

KINSHIP ALLEGIANCE AND DEFERENCE TO ELDERS WORLDVIEW: THE ROOT CAUSE OF DYSFUNCTIONAL GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA

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Abstract

Symptoms and consequences of dysfunctional governance are palpable virtually everywhere in Africa. Discussion of the dysfunctional governance in literature is mostly in popular rather than scientific media perhaps because there is no basis on which a nation-state's governance quality can be assessed objectively. This paper traces the root cause of dysfunctional governance in Africa to the peoples' worldview, especially kinship allegiance and deference to elders, authority and White Man. Ethnicity creates conducive environment for manipulation of electoral process and increases the likelihood of electing incompetent political leaders. The need for loot to meet the expectations of kinsmen and kinswomen is the origin of embezzlement and bribery; should a public office holder retire without loot he becomes an object of ridicule among his kinsmen. Deference to elders limit the participation of younger generation in governance. Young generation of people have limited impact in governance because they do not replace and do not criticize government officials who in most cases are elders. African governments often adopt policies, especially foreign policies that may not be favorable to their countries because they do not face the White Man. Functional governance requires that the root cause of bad governance, namely Africans' worldview should be changed. But peoples' worldview is fundamental and does not easily lend itself to change. Besides Africans have over time depended on their worldview to survive difficult conditions such as slavery, colonialism, and other man-made and natural disasters.

Key Words: Africa, Governance, Worldview, Cosmology, Kinship

Introduction

There is no basis on which a nation-state's governance effectiveness and quality can be assessed objectively and meaningfully (Rotberg 2005 and Agbadam 2017). But governments elected by the people periodically through free and fair process that is not plagued by corruption, nepotism, etc. are not common in Africa. Rather symptoms and consequences of dysfunctional governance are palpable virtually everywhere in the region since the nations gained independence from colonial masters around the year 1960. Examples include sit tight presidents in Zimbabwe until recently and in Uganda presently and manipulation of electoral process in Nigeria. Examples also include corruption and nepotism, exploitation of surface and underground natural resources without regard for ecology and for the future, lodgment of funds of uncertain sources in private accounts in European, North

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American, Arab and Asian countries by African political class. Africans who have the means are eager and proud to take vacation, have medical treatment and send their children for education in those countries and make no effort to develop facilities for the essential purposes in their own countries. Africa is not unique with respect to any of these evils as there are such problems at varying degrees in some other parts of the world but this paper is about Africa. Why has flawed governance persisted in Africa after more than half a century of political independence from colonial powers? Observers focus attention on the symptoms and consequences and not on the cause. This paper traces the root cause of dysfunctional governance to the people's worldview, especially kinship allegiance and deference to elders.

Definition of Concepts

Worldview or cosmology is the fundamental concepts concerning the universe; it is the understanding, attitude of mind, logic and perception behind the manner in which a people think and act in different situations of life; it is a people's way of looking at the world and interpreting reality (Tempels 1952, Mbiti 1969 and Arinze 1982). Kinship allegiance and deference to elders (understood in Africa as respect for elders) are among elements of worldview that are common to African peoples.

Several races of the world are represented in the African continent (Mbiti 1969). The Negroid people are found in every part of the continent, they are dark-skinned and curly-haired and they make up the bulk of human population in the continent. The Mongoloid people are concentrated in the island of Madagascar; the Bushmanoid people are scattered in Eastern and Southern Africa; and the Pygmoid people are found mostly in the Congo region. The Caucasoid and other non-curly haired non-dark skinned people including Arabs and Asians are in the extreme Southern, North-Eastern and Northern Africa. In this paper African people refer to the Negroid people.

In Africa kinship is a vast system that is wide horizontally stretching in every direction to embrace everybody in any given local group. Each individual is a brother or sister, husband or wife, father or mother, grandmother or grandfather, brother-in-law or sister-in-law, uncle or aunt to everybody else. It is like a ripple spreading from the center, namely the nuclear family to extended family to clan to tribe. Outside a village anybody from that village is a brother or sister; that is true also with respect to clan and tribe. In Nigeria people do not establish legal residency outside their village of origin. People are always from where their father is from; this means where their grandfather, great grandfather, great-great-grandfather *ad infinitum* came from. Legal residency is not a birth right outside the village of origin of the individual's descendant. For example, someone of Igbo origin cannot be a legal resident in Yoruba tribal area and *vice versa*.

The kinship system is also deep vertically stretching back in time to encompass a long line of ancestors as far back as living individuals can remember or have been taught. It is part of traditional education for children to learn the genealogies of their descent (Mbiti 1969). People commonly trace with pride a long list of their ancestors by name. For example, a Nigerian politician, Festus Odimegwu was able to trace his bloodline back in time for almost 1000 years to prove his full blood

Igbo tribal origin (Ejiofor 2015).² Ancestors are members of the clan who have died but are still capable of agency or capacity to initiate actions that have consequences for the living (Brown 2004).

The kinship system provides support that helps Africans to survive difficult conditions created by natural and man-made crises such as civil strifes, droughts and floods that have been frequent in the region over time. Whenever such disaster strikes people seek the support of relatives near and far as there are no institutional arrangements to help them absorb the shocks. Africans survived extreme brutality inherent in both slavery and colonialism and averted extinction perhaps with the help of kinship support. With forced labor in mines, plantations and in exploitation of forest resources colonialism was as brutal as slavery (Rodney 1973). But compared with the rest of the world Africa can hardly be said to have thrived. Among the regions of the world poverty index is highest in Africa where mass poverty is masked by extremities in income distribution (Nweke and Matlon 2017 and Rodney 1973).

An elder is a member of an older generation, such as parents' generation, and grandparents' generation back in time to include ancestors who are still remembered by name who are capable of agency. Within the same generation, anybody who is older is an elder. In most places age grade organizations exist and a member of an older age grade organization is an elder (Chiorazz 2015). Members of one age grade are considered equal although the members know who is older because they were born in the same community. Among Africans age is associated with wisdom. Where history is passed on by word of mouth from one generation to another old people tell the stories of the tribe. Africa is a region of the world without a developed script of her own (Isichei 1995).

In Africa the White Man and people in various positions of authority are placed in elevated positions similar to that of elders and they too are deferred to just as elders. The term "White Man" features in this paper in its generic and broad sense, i.e. the average African's understanding of it. It is used to refer to people who are non-curly haired and non-dark skinned. An average African understands the White Man to include the Caucasoid, the Arab and the Asian of every description; this is all white, red and yellow skinned people. The African views the White Man with both dread and awe, the White Man was the slave trader and colonial master who was lord and master of everybody including their elders; he was the trader who brought manufactured goods such as guns, clothing, tobacco, and alcohol; above all he is a master of technology.

People in positions of authority include chiefs and members of council-in-chief; elected and appointed government officials; wealthy people in the community; and human specialists in mysticism such as diviners, rainmakers, seers, sorcerers, witches, etc. that are believed to have powers of clairvoyance, precognition, telepathy, etc. The offices of these individuals are usually regarded as divinely instituted and they are looked upon both as political leaders and sacred personages and community people go to them individually and communally for counsel on spiritual and secular matters (Mbiti 1969 and Dike 1966).

Peoples' worldviews do not easily lend themselves to change or to foreign influence. Worldwide, age old white-black prejudice or black-white prejudice has not abated (Tempels 1948, Mbiti 1969

² Mr Odimegwu boasts "My full name, for instance, is Eze'kulie Festus Anthony Boniface Oha Odimegwu Okonkwo Nwa-Uboh Ikpendu Ndieze Umuzo Okanadiji UbiriElem... Nnemiriukwu-Chukwuabiana" (Ejiofor 2015, p. 3).

and Isiechei 1995). In the specific case of Africa, Western education has produced only superficial impact on the fundamental beliefs of the people. Tempels reports that "... among our Bantu we see the *evolues*, the civilized, even the Christians, return to their former ways of behavior whenever they are overtaken by moral lassitude, danger or suffering" (Tempels 1948, p17)³. More recent than Tempels, several other experts in African religions and philosophy made similar observation about other peoples of Africa; they include Anderson (2002), Isichei (1995), Kalu (Christian History 19??), Mbiti (1969) and Olupona (Chiorazzi 2015). African children who attend elite schools in urban centers display boldness and inquisitiveness but with time as they grow up they acquire proper behavior and defer to elders as they are expected. African political leaders and policy makers bear the brunt of blame for bad governance but when African critics find themselves in positions of authority they commonly toe the line. Political leaders usually start with good intentions and high sense of patriotism but if they stay long enough in office they embrace the evil. Exceptions are few; in Africa selfless leaders are like eagles, they do not congregate and they appear one at a time and far in between.

Literature Review

In literature discussion of poor governance in Africa is mostly in popular rather than scientific media perhaps because there is no basis on which a nation-state's governance effectiveness and quality can be assessed objectively and meaningfully (Rotberg 2005 and Agbadam 2017). Most of what is available in the popular media on the subject is on symptoms and consequences and hardly on the cause. For examples, in Africa, poor governance has led to poor economic growth manifested through corruption, political instability, ineffective rule of law and institutions (Agbadam 2017). Bad governance and corruption are symptoms of leadership and institutional failure in African countries (Owoye and Bissessar 2019). The most important driver of violence and conflict in Africa today is weak and unconsolidated governance. Bad governance doesn't just undermine development; it also drives violence (Anon. 2018).

In 1992 the United States National Academy of Sciences organized three workshops in in Benin, Ethiopia and Namibia on the theme "Democratization in Africa: African Views, African Voices." The aim was to better understand the dynamics of contemporary democratic movements in Africa and African opinions about how democracy can be most effectively encouraged (National Research Council. 1992). The workshops used research on various aspects of democratization as a springboard for discussions. Participants included scholars, journalists, lawyers, political activists, government and nongovernmental organization officials from over 40 countries. What the workshops identified as reasons for poor governance in African countries are more of symptoms than causes, namely personalized nature of rule, the failure of the state to advance and protect human rights, the tendency of individuals to withdraw from politics, state control of the economy and the extreme centralization of power in the hands of few people (Democracy and Governance in Africa | Democratization in ... <https://www.nap.edu/read/2041/chapter/5>)

Analytical Framework

Econometric regression model in which dysfunctional governance in Africa is the dependent variable and kinship allegiance and deference to elders are the explanatory variables can be a

³ *Evolues* are people who have been exposed to French culture.

powerful tool of analysis to establish the degree of statistical correlation between the dependent and each of the explanatory variables if the variables are quantifiable. But there is no basis on which a nation-state's governance effectiveness and quality can be assessed objectively and meaningfully (Rotberg 2005 and Agbadam 2017). Also quantitative indices are difficult to establish objectively for the explanatory variables, namely kinship allegiance and deference to elders. Mathematics is a branch of philosophy but some other branches rely on logic to establish cause and effect relationship between variables because the discipline deals with unquantifiable variables most of the time. For similar reasons this paper is based on the analytical framework of logic rather than quantitative modelling.

Source of Information

The author was born by Igbo parents and grew up in Eastern Nigeria in the 1950s and 1960s under the influence of his grandparents who exposed him to African faith tradition from early childhood. He went to school and later served as the Project Leader of the Collaborative Study of Cassava in Africa (COSCA studies) conducted under the aegis of International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Ibadan from 1989 to 2002. In that capacity the author interacted closely with farmers for fourteen years, sometimes staying with them for days in their homes in 281 villages in six countries, namely Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda and Tanzania. Later in 2012 and 2013 the author conducted a similar study on yam in West Africa sponsored by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The COSCA studies are summarized in the book The Cassava Transformation: Africa's Best Kept Secret, 2002 by Felix Nweke, Dunstan Spencer and John Lynam. The yam study is summarized in Yam in West Africa: Food, Money and More, 2016 by Felix Nweke. In these studies the author gained insight into the aspirations and anxieties of the peoples of these countries. The author later studied African religions and philosophy by reading such authors as Arinze, Basden, Brown, Dike, Donkor, Gbadegesin, Isichei, Kalu, Kutor, Mbiti, Olupona, Tempels and Wiredu.

The African Worldview as the Origin of Dysfunctional Governance

A root of bad governance in Africa could be found in the elaborate kinship system that leads to social polarization and increases the likelihood of electing incompetent political leaders (Easterly and Levine 1997). Ethnicity creates conducive environment for manipulation of electoral process and to politically motivated violence. In national elections, people vote for their tribe's man whether or not the candidate is suited for the position. The implication is that the largest tribe nearly always produces the head of state. If an incumbent decides to hold on to power beyond his constitutional tenure his tribe's men who are in the majority stand behind him. When majority tribe's men are vocal as it is often the case about the fact that their tribe's man will always be president, people of minority tribes may lose patience and resort to agitation or violence.

In Africa presidents are powerful while public institutions are weak. The power of the presidents derives from their constituencies, namely their tribe's men and women who vote for them in elections and who assure that they are reelected as many times as they desire irrespective of dismal performance. Public institutions are weak because the presidents override them without respect for the law. A policy that is inimical to national interest may be adopted if it favors a particular ethnic group (Easterly and Levine 1997). The institutions are weak also because often they are staffed with incompetent and ill qualified individuals. Top executive positions are filled with tribal loyalists of the presidents while nepotism is important consideration in filling rank and file positions.

Corruption practices in most Africa countries are due to clan base thinking (Kwasi 2018). Appointment to a public office is celebrated by the kinsmen of the incumbent because through him they expect to have access to public resources. Should the incumbent retire without loot he is a disappointment and he becomes an object of ridicule among his kinsmen. The need for loot is the origin of embezzlement and bribery which are symptoms or results of bad governance. Culprits when apprehended often get away unpunished; they are defended or protected by their kinsmen and kinswomen.

Obedience to elders is among the goals of educational period in Africa; curiosity is discouraged in childhood education (Wiredu cited in Donkor 1998, p. 117). From infancy a child is taught to be submissive to adults and to accept what is taught to him literally believing in the infallibility of adults. Children observe and imitate adults obediently (Donkor 1998). The young does not know because they are young, it is the elders who know (Tempels 1952). Children do not talk back to adults or refer to adults by name. A child is in a position of shame before an adult; he lowers his head and avoids looking straight into an adult's face. That an individual does not stand tall before an elder (anyone older) is on display when a Yoruba person greets an elder; the younger prostrates flat on the ground face down. All these mean that traditionally one does not challenge anyone who is his senior by age.

In most African countries, aged people constitute the political class and they stay long in office sometimes for life. Young generation of people have limited impact in governance because they do not replace and cannot criticize government officials who in most cases are elders in the country. There are opposition parties in governments that oppose the ruling party in most of the countries. But back to constituencies, individual politicians face limited opposition. Questions when fielded to them are well guarded so as not to be seen as impudence to an elder or to someone in authority.

People in positions of authority have considerable influence on national and regional elections and in governance. Members of the community depend on the advice of chiefs and members of council of chiefs on which political party to support and which individual politicians to vote for. At this level vote trading takes place and politicians are guaranteed of kinship support. Clansmen demand contributions towards community projects such as churches, mosques, schools, etc. and favors in government jobs and contracts, etc. from politicians and government officials. To meet such demands, the politicians and government officials engage in bribery, nepotism and embezzlement of public resources. Human specialists in mysticism embolden politicians and government officials with promise of protection against apprehension if the officials commit fraud in government.

The African's view of the White Man has far reaching impact on governance in Africa. African governments often adopt policies, especially foreign policies that may not be favorable to their countries because they do not face the White Man. Examples include acceptance of free food aid to feed the urban elite and policy of importation of cheap food and agriculture-based raw materials that can be produced within Africa. These policies undermine African agriculture by depriving the farmers of domestic markets thereby keeping them in poverty. African governments condone and foreign governments do not object to African political elites lodging funds of uncertain source in European, North American, Arab and Asian countries of every description. Often under the prodding of foreign governments and businesses African governments take loans with high interest burden from the foreign countries.

African governments are also helpless with respect to exploitation of surface and underground natural resources by foreign businesses sometimes without regard for the ecology and on terms and conditions that are not always favorable to the African countries. This is a reminder of the book, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa by Walter Rodney (Rodney 1973). African governments are helpless first because they tend to be shy in the presence of the White Man and second because they do not have the technology needed to access the resources. Most Africans who can afford it are eager and proud to take vacation, go for medical treatment send their children to school in European, North American, Arab and some Asian countries while not paying attention to develop facilities for those needs.

Synthesis

This paper traces the root cause of dysfunctional governance in Africa to the peoples' worldview especially to kinship allegiance and to deference to elders, authority and the White Man. The underlying value judgment is that functional government, i.e. government elected by the people periodically through free and fair process that is devoid of corruption, nepotism, etc. is desired for Africans. To enthrone the desired governance requires that the root cause of dysfunctional governance, namely Africans' worldview should be removed. Two questions arise; one is should the worldview be eliminated in order to eliminate the root cause? Africans have depended on their worldview to survive under difficult conditions such as slavery, colonialism, and other man-made and natural disasters that plague the continent over time. But survival is one thing, thriving is another; compared with most of the rest of the world Africa has not thrived.

The second question is if the African worldview should be changed can it be changed? Peoples' worldview die hard; they are fundamental and do not easily lend themselves to change or to foreign influence. Does that situation imply that Africans are doomed to live with bad governance indefinitely? If not what can be done to promote functional governance, i.e. government elected by the people periodically through free and fair process that is devoid of corruption, nepotism, etc.? These and other questions need to be investigated.

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