz, Jungle Brothers and X-Clan, Stetsasonic, considered the first hip-hop band, released its record “A.F.R.I.C.A.” in 1987, which also featured heavy anti-apartheid themes, according to D.L. Chandler.

## **Conclusion**

In this exercise, the writer has summarized what the literature on leadership offers for some of the issues and dilemmas TransAfrica has or may have been confront and thus how ethical and creative leadership differs from other forms of leadership with attentiveness to social justice in the organization. I have also described how in general, attention to social justice would qualitatively improve group dynamics. In this exercise, it is recognized that further research could expand on the subject and thus, other researchers are encouraged to: examine the adaptive leadership of TransAfrica in how its leaders encouraged people to adapt to tough issues and thrive in challenging environments, the processes and dynamics of human behavior so that leaders can better understand their own behavior and their followers in order to facilitate optimum outcomes, arrest empowering leadership based on active and directed goals aimed to advance follower development, explore followership theory, contingency approaches to leadership in the case of the manifestations of destructive leadership with its associated antecedents and consequences (e.g., according to Sylvia Hill in her 2004 report, the re-framing of public discourse by the Free South Africa Movement was challenged by the South African regime by employing people of African descent to implement a propaganda campaign to discredit the movement).

And last but not least, an investigation into an Afrocentric transformational leadership that can articulate “an ongoing synthesis of the best of African thought and practice in constant exchange with the world”, hence, a Kawaita paradigm as expressed by scholar-activist, Maulana Karenga (Karenga 2010: 260-263).

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## Appendix



Artist and Athletes Against Apartheid (UN photo. September 14, 1983)

Member of Artists and Athletes Against Apartheid, established in 1983 under the chairmanship of Harry Belafonte and Arthur Ashe. The above photo was taken September 14, 1983 at a press conference organized by the Organization of African Unity at the United Nations. From left: Gregory Hines, Tony Randall, Arthur Ashe, Rose Elder, Randall Robinson, Franklin Williams, Harry Belafonte and Joel Grey. Artists and Athletes Against Apartheid was a subsidiary of TransAfrica organized in 1983 under the direction of Harry Belafonte and Arthur Ashe that worked to discourage performers from visiting South Africa during the apartheid era (Taylor 1985).