LEADERS, FOLLOWERS, AND SUPPORTERS: THE OKANAGAN EXPERIENCE[1]

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Abstract: This article discusses some of the conceptual problems and issues of leadership as this idea is commonly used by social anthropologists in their work among native peoples in Canada. The main argument of the article is illustrated by research among the Okanagan Indians of British Columbia. Although the formulation presented here has no grand theoretical pretensions, an attempt is made to deal with the problem of leadership in both time and space (i.e., diasynchronically). Particular attention is paid to external forces which impinge on the position of local leaders, and on the ideology and actions of followers and supporters of local leaders.

Résumé: Cet article examine quelques-uns des problèmes conceptuels et des questions liés à la façon de concevoir l'idée de chef telle qu'elle est généralement employée par les spécialistes de l'anthropologie sociale dans leurs études des peuples autochtones au Canada. L'article illustre ses propos des recherches faites chez les indiens Okanagan de la Colombie Britannique. Bien que la présentation faite ci-dessous n'ait pas de grande prétension théorique, elle a néanmoins essayé de traiter le problème du chef à la fois dans l'espace et dans le temps (c'est-à-dire « diasynchroniquement »). L'article a également accordé une attention particulière aux forces extérieures qui empiètent sur les pouvoirs des chefs régionaux ainsi que sur l'idéologie et les actions de leurs disciples et partisans.

Most social anthropologists trained in the tradition that takes the ideas of social structure and social organization seriously are bound to have a view of society which is rooted in concepts such as groups, classes, categories, segments, factions and other forms of institutionalized or semi-institutionalized configurations. Closely associated with this perspective of a geometry of the social world (Simmel 1950:21, 152; Spykman 1925) is the assumption that many of these components, notably social groups (both primary and secondary), are made up of leaders and followers. But even those anthropologists who attempt to avoid paradigms based on "groupology" (Boissevain 1968) can never really avoid dealing with the questions of decision-making, leader-

ship, power, and authority, and all the actors involved in these issues.

The term "leadership" is both confusing and complex. While there is a considerable literature in sociology and social psychology dealing with the subject, anthropologists have tended to ignore this work because so few of the concepts and ideas seem to fit their kind of data. The field of anthropology focuses on a wide variety of social and historical contexts, and we are concerned with both past and present, with relations between different societies and communities, with ethnic and cultural relations, with social differentiation, and with rapid social change. Although the same could also be said for sociology, the range of socioeconomic and cultural variation dealt with is much greater in contemporary social anthropology. Anthropology no longer confines itself to the village, band, or tribe, and the field has few boundaries nowadays as we try to juggle the intricate variables which grow out of the synthesis between synchronic relationships, diachronic relationships, and macro-functionalism, i.e., world systems theory (see Wolf 1982). In other words it might be argued that modern social anthropology attempts to use the diasynchronic method to understand the problems at hand.

The concept of "leadership" is used for many different situations as though it can be evenly applied. Thus in studies of Canadian native peoples we might talk of the chiefs in precontact times as being the leaders of the members of their particular tribes. In contemporary times we speak of chiefs and councillors (and sometimes band managers) as leaders. We also refer to the leadership of tribal councils and brotherhoods; and when Canadian native peoples debate at Provincial and Federal levels we see the membership of these assemblies as being made up of the leaders of various associations. But clearly the latter category of leaders are involved in loose-knit relations with their constituencies in a socio-political situation very different from that found in bands at the local level. For a useful example of the free use of the term leadership in wider contexts see the detailed work of Menno Boldt (e.g., 1980, 1981).

Research among the Okanagan people of British Columbia provides some examples to illustrate several problems relating to the use of the term leadership, and the need to analyze leadership within its social context. Three kinds of examples are discussed here: first, traditional Okanagan leadership in pre-fur trade times; second, an example of a fur trade chief; and third, some observations concerning the social positions of contemporary chiefs, and councillors in the context of a contemporary reserve. In writing this paper I have avoided ethnographic comparisons with other Canadian Indian groups because I wish to focus on one small community only and avoid the issues relating to macro analysis.

Traditional Okanagan Leadership

The Okanagan constitute one segment of the interior Salish-speaking people of British Columbia and the states of Washington, Idaho and Montana. Thus, nowadays they live under Canadian and American jurisdiction. They were once a hunting, fishing, and gathering peoples who occupied the territory to the east and west of Lake Okanagan, and southwards to the junction of the Okanagan and Columbia Rivers (Duff 1964; Hill-Tout 1978; Ray 1939; Ross 1956; Teit 1914, 1930).

As a foraging people they leaned towards a band organizational structure. Okanagan bands were loosely structured and consisted of networks of related families that made their headquarters in a particular territory under the leadership of an established headman (*Ilmexum*). A headman was thus not a chief in the sense that chieftainship usually implies leadership over larger numbers of people and the existence of formal councils.

Bands varied in size, and there does not seem to have been any obligation to show permanent allegiance to any one headman, which illustrates the loosely knit nature of Okanagan bands both politically and residentially. Thus a family might spend the winter with one band and summer with another, and these headmen had no real authority or hold over the members of their bands, giving people the freedom to come and go as they pleased. But whether band members remained with one group or another seemed to depend on how their *Ilmexum* played his cards and used his personal influence.

Perhaps the best account of the actual duties, expectations and obligations of these band headmen is given by James Teit. Teit who calls them "band chiefs" writes:

> Chiefs of bands were looked upon as fathers of the people, and gave advice on all internal matters of the band. They exhorted the people to good conduct, and announced news personally or through criers. To some extent they regulated the seasonal pursuits of the people. They looked after the maturing of the berries, personally or by deputy, in their respective districts. They kept time by notching sticks and occasionally made records of notable events. They were often referred to, in case of dispute, regarding dates, the name of the month, etc. They gave decisions and admonitions in petty disputes and quarrels, and sometimes, when asked to arbitrate, they settled feuds between families. They had little power to enforce any decrees. This was done by public opinion. Some of them had messengers or helpers, who acted generally in a persuasive way as peace officers . . . [all chiefs were expected to] help the poor, show a good example, and give small feasts or presents to the people from time to time (1930:262-63).

These band headmen (or chiefs) were not the only dignitaries in the band, and they were assisted (or hindered) in fulfilling their obligations by a number of others responsible for different activities: war chiefs, hunting

chiefs, shaman chiefs and at least two kinds of dance chiefs.[2] Thus the band headman (*Ilmexum*) should always be seen in relation to these other leaders, because Okanagan political organization revolved around this nexus of dignitaries and all of them were involved directly or indirectly with power, leadership, decision-making, and the regulation of conduct in the broad sense.

Whereas the band headman was the most visible and influential of all, chiefs of various kinds achieved their roles by acquiring prestige and personal esteem from those whom they led: through prowess in war; by accumulating wealth and distributing it in feasts; through giving presents or entertainment to strangers; and through their wisdom and council, especially if combined with good oratory.

What this meant in practice was that the Okanagan authority system involved an elaborate division of labour and division of power. Moreover, this scheme highlights the way in which individuals were prevented by their own system from increasing their power and influence beyond limits acceptable to their followers and rivals.

A successful Okanagan political headman (*Ilmexum*) was a person who, through his ability to manipulate social relationships, was able to maintain his office without falling foul of his rivals and lieutenants. In short, chieftainship could be a very precarious business, and must have been riddled with all kinds of jealousies and rivalries as individual political chiefs battled to maintain their popularity ratings. Political headmanship among traditional Okanagan therefore involved a sort of on-going contest between dignitaries, but the main objective of the game from the point of view of the political headman was to draw as many followers as possible into his camp by every legitimate means open to him.

In anthropology the impression is generally given that all hunter-gatherer peoples are conservative and slow-changing. I cannot say this about the Okanagan whose society was characterised by its flexibility and dynamic instability — characteristics that were inherent in the authority structure. The aim of all leaders was to lead into action a stream of wills which were often at variance with one another and generally unpredictable (cf. Miller 1985).

Great Chief Nkwala and the Hudson's Bay Company

The advent of the fur trade as well as the arrival of missionaries in Okanagan territory produced many changes in traditional Okanagan authority structure, an authority structure which had also been transformed by other factors. Some of these factors were intrinsic to Okanagan society, whereas others, such as the acquisition of the horse, were related to contact with neighbouring peoples.

The land-based fur trade in the interior of British Columbia was in full swing during the 1820s (Fisher 1977) and it was during this period that a new

kind of political leader emerged among the Okanagan — the Double Chief. I use the term Double Chief for want of a better concept to show that economic and political leadership now took on a new dimension, serving two kinds of societies at the same time — traditional Okanagan on the one hand, and the capitalist based Hudson's Bay Company on the other (Hudson's Bay Company Archives. See various Reports, Journals and Correspondence 1820-60; Cole 1979).

During the early part of the 19th century several Okanagan headmen seemed to have acquired distinction over others, partly as result of inter-ethnic warfare, and partly through their involvement in the fur trade. One of these headmen named Hwistesmexquen had his headquarters at the head of Lake Okanagan near the present city of Vernon. He was an astute politician, possessed a large herd of horses, and his wealth enabled him to support seventeen wives. Some wives were Okanagan, others came from neighbour-ing people including the Shuswap in whose territory the Hudson's Bay Com-pany had established a main post, namely, Fort Kamloops. Hwistesmexquen ingratiated himself with the Chief Factor of Fort Kamloops and became an important figure in the area. He appears to have been baptized Nicholas (Nicola), a name which soon symbolized his fur trade connection. But he also retained his Okanagan roots and his fur trade name was transformed by his people into Nkwala, and today he is devoutly remembered by a few Okanagan as the most prominent political figure of his time. Indeed in con-temporary ethnohistory Nkwala is characterized as the ''Head Chief of all the Okanagan people'' (see also Teit 1930; Balf n.d. and 1985; Brent n.d.).

Without elaborating, let me merely state that Nkwala derived his reputa-tion from two spheres: the personal esteem with which he was regarded by his own and neighboring bands, and his association with the Hudson's Bay Company. This duality enabled him to build two bases of hegemony, each of which he used to strengthen the other. As a prominent Okanagan, and through his foreign wives, he had access to potential surpluses of furs and fish in the sense that he was able to encourage their delivery to the Fort. As a friend and ally of the fur traders, Nkwala was in an ideal position to act as broker and mediator between the Company and the Okanagan and other native peoples, but his position was more complex and more powerful than a mere trading captain because of his political significance in the region.

Nkwala provides us with an example of a new kind of leader. He enjoyed far more influence, authority, and power than any Okanagan head-man before him because of the new socioeconomic role he played by virtue of being a valued favorite of the Hudson's Bay Company. He was a Double Chief with support from both social spheres in which he operated. He was crafty and a master at manipulating his position as broker, maximizing his profits on both sides. It would be inaccurate though to characterize him as a

mere stooge of the Hudson's Bay Company because he controlled the officials at Fort Kamloops as much as they controlled him (cf. Homans 1951:188-189). Moreover, his power over the Okanagan people increased because of the leverage he had over the fur traders and the access he had to trade goods and other commodities. From the point of view of the Okanagan the new order of chief that Nkwala represented was marked by several characteristics. Perhaps the most significant of these was the fact that Nkwala became the first headman-chief whose followers defined themselves through the allegiance that they owed to him. In other words it was during his era that the Okanagan ceased to be a band type society with informal leadership. Nkwala's leadership marked the transition from what Bertrand de Jouvenel (1957:21) termed a *dux*, "the man who leads into action a stream of wills" to a sort of *rex*, "the man who regularizes and rules." Okanagan government began to develop at this time, and an embryonic court system grew up. Bands ceased to be important, and there is a suggestion that the members of traditional bands and villages transformed themselves into factions as authority moved from the local level to a more centralized position, though the nature of structural change was more elaborate than this.

Nkwala was a special kind of charismatic leader who routinized his charisma quite modestly, and he continued throughout his life as chief to play the game of mediating between a rapidly changing culture and the hegemony of fur trade capitalism.

Chiefs and Councillors: Leadership Indian Act Style[3]

The enforcement of the Indian Act in 1876 created new patterns of authority in the Okanagan Valley, as it did in other parts of Canada. And as the Act was modified over the years so were the reactions of the people who fell under its jurisdiction. One of the most important changes was the demise of the Indian agents (or superintendents) in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the creation of band managers to replace them. But there have been many changes in the administration of native people, and the whole history of leadership under the Indian Act is complex and beyond the scope of this paper (see Ponting and Gibbins 1980; Weaver 1981; Canada, 1984). Here I am concerned quite briefly with some general aspects of Okanagan chiefs and councillors at the present time in the context of one local band.

Provision is made under the Indian Act for the election of chiefs and councillors for two year periods. In the Okanagan Reserve near Vernon, British Columbia, chiefs are elected separately from councillors, a practice which has come to reflect the different perceptions and expectations the people have of their chiefs *vis-à-vis* councillors. In very broad terms chiefs are expected to express the wishes of all band members from the point of view of their traditional "Indianness," however that may be defined (cf. Tanner 1983). But

in point of fact they do not. Councillors are viewed as more practical people who should get things done at the local level in terms of the Indian Act. Chiefs must have charisma to be elected, but any chief who tries to routinize his charisma is immediately accused of violating his responsibility to do what the people expect of him.

The dichotomy between chiefs and councillors is clearly exemplified in nomination patterns over the years, each category being represented by a separate cohort. For example, successful councillors who are elected year after year seldom enter the competition for chief. There are two factors involved. First, there is the question of choice on the part of the candidates themselves. Second, but more important, candidates who are firmly entrenched in the councillor cohort are seldom nominated by their followers for the position of chief. Prior to election time, candidates for chief tend to be preselected, while candidates for councillors are nominated in a somewhat random fashion, and many nominations attract very few votes on election day. Thus in terms of electoral sentiments, chiefs may be said to represent the collective unconsciousnesses of segments of the band membership, the winner in any one election representing the largest cleavage in the community. Councillors, on the other hand, represent factions or clusters of factions as these factions are aligned at any one time.

It is difficult to present the relationship between chiefs and their electorate in concrete terms. Had I been able to administer opinion polls over a long period, it is possible that some concise formula to explain the general principles would have emerged. But in all probability the clue would have been concealed in the confusion that is generated by voting for an ideal, and voting for an ideal believed to be embodied in an individual person.

The suggestion then is that among the Okanagan the chief can no longer be said to lead into action a stream of wills, but rather that a stream of wills determines who the chief will be. In de Jouvenel's sense a chief under the Indian Act is not a *rex*, not merely because he does not regularize and rule, but because he is always at the mercy of an electorate and has no control over the electorate in the absence of formal political parties. It is true that in the Weberian sense his authority is legitimated by a formal election, but he stands apart from the councillors, many of whom may not even regard him as their leader in committee. Under the Indian Act the chief is a person who represents public opinion at one period of time but can never articulate that opinion since the Act does not confer upon him any real executive or bureaucratic powers. Moreover, as representative of public opinion the modern Okanagan chief stands in opposition to the band manager who is the paid bureaucrat (or responsible officer) of the band. It might well be asked then why anyone ever bothers to run for chief, given the chief's political impotence and the ambivalence with which he is regarded. The answer is complex and cannot be dealt

with in any detail here. But there are two crucial factors which I shall men-
tion. First, as I have indicated, candidates for the office of chief are
preselected by the clusters of interest groups who support them. Conse-
quently they have little "free choice" in the matter. Second, chieftainship
sometimes affords an individual the opportunity to increase his personal
esteem in the community by forging informal (sometimes formal) ties with
the wider society. In short the social perquisites of office, such as they are,
come to chiefs from outside the community, and candidates for chieftainship
know this very well.

In contrast to chiefs, band managers are not only secretaries to council,
but they also occupy strategic positions from which they can manipulate the
wishes and actions of the band council by compulsively following the letter
of the law. Band managers do not have the power or authority of the former
Indian agents, but in most bands they are better able to administer the Indian
Act because of their ties to both Ottawa and their respective communities.
They may at times incur the wrath of band members, but they are trusted
because they are expected to know the rules of an Act which is now internal-
ized as part of Okanagan tradition. Band managership is a purely bureaucratic
vocation.

Let us return to the position of chief. In theory he stands at the apex of
the band, a position that is impossible to maintain. Not only must he face crit-
icism for his inevitable and constant failure to create a little utopia in the
white man's space, but he must also be sensitive to the ever-changing self-
perceptions of band-members. They are constantly involved in a process of
re-evaluating their positions within the context of their factional categories,
within their family networks, and in coming to terms with their attitudes
towards local government, pan-Indianism, the Department of Indian Affairs,
land claims, the Canadian Constitution etc. Thus, if a chief fails to be re-
elected to office, the answer lies not in his personal inadequacies, but rather
because of the sociological and ideological positions which he occupies in the
community. The office of chief is predictably hazardous, and no chief can
ever avoid the stigma of having his actions discredited by band members on
the grounds that he is a "government chief."

Contemporary political leaders such as chiefs and councillors, in spite of
their very different roles, are all involved in a general game of strategy within
the context of the Indian Act. Every successful and astute political leader,
even if his period of office is short-lived, tries, once elected, to conduct his
affairs according to three general principles, although the full implication of
these principles may not be consciously perceived:

Principle 1. Promote the Indian Act but do so in such a manner that
your supporters and followers will gain the impression that you have no love
for the white man.

Principle 2. Never rely on any group, faction, opinion, or persuasion in your community for support, even if you think you know who your supporters are. This is the "T.S. Eliot principle." [4]

Principle 3. Manipulate the local status hierarchy in the community for your own ends. This is the traditional Okanagan headman principle.

The reason so many aspirant and potential local leaders fail seems always to relate to at least one of these three principles. The councillor who condemns the Indian Act out of hand may be suspected of plotting to sell land to whites. The chief who sides openly with one faction is often accused of failing in his duty to promote band harmony and welfare. The councillor who does not know how to boost his social position by acquiring personal esteem and by out-maneuvering his rivals renders himself impotent in the next round. Women were unsuccessful in their attempts to be elected to council for more than thirty years until one woman candidate learned the importance of Principle 3, and was immediately elected to office. In the following election two women were elected. It is significant to note in this context that all three of the women elected to office were outsiders in the sense that they married into the band from other communities (cf. Carstens 1966).

General Discussion

Many years ago, I attempted to classify types of leadership in a small reserve in the Cape Province of South Africa in terms of the kinds of authority and/or influence held by people in positions of superordination (Carstens 1966). Part of the problem with that analysis was that it provided some interesting labels for a typology of leadership, but not much else. If that work has any value, it lies in the demonstration that outsiders or aliens often find themselves appointed as "leaders" to certain bureaucratic or official positions in those kinds of communities. But the argument goes little further than that.

I have suggested in this paper that we need to see leaders in much fuller and specific contexts: their sociological contexts, their ideological contexts, and in the contexts of their followers and supporters. This does not mean that "groupology" has to be abandoned in the study of leadership and decision-making. Rather it implies that leaders are not necessarily tied to stable groups with clearly defined memberships, and that special attention has to be paid to the dynamics and caprice of both leaders and their followers and supporters.

The ethnographic data presented in this paper, although limited, are intended to show that as the world of the Okanagan has become more extensive and more complex so the nature of leadership has reflected the wider involvement of people generally.[5] This is a truism, but it does signal the need for closer examination of the context of leadership. For example, it is erroneous to assume that band chiefs in 1985 reflected the aspirations of every member of their respective bands. Chief and band members together do not

constitute a tidy social organizational scheme consisting of a leader and fol-
lowers.

We saw also how the position of headman (*Ilmexum*) of a traditional
Okanagan band could only be understood in terms of his interaction and
competition with other potential leaders, and the relation in which he stood to
his followers and "hangers on." The flexibility and dynamic instability of
traditional Okanagan society were also reflected in its leadership patterns.

During the fur trade a new kind of leader emerged. I have described him
as a Double Chief on the grounds that his authority and spheres of influence
were derived from two sources — his traditional authority and the economic
and political power that he derived from the Hudson's Bay Company. Chief
Nkwala's strength lay in this duality and his ability to act as broker between
two traditions and two economic systems. This role of broker fostered his
charismatic authority and facilitated his ability to transcend the factions that
grew up in place of bands and villages as traditional leadership waned. In the
final analysis, however, Nkwala's position also illustrates the hegemonic
influence of the fur trade over the Okanagan people in general.

The complexity of leaders, followers, and supporters was examined with
reference to chiefs and councillors as they have emerged since the creation
and enforcement of the Indian Act. The Indian Act revolutionized leadership
patterns among the Okanagan and other native peoples. By defining the
parameters of reserve government and its relation to the wider society, the
authority of leaders such as Nkwala was destroyed, and the new leaders had
to work out different strategies for manipulating the power available to them.
It was suggested that among the Okanagan, at least, successful political lead-
ers seemed nowadays to follow three principles or techniques to maintain
their positions.

Thus, in the modern period, chiefs and councillors perform very differ-
ent roles, not only within the context of the Indian Act, but also, it should be
added, in terms of the perceptions people have of the past and of the wider
society. There is some suggestion that in these contexts, a leader can no
longer count on a following and must maintain leadership through supporters
who share common values at a particular period in time.

There is room for extensive comparative research in the whole area of
leadership among Canadian native peoples. Much of it will have to be quite
theoretical, but the results could be of some practical value to native people
themselves for a variety of reasons. It is necessary for us to clarify the frames
of reference in which leaders operate, to understand their motives, and to
comprehend the techniques used by the ruling class to maintain the status
quo. Band government is based on a system devised by Canadian bureau-
crats, and native peoples' leadership patterns on every reserve are a function
of that system (cf. Carstens 1971). Even when local leaders succeed in ma-

nipulating the system to their own advantage their actions always take place in the context of their reserve and the status contingent on that position.

Notes

1. The archival research and field work on which this paper is based were made possible by grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the University of Toronto. I am indebted to both of these institutions for their support. A full analysis of Okanagan society will appear in a later publication, and will include a detailed elaboration of the main ideas expressed here (Carstens forthcoming).

    I wish to thank my colleague, Shuichi Nagata, for comments on an earlier draft of this paper. I am especially grateful to the late Jimmy Antoine for making sure that I understood the difference between an Okanagan headman and a "Government" chief. Various other members of the Okanagan Band (and especially the band council) also contributed to the formulation of these ideas, and I am most grateful to them for their hospitality during my periods of field work.

2. For the purposes of this analysis I have followed the work of James Teit very closely (particularly Teit 1930), but I have also relied on the oral tradition derived from present day Okanagan historians. I have also reformulated some of these ideas and must therefore take responsibility for much of the interpretation of the data.

3. For some additional studies in other parts of Canada see Dunning (1964), Smith (1973), Lithman (1978, 1982), McFeat (1983), Tanner (1983) and Sieciechowicz (1985).

4. In his *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture,* T.S. Eliot wrote, ". . . an indefinite number of conflicts and jealousies . . . should be profitable to society. Indeed the more the better: so that everyone should be an ally of everyone else in some respects, and an opponent in several others, and no one conflict, envy or fear will dominate" (Eliot 1962:59).

5. A detailed elaboration of the themes presented here is dealt with in *The Queen's People* (Carstens forthcoming).

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