



## THE JUNIORISATION OF TRADITIONAL AND ROYAL LEADERSHIP IN SOUTH AFRICA: A CALL FOR CHANGE.

We, the Leadership of Afrika Mayibuye, have traversed the length and breadth of South Africa, engaging directly with traditional and royal leaders from various communities. Among the leaders we have interacted with are Isilo Misuzuluka Zwelithini of the Zulu Kingdom in KwaZuluNatal, Hosi Shilungwa II Mhinga of the Mhinga Dynasty in Limpopo, Hosi Mahonisi in Limpopo where the National Convenor was born, Inkosi Makhosonke Mabena of the Mabena clan in Mpumalanga, Inkosi Mthethwa of Mandeni in KwaZulu-Natal one of the most

intelligent Kings, Inkosi Gumede and Nyawo in Umhlabuyalingana in KwaZuluNatal, The Traditional Leadership Council of Bakoena in Mathibela Royal Council in Mpumalanga, Inkosi Mthimkhulu of Amahlubi in KwaZuluNatal who provides constant and daily guidance to Mayibuye Process, Kumkani Ahlangene Sigcau of AmaXhosa in Eastern Cape, King Tikoe of the Kham Kingdom, King Aran of the Khoi Kingdom in Western Cape, Female King Kgosi Kgaboilelwe Moroka of Barolong boo Seleka in Thaba Nchu Free State who is well versed on issues of traditional leadership as the first woman crowned as Kgosi in her tribe in 2022 member of the National House of Traditional Leaders.



We as Mayibuye fully respect all traditional leaders whether recognised or not recognised by the government. These interactions, spanning rural villages in Limpopo, the hills of KwaZuluNatal, the heartlands of the Eastern Cape, the plains of the Free State, the urban centres of Gauteng, the vast landscapes of North West, the arid regions of Northern Cape, the coastal areas of Western Cape, and the bushveld of Mpumalanga, have been profound. We have listened to their cries of marginalisation, their frustrations with systemic disempowerment, and their aspirations for a dignified role in our nation's future.

We are in a position to formulate a policy perspective on traditional and royal leadership. As this process begins, the sine qua non principle in the formulation of that perspective is that traditional and royal leaders must be involved.

Whilst we will take full guidance from traditional and royal leadership on how they should play a role in government and governance, we as Mayibuye make the following commitments:

1. The national leadership of Mayibuye will report to a council of elders which will be anchored by traditional leaders from different provinces.
2. All Mayibuye leadership structures already have traditional leadership representatives and a standard item that reports on traditional leadership not as voting fodder but as an important institution.
3. Mayibuye Councillors' elections and section process in municipalities that include traditional leadership will directly involve traditional leadership structures and councils.
4. Mayibuye will constantly seek guidance from amongst others, traditional leadership on all issues.
5. When Mayibuye takes government, there will be certain responsibilities and roles in the state which will be reserved for royal and traditional leadership.
6. Mayibuye government will designate representatives of traditional and royal leadership as ambassadors and foreign mission leaders in countries that are led by royalty to foster a meaningful relationship.



This perspective is not born from abstract theory but from practical observation witnessing firsthand how these leaders, once the custodians of our cultural and communal integrity, have been reduced to junior partners in their own lands. It is informed by hours of dialogue, where elders shared stories of lost authority, bureaucratic disdain, and unfulfilled promises. The “juniorisation” of traditional and royal leadership refers to this systematic diminishment, where these institutions are treated as relics rather than vital pillars of society.

This must change. South Africa’s traditional leadership, rooted in thousands of years of African governance, has been ravaged by colonialism, subjugated under apartheid, and tokenised in the democratic era. A total reformation is imperative, drawing lessons from global monarchies while addressing our unique divisions. Afrika Mayibuye, as a consultative process towards a renewed African liberation, commits to elevating these leaders ethically and strategically.



The history of traditional leadership in South Africa is one of resilience amid relentless assault. Before colonial intrusion, indigenous African societies operated under sophisticated systems of governance led by kings, chiefs, and councils. These structures were democratic in their communal essence, with leaders accountable through consensus and customary law. For instance, among the Zulu, Xhosa, Tsonga, Venda, Ndebele, and Sotho peoples, royalty balanced authority with community input, managing land, justice, and rituals.



However, European colonialism, beginning in earnest with the Dutch settlement at the Cape in 1652 and intensifying under British rule from 1795, systematically dismantled these institutions. The colonial project viewed African leadership as a primitive barrier to exploitation, employing divide-and-rule tactics to erode their power.

By the mid-19th century, colonial wars had decimated many kingdoms. The Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, culminating in the Battle of Isandlwana and the subsequent defeat at Ulundi, shattered Zulu sovereignty under King Cetshwayo, who was exiled.

Similarly, the Xhosa Wars led to the subjugation of amaXhosa chiefs, with lands confiscated and leaders coopted or deposed. The British implemented indirect rule, a strategy borrowed from Lord Lugard's model in Nigeria, but adapted harshly in South Africa.

The Glen Grey Act of 1894 in the Cape Colony introduced councils that undermined chiefs by imposing taxes and labour controls, forcing many into subservience. In the Transvaal and Orange Free State, Boer republics further fragmented authority through treaties that recognised chiefs only as administrative puppets.

Colonial suppression extended to other regions, where leaders like Ngunghunyani (also known as Ngungunhane), the last emperor of the Gaza Empire bordering South Africa, resisted Portuguese encroachment but was captured in 1895 at the fortified sanctuary of Mandlakazi after a brutal campaign. He was exiled to the Azores, where he endured harsh conditions and died in 1906 from a cerebral haemorrhage, his kingdom

dismantled and his people subjugated. In the north, King Makhado of the Vhavenda in Limpopo fiercely resisted Boer incursions, inflicting defeats that kept Venda independent until his suspicious death on 3 September 1895, allegedly from poison arranged by rivals possibly in collusion with Boers; following his demise, the Boers swiftly suppressed Venda resistance, occupying the land and imposing control.

Further south, King Moshoeshoe I of the Basotho, a master diplomat who unified clans against invaders, saw his kingdom eroded through wars with Boers (Free State-Basotho Wars, 1858–1868), leading to British annexation in 1868 as Basutoland; though he negotiated partial restoration, the constant pressures and loss of fertile lands effectively destroyed much of his sovereign vision before his death from natural causes on 11 March 1870 at age 84.

Kings and Kingdoms resisted colonialism in all parts of South Africa. King Shaka Zulu, revered for forging the Zulu nation; King Moshoeshoe I, admired for his wisdom and unity among Basotho; King Sekhukhune of the Bapedi, who valiantly fought colonial forces; King Cetshwayo kaMpande, hero of Isandlwana; HintsakaKhawuta of the amaXhosa, a symbol of early resistance; Bambatha kaMancinza, leader of the 1906 rebellion; Queen

Modjadji of the Balobedu, the Rain Queen embodying spiritual power; Autshumao (Harry the Beachcomber) and Krotoa of the Khoisan, pioneers in early colonial interactions; and Mzilikazi kaMatshobana, founder of the Ndebele kingdom.

These figures transcend ethnic lines, inspiring a shared heritage of defiance against colonialism and oppression.



The Union of South Africa in 1910 formalised this destruction. The Native Administration Act of 1927 empowered the Governor General to appoint or remove chiefs at will, turning them into extensions of colonial bureaucracy. This Act, effective from 1927, stripped leaders of judicial powers, relegating them to minor civil matters while criminal jurisdiction fell to white magistrates.

By the 1930s, over 80% of African land was alienated, with traditional authorities confined to reserves. Colonialism not only destroyed physical kingdoms but also disoriented cultural identities, imposing religion and Western education to erode ancestral legitimacy.



As observed in our consultations, elders lament how colonialism “broke the spine” of African royalty, reducing kings to beggars for colonial stipends. This era, spanning from the 17th century to 1948, laid the foundation for further subjugation, with traditional leaders either collaborating for survival or resisting at great cost, as seen in the Bambatha Rebellion of 1906 where Chief Bambatha kaMancinza was killed for defying poll taxes.



Under apartheid, from 1948 to 1994, traditional leadership was further subjugated and disoriented, transformed into tools of racial oppression. The National Party government, elected in 1948 in the whites-only elections, intensified colonial legacies through “separate development”, which is correctly referred to as apartheid. The Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 established tribal authorities, forcing chiefs to administer homelands under white oversight. This Act, promulgated on 17 August 1951, created a hierarchy where chiefs received salaries from the state, binding them to apartheid policies. Noncompliant leaders were deposed; for example, in Transkei, around 30 chiefs were removed in the 1950s for opposing the regime.

The Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959 further entrenched this by creating Bantustans like Transkei (independent in 1976), Bophuthatswana (1977), Venda (1979), and Ciskei (1981), where puppet leaders were installed. Apartheid disoriented traditional institutions by corrupting their essence.



Chiefs were tasked with enforcing pass laws, influx control, and forced removals, alienating them from their people. In Sekhukhuneland, resistance led to the 1958 uprising, where Chief Moroamoche was deposed. The regime used violence; the Pondoland Revolt saw peasants rebel against collaborating chiefs, resulting in over 20 deaths. Our engagements reveal how this era left scars: leaders describe feeling “trapped in a web of betrayal,” where survival meant complicity in oppression. Apartheid’s legacy was a disoriented royalty powerful on paper but subservient in practice, with authority eroded by state manipulation.

The post-1994 democratic dispensation promised restoration but instead treated traditional leadership with disdain, reducing it to tokens in a modern constitutional framework. The interim Constitution of 1993 and the final Constitution of 1996 recognised traditional leaders under Chapter 12, mandating legislation to define their roles. However, this recognition was superficial.

The Municipal Structures Act of 1998 and Municipal Systems Act of 2000 empowered elected councils over communal lands, clashing with chiefs’ customary authority. Traditional leaders were allocated seats in municipal councils (up to 20% nonvoting), but this juniorised them as advisors without real power.

A stark example of this tokenism is the handling of the Ingonyama Trust. Established in 1994 through the KwaZulu-Natal Ingonyama Trust Act, it transferred approximately 2.8 million hectares of land previously under the KwaZulu Homeland to the Zulu king as the sole trustee, aiming to preserve Zulu land sovereignty amid the transition to democracy. However, this attempt has since been effectively reversed through amendments and administrative overreach. The Ingonyama Trust Amendment Act of 1997 introduced a board appointed by the Minister of Rural Development and Land Reform, diluting the king's sole trusteeship. Today, the government exerts significant control over the Trust's operations, including financial audits, land allocations, and policy decisions, stripping away the power that Isilo was supposed to hold as the sole trustee. This has led to ongoing conflicts, with the Trust becoming a battleground for land rights, where traditional authority is undermined by bureaucratic interference.

The Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act of 2003 (effective 2004) aimed to integrate them but perpetuated ambiguity.



It established traditional councils but subordinated them to provincial governments, with disputes over land rights persisting. For instance, the Communal Land Rights Act of 2004 (later struck down in 2010) attempted to transfer land to communities but faced resistance from chiefs fearing loss of control. Post-1994 governments have often viewed traditional leaders as relics, funding them meagerly. The Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (Contralesa) has repeatedly protested budget cuts. In 2019, the Traditional and KhoiSan Leadership Act sought to formalise recognition but has been criticised for bureaucratic overreach.

From our observations, leaders feel like “decorations at state events,” invited to ceremonies but ignored in policy. Conflicts in platinum-rich areas like North West province highlight this: chiefs negotiate mining deals but are bypassed by the government. The ANC's approach, as noted in consultations, has been paternalistic, coopting leaders for votes while sidelining them in development.



This disdain manifests in unresolved succession disputes and underfunded houses of traditional leaders. By 2025, with over 800 recognised senior traditional leaders, their cries echo unheard, symbolising a democracy that honours tradition in rhetoric but juniorises it in reality.



A total reformation of royal and traditional leadership is essential. South Africa must reimagine these institutions as integral to governance, not appendages. This involves constitutional amendments to grant defined powers in land management, cultural preservation, and local justice, while ensuring accountability. Global examples illustrate viable models.

In the Arab world, monarchies blend tradition with modernity. Saudi Arabia, an absolute monarchy since 1932, operates under King Salman bin Abdulaziz (since 2015), who wields executive, legislative, and judicial powers. Governance involves the royal family (House of Saud, over 15,000 members) consulting through the Allegiance Council for succession.



The king appoints ministers and oversees oil development, with reforms like Vision 2030 empowering women and diversifying the economy. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), a federal monarchy since 1971, comprises seven emirates ruled by hereditary emirs.

The President (from Abu Dhabi) and Vice President (from Dubai) lead, with the Federal Supreme Council balancing emirate autonomy and national policy. This structure fosters economic hubs like Dubai, where emirs drive investment while preserving Islamic traditions.

Qatar, an absolute monarchy under Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani (since 2013), centralises power in the emir, who appoints the cabinet and Shura Council. It leverages gas wealth for global influence, hosting events like the 2022 World Cup, while maintaining cultural norms. Bahrain, a constitutional monarchy since 2002, has King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa as head of state, with a bicameral parliament (elected lower house, appointed upper).



The king appoints the prime minister, but reforms post-2011 uprisings enhanced legislative oversight. . Oman, absolute under Sultan Haitham bin Tariq (since 2020), features the sultan as supreme commander, with an advisory Majlis al-Shura elected since 1991. It emphasises diplomacy and economic diversification. Jordan, a constitutional monarchy since 1952, sees King Abdullah II exercise significant influence, appointing the prime minister and dissolving parliament. It balances tribal loyalties with democratic elements, aiding stability amid regional turmoil.



These Arab monarchies, despite their royal leadership structures, demonstrate remarkable economic prosperity, often outpacing many democratic nations globally. This prosperity is largely fueled by vast hydrocarbon resources, strategic sovereign wealth funds, and visionary economic diversification plans, proving that traditional leadership can coexist with modern economic success.

Consider Qatar, which boasts one of the highest GDP per capita in the world. According to 2024 data, Qatar's GDP per capita (PPP) stands at approximately \$112,283, ranking it first in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and among the top five globally. This wealth stems from its enormous natural gas reserves, the third-largest in the world at about 24 trillion cubic meters - enabling it to become the world's largest exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG). Qatar's sovereign wealth fund, the Qatar Investment Authority, manages assets worth over \$526 billion, investing in global sectors like real estate, technology, and finance, which has cushioned the economy against oil price volatility. The country's Vision 2030 focuses on knowledge-based industries, education, and healthcare, transforming Doha into a global hub.

Similarly, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) exemplifies how royal governance can drive economic miracles. With a GDP per capita (PPP) of \$88,221 in 2024, the UAE ranks second in MENA and within the global top 10. Its oil reserves, estimated at 98 billion barrels (eighth globally), have been leveraged through the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, the world's third-largest sovereign wealth fund with \$993 billion in assets. Under the leadership of emirs, the UAE has diversified into tourism, aviation, and renewable energy.

Dubai's non-oil sectors now contribute over 70% to its GDP, with initiatives like Expo 2020 and the Dubai International Financial Centre attracting billions in foreign investment. The federation's model allows emirates like Abu Dhabi to focus on oil while Dubai emphasises trade, resulting in a resilient economy that grew by 7.9% in 2023 despite global challenges.



Saudi Arabia, the largest Arab monarchy, holds the second-largest proven oil reserves at 259 billion barrels, representing about 17% of global totals. Its GDP per capita (PPP) is \$70,333, ranking third in MENA and around 19th worldwide.

The Public Investment Fund (PIF), valued at \$925 billion, is central to Vision 2030, which aims to reduce oil dependency by investing in entertainment, technology, and green hydrogen. In 2024, Saudi Arabia's economy, the largest in the Middle East at \$1.085 trillion nominal GDP, benefited from high oil prices, achieving an 8.7% growth in 2022 before stabilising.

Projects like NEOM, a \$500 billion futuristic city, underscore how royal decrees accelerate development, attracting \$73 billion in foreign direct investment in 2023 alone.

Bahrain, though smaller, punches above its weight with a GDP per capita (PPP) of \$60,715, fourth in MENA. Despite modest oil reserves of 0.2 billion barrels, it has diversified into finance and aluminium production, hosting the Bahrain International Circuit for Formula 1. Its sovereign fund, Mumtalakat, manages \$18 billion, focusing on non-oil growth, which now accounts for 83% of GDP. Oman's GDP per capita (PPP) is \$47,225, sixth in MENA, supported by 5.4 billion barrels of oil reserves. Vision 2040 emphasises tourism and logistics, with the sovereign fund at \$48 billion investing in ports like Duqm.

Jordan, with minimal oil (negligible reserves), relies on royal stability for economic resilience. Its GDP per capita (PPP) is around \$14,000, lower but impressive given challenges, ranking it mid-MENA. The king oversees phosphate and potash exports, with tourism (Petra) contributing 12% to GDP, and a sovereign fund of \$20 billion aiding stability amid regional turmoil.



Collectively, these monarchies control over 50% of global oil reserves in the Middle East, driving their wealth. Their sovereign funds exceed \$3 trillion combined, ranking among the world's largest and enabling global influence through investments in companies like Uber and SoftBank. In global competitiveness, four GCC countries (Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE) rank in the top 30 per the IMD World Competitiveness Ranking 2023. This prosperity contrasts with many democracies struggling with inequality, highlighting how royal leadership, when visionary, fosters economic growth without democratic fragmentation. South Africa can learn that empowering traditional leaders need not hinder progress but can enhance it through unified, long-term planning.



European monarchies offer constitutional models. The United Kingdom, a parliamentary monarchy since the Glorious Revolution of 1688, has King Charles III (since 2022) as ceremonial head.

The monarch assents to laws but power resides with the Prime Minister and Parliament, ensuring democratic accountability while symbolising unity. Spain, restored in 1975 post-Franco, features King Felipe VI (since 2014) in a similar role, with the Cortes Generales holding legislative power. The king arbitrates but does not govern, aiding the transition to democracy.

The Netherlands, constitutional since 1815, has King Willem-Alexander (since 2013) who weekly consults the Prime Minister but exercises no executive power, focusing on national representation. Sweden, since 1974 fully parliamentary, sees King Carl XVI Gustaf (since 1973) as a figurehead, with the Riksdag and Prime Minister governing, emphasising equality and welfare.

These examples demonstrate how monarchies can adapt: absolute ones like Saudi Arabia centralise for efficiency, while constitutional ones like the UK decentralise for democracy. South Africa can hybridise, granting traditional leaders veto on cultural matters while integrating them into local governance.

A key challenge for South African royal leadership is its division in vision and approach. Bodies like Contralesa and provincial houses often fragment along ethnic, political, and ideological lines, with some aligning with ruling parties for patronage while others resist independently. This disunity weakens collective bargaining, as seen in varying responses to land expropriation debates. It must change through unified forums fostering shared goals, transcending tribalism for national cohesion. Without this, reformation efforts falter.



In conclusion, Afrika Mayibuye will embrace and develop traditional leadership, assigning defined roles in community development. Leaders will partner in land reform, education, and economic projects, code-signing initiatives like communal farming and cultural tourism. This elevates them as active agents, not tokens.

Yet, we admit not all traditional leaders embody virtue. Some engage in corruption, such as embezzling mining royalties; sexism, perpetuating patriarchal abuses; and bullying, intimidating dissenters. Afrika Mayibuye will never associate with nor protect such individuals. We advocate accountability, supporting probes and reforms to root out misconduct.

This is not a departure from scientific socialist politics but a continuation and strategic embrace of our circumstances. Socialism adapts to context, integrating indigenous structures for liberation. As Marx noted dialectics, we synthesise tradition with progress for a truly African socialism. Before the national convention, Mayibuye will facilitate a process for all royal and traditional leadership to develop their unique policies on the roles they should play in governance and government. Afrika Mayibuye calls for this change let traditional leadership rise anew.

**By:** Nyiko Floyd Shivambu, National Convenor Mayibuye Consultation Process.

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or  
contact us at [admin@afrikamayibuye.org](mailto:admin@afrikamayibuye.org)



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