

## 1. Introduction

In many countries reaching the interlinked global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will depend on realising peace and security as targeted in SDG16. The context-specific challenges of conflict-affected and post-conflict states require specific intervention<sup>1</sup>. Transitional justice mechanisms have the potential to contribute not only to SDG 16, but to the various interlinked SDGs<sup>2</sup>. The field of transitional justice has been criticised as a top-down, hegemonic force<sup>3</sup> that mirrors a *mission civilisatrice*<sup>4</sup>, wherein those affected by conflict exist in the Global South and those considered experts operate out of the Global North<sup>5</sup>.

This qualitative case study sought to explore leadership capacities believed to deconstruct imperial overtones in a transitional justice training programme that could enable movement towards SDG16. A singular case was examined, through analysis of semi-structured interviews as well as leadership and transitional justice literature. Findings from this case study indicated that authentic leadership capacities hold potential for bridging the North-South gap within cross-national training programmes. This research highlights the potential value of authentic leadership capacities to the fields of transitional justice and sustainable development.

## 2. Context

### 2.1 Transitional justice for sustainable development

Transitional justice refers to mechanisms and processes - both judicial and non-judicial - that are implemented to assist a society to deal with past or ongoing mass human rights violations. Promoting peaceful societies, providing universal access to justice and building effective institutions (SDG 16) is a prerequisite for nations to create stable foundations from which other SDGs may be reached<sup>6</sup>. However, transitional justice is not without its critics, cf. section 1. The foundational five pillars of transitional justice have been criticised for discouraging local perspectives on areas of priorities in transitional sites. The potential for transitional justice to be met with resistance is increased if 'experts' from the Global North display a collective amnesia with regards to the legacies of colonialism in the transitional sites in which they practice<sup>7 8</sup>.

### 3.1 Research problem

Transitional justice practices can contribute to building sustainable peace and reaching multiple SDGs in post-conflict and conflict-affected countries. Within current transitional justice discourse there is, however, a tension between what appears to be North-based leaders advising and intervening in South-based transitional sites. This study used authentic leadership theory as a framework for addressing this North-South tension, so that international cooperation for sustainable peace and development can be maximised.

### 3.2 Aim

This study sought to explore the potential authentic leadership capacities may hold in contributing to transitional justice training in post-conflict and conflict-affected African

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<sup>1</sup> The United Nations, "The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", 2015.

<sup>2</sup> International Centre for Transitional Justice, "On Solid Ground", 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Lambourne, "What are the pillars of transitional justice?", 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Kerr, "Tyrannies of peace and justice", 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Fletcher & Weinstein, "How power dynamics influence the North-South gap in Transitional Justice", 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Lambourne, "What are the pillars of transitional justice?", 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Fletcher & Weinstein, "How power dynamics influence the North-South gap in Transitional Justice", 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Kerr, "Tyrannies of peace and justice", 2017.

countries. In particular, the study assumed there would be some degree of congruence between the four authentic leadership capacities of self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing and internalised moral perspective and key transitional justice concepts of accountability, truth-telling and justice<sup>9 10</sup>. It was predicted that any existing conceptual congruence would indicate that authentic leadership could play a role in bridging the North-South gap in transitional justice training programmes.

#### 4. Method

The perceptions of three leaders of a transitional justice training project, held in Kigali, Rwanda, formed the main units of analysis for this qualitative study. The training programme was designed and implemented by an American organisation, based in New York City. All three respondents were American citizens. The host organisation partnered with four affiliate organisations: two from Africa, one from eastern Europe and another from America. Leaders from these partner organisations were not included in the study. Ten practitioners from conflict-affected African countries participated in the training programme. The participants were not included in this study due to their potential inclusion placing them at risk because of conflict situations in their home countries. Participants attended two workshops in Kigali, in May and July 2019. At the second workshop they each finalised the design of a subgrant project, that would receive \$1000 in funding from the host organisation. Alongside the funding each participant received ongoing support from the host organisation in the form of consultations and digital communication.

A case study design was chosen for this study due to its suitability to research problems that require contextual insight and deep understanding of complex phenomena<sup>11 12 13</sup>. The participants were chosen through purposive sampling based on their in-depth knowledge of the project, their first-hand experience and the likelihood of them being able to provide rich data that would enable the researcher to reach a point of data saturation<sup>14 15</sup>. Saturation was reached through two rounds of semi-structured interviews held with each of the respondents, as well as through analysis of literature on authentic leadership and transitional justice. Semi-structured interview questions were developed based on the four dimensions of authentic leadership, and their perceived conceptual similarity to the five pillars of transitional justice. The data showed overlapping perspectives from respondents that allowed nuanced analysis<sup>16</sup>.

Data was analysed through systematic coding and a research journal was used throughout the research process to record any impressions and control for any biases in the analysis<sup>17</sup><sup>18</sup>. Open and axial coding was used to refine, elaborate, compare and integrate themes, as well as interpret implications of the data. A coding register with inclusion criteria for each code was maintained to ensure conceptual integrity throughout analysis.

To ensure trustworthiness of the data analysis constant comparison was used throughout the data analysis period. Awareness of negative instances and rival explanations was used to combat any assumptions that contradicted the data Interpretations from the analysis were

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<sup>9</sup> Gardener, *et al.* "Authentic Leadership", 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Rodriguez, *et al.* "Authentic leadership and transformational leadership", 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Creswell, *Research design*, 2013

<sup>12</sup> Farquhar, "Case study research for business", 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Yin, "Case study research design and methods", 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Kumar, "Research methodology", 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Yin, "Qualitative research", 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Rubin & Rubin, "Qualitative interviewing", 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Persaud, "Interviewing", 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Wildemuth, "Application of social research methods", 2016

evaluated based on completeness, fairness and empirical accuracy<sup>19</sup> through member-checking of transcripts, and data triangulation<sup>20</sup>.

## 5. Findings

Through data analysis, four major themes emerged from the interviews. These themes enabled interpretations to be extrapolated and related to current leadership, and transitional justice literature. The four themes were collaborative drive, relational trust, mutual respect and awareness.

### 5.1 Collaborative drive

Analysis of data gathered from the case study indicated that the programme leaders' decision making was driven by a strong emphasis on collaboration. This was evident through the leaders' pursuit of feedback from workshop participants in the training programme, as well as partner organisations. The local relevance of the programme was increased due to this strong emphasis on collaboration. While echoed throughout all the interviews, this quote from Participant 1 best illustrates this emphasis on collaboration:

*... how we can make use of the resources that we have to share ...funnelling as much of that support ... directly into communities and working directly in kind of a collaborative way with them, so that all of the work that we are doing is very much driven by local expertise, local needs and you know just local knowledge of the communities (P1:735-744) <sup>21</sup>.*

Participants saw collaboration as a means of breaking down divides between North-based leaders and South-based participants and implementing partners. Participants expressed an attitude of shared responsibility for the programme's success. Participant 1 provided evidence of the value of collaboration and shared responsibility when they said:

*... it's not as though I or the [host organisation], was the only group that had any oversight or responsibility or input in the design of the project. Others from other organisations were very much involved in that ... we would always have meetings and check-ins with everyone to see how they felt, at least among the facilitators including the individuals from [the affiliate organisations in Africa] (P1:2675-2681)<sup>22</sup>*

Collaborative drive was seen to hold particular relevance to the field of transitional justice. The participants indicated that their collaborative approach enabled those in conflict and post-conflict areas, who might be overlooked by large-scale, national transitional justice processes, to participate in the transitional justice process at a community-level. Transitional justice at this community-level was of greater relevance to the everyday person than the more traditional top-down approaches to transitional justice. Participant 2 illustrated this point when they said:

*... collaborating on community level projects because outside of the more formal legal mechanisms I think there is a lot of really rich space for [a] kind of more nuanced programming and I think that there is where the collaboration can come in (P2:3299-3301)<sup>23</sup>*

Evidence of a strong drive for collaboration was present across all the interviews conducted.

### 5.2 Relational trust

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<sup>19</sup> Persaud, "Interviewing", 2012.

<sup>20</sup> Wildemuth, "Application of social research methods", 2016

<sup>21</sup> Brouard, "An exploration of authentic leadership in a transitional justice training programme", 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Brouard, "An exploration of authentic leadership in a transitional justice training programme", 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Brouard, "An exploration of authentic leadership in a transitional justice training programme", 2020.

Analysis of participants' perceptions indicated that cultivating trust through the appropriate sharing of personal stories amongst workshop participants, leaders and implementing partners, was seen as a precursor to building strong relationships. Participant 1 indicated that these relationships formed when stating:

*We had all gone through this experience together and were, sort of had a more bonded kind of trusting relationship I suppose as a result (P1:404-405)<sup>24</sup>*

The data revealed that supporting and trusting relationships were believed to enable effective transitional justice work and were thus a priority for participants. The role of supportive relationships between leaders and workshop participants was evident in Participant 2's statement:

*You can't just come in as a you know a technocrat and lead a project ... when we're dealing with violations to the extent that we do. There needs to be empathy within your leadership, it can't just, you can't disassociate yourself from participants (P2:1589-1592)<sup>25</sup>*

Participant 3 heavily emphasised the importance of vulnerability in cultivating trust and supportive relationships when relaying the story of a workshop participant who shared her experience of a traumatic event with others in the group. Vulnerability and trusting relationships were seen by Participant 3 to enable transformation, as she said:

*... we are in the business of stories and storytelling ... anytime you share a story with somebody, or a personal story, I think it creates a certain bond ... that can be really transformative. The woman who shared the story about female genital mutilation, she shared that with somebody who, this is the second time in person that has met and it took a lot of bravery on her part and again, just completely transformative (P3:1926-1935)<sup>26</sup>*

Sustainability was seen by participants to increase through quality relationships between implementers, partners and workshop participants could ensure the programme's effects would reverberate beyond the official end date of the training. This is evident in Participant 1's statement:

*And it was clear from the outset that this would be a limited term sort of educational programme but our hope was in terms of sustainability ... the relationships established both between participants and between facilitators and participants would extend beyond the funding for the programme (P1:2986-2991)<sup>27</sup>*

### **5.3 Mutual respect**

An ethics of mutual respect was evident across all responses. It was evident that the programme leader's acknowledged and prioritised workshop participants' knowledge and expertise. Participant 1 showed this ethics of mutual respect when she said:

*Some of the insights, as well as the real challenges, the participants shared...were just extremely insightful, and you know for both us and the other participants and just kind of showcased both their, as I've been saying their expertise but also their kind of passion for this work (P1:380-384)<sup>28</sup>*

Through recognising workshop participant expertise, the participants in this study believed they were actively working against any imposing overtones that may be indirectly

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<sup>24</sup> Brouard, "An exploration of authentic leadership in a transitional justice training programme", 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Brouard, "An exploration of authentic leadership in a transitional justice training programme", 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Brouard, "An exploration of authentic leadership in a transitional justice training programme", 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Brouard, "An exploration of authentic leadership in a transitional justice training programme", 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Brouard, "An exploration of authentic leadership in a transitional justice training programme", 2020.

communicated through their position as leaders from the Global North training practitioners in the Global South. Participant 1 emphasised the potential for mutual respect to deconstruct any implicit power dynamics by saying:

*We absolutely have this awareness of being an international US based organisation operating in this space. So, in that sense we'd probably take extra care to make sure that it's clear that we value others input and expertise around these different issues (P1:2905-2908)<sup>29</sup>*

Through an ethic of mutual respect, leaders hoped to increase workshop participant agency and a sense of local ownership amongst those attending the workshop and their communities. A prioritisation of agency and local ownership was evident when Participant 2 said:

*We just take a back seat. We kind of just occupy this active listening space where we are responding to what they are saying, we are trying to gain a better understanding of their, you know what they want to do, and then provide suggestions and guidance right ... because I'm operating from a different perspective ... at my desk in New York ... we firmly believe that people are the experts in their own contexts (P2:1574-1581)<sup>30</sup>*

#### **5.4 Awareness**

All three participants displayed a commitment to awareness as a leadership tool. They indicated that listening, stemming from self-awareness, was a capacity that could enable mutual respect and relational trust. This was evidenced by Participant 2's statement as mentioned in section 5.3.

Self-awareness and an awareness of inherent power dynamics and their links to context were perceived as capacities that could not only reduce potential imposing overtones, but also increase leader listening capacity. Participant 2 indicated the link between awareness and listening to local perspectives when they said:

*... it's more about understanding our perspectives and understanding the context in which we're coming from and the context in which we're operating in. I think there's a lot of awareness ... it's been reinforced so much that really the local or at least local organisations, and local people they know what's best (P2:1184-1189)<sup>31</sup>*

In this sense the participants believed self-awareness could reduce perceptions of the programme as a neo-colonial endeavour. This was illustrated as Participant 2 said:

*[There] is a deep recognition of coming in as a white person into an African space and talking about transitional justice ... there's also you know there's more abstract concept of colonising spaces ... like taking over a space that isn't naturally ours ... we recognise that there is this perception of us coming in and helping, and what we try to avoid is that god-awful saviour, white saviour complex that I think is attached, that dynamic has attached to a lot of peace building humanitarian work ... (P2:1543-1552)<sup>32</sup>*

A commitment to awareness as a means to deconstruct inherent power dynamics was evident across interviews with all three participants.

#### **5.5 Gender and leadership**

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<sup>29</sup> Brouard, "An exploration of authentic leadership in a transitional justice training programme", 2020.

<sup>30</sup> Brouard, "An exploration of authentic leadership in a transitional justice training programme", 2020.

<sup>31</sup> Brouard, "An exploration of authentic leadership in a transitional justice training programme", 2020.

<sup>32</sup> Brouard, "An exploration of authentic leadership in a transitional justice training programme", 2020.

Minor findings emerged related to gender and leadership in transitional justice. The scope and focus of this research, however, did not allow for further exploration of this minor theme. It is advised that future research explore connections between authentic leadership capacities, gender and leadership for transitional justice.

## **6. Discussion**

### **6.1 Conceptual congruence**

As was anticipated, evident instances of conceptual congruence emerged between authentic leadership capacities and transitional justice concepts as they appear in the literature. It was these instances of conceptual congruence that laid the foundation for the interpretation of the findings.

The greatest instance of conceptual congruence existed at the nexus of transitional justice's focus on transparency and authentic leadership's capacity of relational transparency<sup>33</sup>. Conceptual congruence also existed between individual and institutional accountability as goals of transitional justice and authentic leadership's capacity of ethical accountability in business leadership<sup>34</sup>. Ethical accountability should undoubtedly be a priority in transitional sites where national leaders often have to earn back their citizens' trust. This instance of conceptual congruence indicates that further investigating authentic leadership approaches in conflict and post-conflict situations could provide valuable insight into the needs of communities trying to rebuild after human rights violations.

Congruence was evident between transitional justice's fifth pillar (national consultations) and authentic leadership's capacity for balanced processing. Findings showed that through collaborative drive the participants showed balanced processing by actively seeking workshop participant feedback and input in decision making processes. This instance of congruence implies that authentic leadership theory may be relevant to the theory and practice of transitional justice as it has the capacity to address key critiques of transitional justice as being top-down, formulaic, and not centred around victim perspectives.

### **6.2 Self-awareness and epistemic humility**

Awareness, as it was evident in the findings related to authentic leadership's capacity of self-awareness. Self-awareness, in this sense, means that leaders are aware that individual's shape their own realities. While they need to trust their own realities, they should also be aware that theirs is not the only reality<sup>35</sup>. Through this understanding, leaders are able to develop a deep self-knowledge that allows them to engage with their followers without defensiveness. Self-awareness, then, feeds into the capacity of balanced processing.

The participants all displayed self-awareness, especially with regards to colonial legacies and their position as North-based leaders. The implication of this finding was that self-awareness, as it is detailed in authentic leadership theory, may enable North-South transitional justice partnerships that are less likely to meet resistance in post-colonial contexts, due to collective colonial amnesia<sup>36</sup>

Self-awareness was found to be linked to epistemic humility, as indicated in the findings of mutual respect and collaborative drive<sup>37</sup>. Participants displayed epistemic humility in their

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<sup>33</sup> Steffens *et al.*, "True to what we stand for", 2016

<sup>34</sup> Diddams & Change, "Only human", 2012

<sup>35</sup> Diddams & Change, "Only human", 2012

<sup>36</sup> Yusuf, "Colonialism and the dilemmas of transitional justice", 2018

<sup>37</sup> Diddams & Change, "Only human", 2012

willingness to be changed by a two-way exchange with workshop participants and local partners. In this sense, authentic leadership capacities may hold potential to address the key critique that transitional justice silences local voices. The epistemic humility displayed in findings related to authentic leadership capacities, also indicated that authentic leadership may provide ways of addressing the heroic bias of transformational leadership theory<sup>38</sup>.

### **6.3 Internalised moral perspective**

Authentic leadership's capacity of internalised moral perspective enables leaders to regulate their behaviour based on internal values and moral reasoning<sup>39</sup>. Authentic leaders are able to align their own values with those of their organisation and in so doing, they embody a collective identity that is reflected in their sincere actions<sup>40</sup>. The value participants placed on the expertise of workshop participants and partner organisations clearly reflected their own and their organisation's moral perspective. Their actions clearly displayed their internalised, collective and individual, moral perspective as they foregrounded local expertise in how the programme was designed and implemented.

### **6.4 The value of relationships**

A surprising finding was the high degree of trusting relationships that stemmed from personal vulnerability and transparency between leaders and workshop participants. The data showed multiple references to trusting relationships based on appropriate sharing of personal information. This theme of trusting relationships emphatically reflects the authentic leadership capacity of relational transparency as it is referred to in the leadership literature<sup>41</sup><sup>42</sup><sup>43</sup>. An important implication of relational transparency is its potential to enable followers to see themselves as similar to leaders, encouraging them to see themselves as more likely to achieve what their leaders have achieved<sup>44</sup>. Followers seeing themselves as similar to leaders is not only important for the followers' development as a potential future leader, but it also has potential to break down any perceived or inherent divides that may exist between leaders and followers. Again, in this sense, authentic leadership capacities may enable a breaking down of the North-South gap in certain areas within the field of transitional justice.

## **7. Implications for further research**

Data analysis has revealed conceptual congruence which implies authentic leadership theory may hold value for theorists and practitioners in shaping transitional justice as more inclusive. Valuable insights may be gained from research that further explores the reasons why authentic leadership appears to be a suitable leadership model for transitional justice; of particular relevance is the role of epistemic humility, self-awareness and mutual respect. Through such research, greater insight into the needs of people in conflict-affected and post-conflict states could be gained.

Not only could further research into the connection between authentic leadership and transitional justice yield helpful insights for the field of transitional justice, but it may also allow scholars to elaborate the relevance of authentic leadership theory for contemporary contexts, despite its critiques. More research into these connections, with larger sample sizes, and incorporating the perceptions of followers could also provide valuable insights that go beyond the limits of the case study discussed in this paper.

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<sup>38</sup> Fourie & Höhne, "Thou shalt not fail", 2019

<sup>39</sup> Guenter, "What does it take to break the silence in teams", 2017

<sup>40</sup> Steffens *et al.*, "True to what we stand for", 2016

<sup>41</sup> Gardener, *et al.* "Authentic Leadership", 2011.

<sup>42</sup> Rodriguez, *et al.* "Authentic leadership and transformational leadership", 2017.

<sup>43</sup> Northouse, "Leadership theory and practice", 2016

<sup>44</sup> Diddams & Change, "Only human", 2012

## 8. Conclusion

In order to achieve the interlinked targets, set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, special attention needs to be paid to countries that have faced or are facing gross human rights violations. Transitional justice processes may enable conflict-affected and post-conflict states to reach sustainable peace, achieving SDG 16 and providing a foundation from which nations may work towards other SDGs. Transitional justice's North-South gap, however, indicates that imperial overtones, collective colonial amnesia and traditional approaches in the field may render transitional justice mechanisms less effective due to increased resistance and decreased contextual relevance.

This research sought to explore the potential of authentic leadership capacities in bridging the North-South gap in a transitional justice training programme that was implemented in Rwanda. Data analysis revealed clear conceptual congruence between authentic leadership and transitional justice capacities that implies the prior's potential relevance in addressing critiques of the latter. The relevance of authentic leadership theory to transitional justice theory and practice draws attention to a potentially new point of exploration for leadership scholars, despite the existing critiques of authentic leadership theory.

While transitional justice has been criticised for inherent similarities with the liberal peacebuilding agenda, authentic leadership theory may offer a leadership model that allows those leading transitional justice programmes, to focus on locally informed practice and theory. Through self-awareness, mutual respect and balanced processing leaders in the field of transitional justice may conceptualise the role of 'expert' as more inclusive. Most importantly perhaps, the authentic leadership capacity of relational transparency may offer support where there was once a divide, as reflected in the words of one of the programme's participants:

*"On my own I can't really do anything, but now I feel that I have people to walk with."*  
(as quoted by P1: 376-377).

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