Indigenous Africa's Governance Architecture: A Need for African Public Administration Theory?

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Abstract

The African continent has suffered a rather tormented history, following different historical epochs like shadows of colonialism, conquest, neo-colonialism, global capitalism and foisting upon the western organizational management/leadership practices. The indigenous systems of governance are so much neglected that they hardly receive the significant scholarly attention they deserve in most public administration write ups and curricula in African universities. This article sheds light on Africa's indigenous administrative systems, which have been portrayed as rather troubled, chaotic and biased in the literature, especially where western ideas are portrayed as superior to indigenous systems. The article suggests that African scholars are primarily duty bound to portray a better picture of the administrative structures. The tendency, by the architects of the colonial enterprise, to believe that Africa had no administration worthy of the name needs to be rejected, while compelling facts and examples to solidify the robustness of the pre-colonial governance apparatus are advanced. This article advocates for a deeper understanding of the indigenous governance, administration and management systems, practices that, when well documented, should inform a theory of African public administration. The article examines two opposing views in the existing literature, but relies on the second set of ideas.

Introduction

To pause and question whether African societies had administrative systems worthy of the name, before the colonial epoch, attracts two opposing views. First, is the negative view that construes Africa to have been a mere dark continent without any sense of organization. The second confirms how African societies, at the time, had systems to manage public affairs that constituted an administrative system. This article subscribes to the second school of thought. While most attempts at understanding Africa's indigenous administrative systems convey them as potentially troubled, chaotic and biased with western ideas portrayed as superior to "indigenous systems", the article

defends the fact that African scholars are primarily duty bound to portray a better picture. The tendency of the architects of the colonial enterprise is to believe Africa had no administration needs to be countered with compelling facts and examples to solidly illustrate the robustness of the pre-colonial governance apparatus, especially given the time perspective.

Nwagbara[1] reports how the African continent has suffered a tormented history, following different historical epochs with shadows of colonialism, conquest, neo-colonialism, global capitalism and having western organizational management/leadership practices foisted on it. The indigenous systems of governance are so much neglected that they hardly receive scholarly attention in Public Administration curricula in African universities. Some Public Administration scholars may not even imagine the existence of an indigenous governance apparatus worth historicizing during the teaching of public administration. In such circumstances, the warning of Sharma *et al.*,[2] against all efforts at ignoring indigenous knowledge as leading to a failure in people's development, suffices. Indigenous knowledge on governance infrastructure, as it existed before the colonialists arrived, is an important body of knowledge to complement the conventional science/knowledge of public administration. In fact, indigenous knowledge is a bedrock for a full appreciation of our contemporary governance problems. That is why Dia[3] posited that many of Africa's problems, of modern times, emanate from a structural and functional separation between informal, indigenous

institutions as rooted in Africa's history and culture and formal institutions that are mostly transplanted from outside. Ball and Peters[4] also insist on how the classical political theorists are important, especially in regard to the nature of the questions they posed, and how ignorance concerning this isolates any student of politics from some of the communication that passes among political scientists. Indigenous practices of governance, as they existed, are therefore so paramount that some solutions to today's governance challenges have a locus on this historical epoch. Public administration scholars, therefore, should not allow themselves to be isolated from any attempts at exploring the truth and expanding our understanding of indigenous knowledge.

Structurally, governance deals with the specific functions and responsibilities of different machineries of government or institutions within a given society and/or state as Kalu[5] ably demonstrates. Society, through various stages of evolution, has had some form of governance structures although their complexities have also increased along the journey toward civilization. While Africans might have lived a "miserable" life in one form or another before colonialism, it is completely wrong to posit that pre-colonial Africa was devoid of systems of administration or social organization. It is the duty of African scholars to diligently espouse the true story of how pre-colonial African societies were organized socially and politically. Osabu-Kle[6] posits strongly that if democracy is truly the government of the people by the people, the shape and

conditions of African democracy should be determined by Africans and not outsiders. In the same vein, the knowledge and theories of Africa's administrative systems should be determined by African scholars not outside scholars. This is not to suggest that all outsiders have failed us in our understanding of our systems. A Public Administration theory and well documented practices need to be studied by African scholars, not outsiders. Nohlen[7] was possibly correct when he commented that sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has been at the receiving end of a myriad of developmental experiments ranging from modernization concepts to self-help and good governance approaches. Some writings on Africa have undoubtedly tended to be biased. Lucy Mair,[8] in her book *Primitive Government*, for instance, states that it is a fact of history that it was the European peoples who discovered the others and, in most cases, established political dominion over them, and not vice versa. The Europeans, in her view, possessed technical superiority in a number of fields and the techniques of the peoples who came under European rule were rudimentary, and so were their systems of government. Ake,[9] however, hits back at such a description of Africa's pre-colonial governance, warning that it is bad enough for the rest of the world to insist on representing Africa as the ultimate victim of original sin, a sad forsaken place where nothing good or noble ever happens. Njoh,[10] in his excellent attempt at historicizing the African governance systems before colonialism, ably demonstrates how the continent indeed had robust and sophisticated administrative systems for managing affairs. He

does this by elaborating on the governance structures as they existed, a debate that this article examines extensively.

Chanie[11] wonders in his *Trajectory of Public Administration in Africa* why, after some fifty years of independence and with the putative efforts of the western world trying to help, theories of African governance structures are still unimpressive. A handle on those reasons is pivotal to any solution to Africa's problems, he suggests. He advises that to put current public sector reform in context, a rear-view mirror is necessary. This rear-view needs to focus on a rather unfamiliar academic territory – indigenous system of governance. While Giovanni,[12] heaps the misery of African countries on the return of political parties that he argues produced a discontinuity not only in the continent's political life, but also in the study of African politics. Ake[13] in *The feasibility of democracy in Africa* was of the view that the history of Africa has been one long emancipatory struggle against all manner of oppression that was orchestrated by slave traders, overzealous missionaries, French ideologues, British colonizers, home grown dictators and foreign imperialists.

This article advocates for a deeper understanding of indigenous governance, administration and management systems, practices that, when well documented, should inform a theory of African Public Administration. The article examines two opposing views in the existing literature, but relies on the second set of ideas. One view, espoused by post-colonial architects suggests that

pre-colonial Africa did not have a governance apparatus worth talking about. The second, however, vehemently refutes that stance by advancing a number of arguments to support their claims. The article advocates for the teaching of Public Administration in African universities as an important ingredient for adopting local content in tackling the numerous African problems caused, partly, by the destructive foundations that the continent went throughout at the onset of colonial domination. The article suggests an urgent need to coin an African Public Administration theory whose terms of engagement include, among others, documenting and historicizing the African administrative and governance systems and political thoughts. It further attempts to allay fears among African scholars about venturing into the muddy waters of penning the theory and practices of African public administration and governance, especially in as far as the pre-colonial epoch is concerned.

Conceptual Framework

This section explains what constitutes indigenous knowledge and what is meant by the indigenous governance apparatus. Indigenous Knowledge (IK) means local knowledge that is rather unique to a given society and denotes deep understanding of that society and the beliefs and customs of that society. It contrasts with the international knowledge system.[14] However, as Chambers[15] rightly states, IK is often marginalized and given low priority in mainstream studies. This is true of public administration as well. The fact that, as Chambers suggests, many professionals tend to scoff at or criticize such knowledge systems, viewing them as nonsensical, superstitious, irrational and mythical, provides us with an opportunity to resurrect the story of Africa's systems and develop a new theoretical basis for the teaching of our future generation.

If governance involves the evolving processes, relationships, institutions and structures by which a group of people, community or society organizes themselves collectively to achieve things that matter to them,[16] and has both formal and informal structures and processes,[17] pre-colonial Africa had such a governance mechanism. Such governance within communities involved strengthened decision-making and control over their organizations, and building on people's skills, personal and collective contributions, and shared commitment to an organization's chosen governance processes, goals and identity.[18]

Indigenous governance relates to the variety of skills, teachings, wisdom, ideas, perceptions, experiences, capabilities and insights of people, applied to maintain or improve the governance of society. Such indigenous knowledge is seen to exist in a local context anchored to a particular social group in a particular setting and usually at a particular time period.[19] Within this context, the African governance apparatus is essentially about how African societies were organized socially, administratively and politically to manage public affairs before colonialism. Such governance arrangements were dependent on predetermined societal values,

customs and beliefs, which every member of a particular society was expected to comply with. Failure to comply with the agreed governance arrangements attracted harsh punishments. While indigenous knowledge is often portrayed as unscientific by western scientists and considered backward, conservative, inefficient, inferior and based on ignorance or myths, and that it should be replaced by foreign efficient technologies,[20] such knowledge has the potential to build a theory of African Public Administration.

Ghale and Upreti[21] insist that, despite its perceived usefulness, indigenous knowledge is often ignored in favour of modern technical knowledge from the western world. However, it is important to respect and understand people's indigenous knowledge systems and to build on such knowledge as a basis for understanding contemporary challenges.[22] Public administrators tend to the public's business such as building bridges and highways, collecting garbage, putting out fires, ploughing snow, spraying for mosquitoes and providing essential social services for the less fortunate.[23] The African public administrator also has a set of activities that do not necessarily represent the complexity portrayed by the western examples of the activities of a public administrator.

Gladden[24] reminds us how some form of administration has existed ever since there have been governments. Within Africa, some form of organization has existed since man started living in organized societies. Hughes[25] declares that public administration has a long history, long enough to parallel the very notion of government. It is obviously clear that some form of governance has been inevitable in the long history of mankind. Public administration involves the delivery of mail, collection of trash and licensing of motor vehicles to the dramatic event of getting a man to land on the moon, the dispatching of Peace Corps volunteers to scores of countries and the development and control of energy resources.[26]

First, there have to be people, as administration involves people. A stone lodged in the earth on the side of the hill is not administration, nor does a stone that, through some act of nature rolls down a hill constitute administration. People have to be present before administration can take place. Second, administration is action. Two men watching or admiring or leaning on a stone do not, in their inactivity, constitute administration. They have to be doing something before administration can enter the picture. Third, administration is interaction. One man moving a stone, or two men, each of whom is moving a stone independently in a direction different from the other one, are not examples of administration in action. In order for their actions to be administration, they must in some way be related. There must be some coordination, even if such is in the background, about what the two men are doing. This broad scope of public administration has forced some scholars to question whether there will be a generally agreed definition of public administration. Some have argued that the scope of the subject is so great and debatable that it is easier to explain than to define.

INDIGENOUS GOVERNANCE ARCHITECTURE

This section seeks to provide answers to three connected questions. First, did pre-colonial African societies have a governance mechanism worth historicizing and teaching within Public Administration schools in African universities? Second, if the answer to the first question is in the affirmative, what governance apparatus actually existed in pre-colonial Africa that should inform the suggested discourses? Third, were pre-colonial governance and administrative systems perfect in the management of public affairs? The dividends derived from answering these questions are central in advocating for an African Public Administration theory.

Indigenous administrative systems have a wealth of knowledge scattered across many disciplines, and it is a challenge to African Public Administration scholars to document a common administrative theory. How can they assemble all this knowledge into a common body of knowledge that will form an African Public Administration theory? This challenge was posed many years ago during the development of the discipline of Public Administration. There are unique practices within the African context that, when assembled, will generate a rich understanding of African Public Administration.

In 1947, Robert Dahl deflated the science of administration, a year after Simon Herbert, in 1946, had effectively punctured the politics-administration dichotomy. Many European scholars quickly assembled themselves

around a new theoretical paradigm they labeled Comparative Public Administration. Mixed within the development administration argument, comparative administrationists attempted to address a sharp challenge that Dahl had put against Public Administration, insisting that public administration would never qualify to be a science unless it took a comparative perspective. Global research on development administration remained dominated by western thoughts and ideas owing to the western origins of the sub-discipline; an easy development that demonstrated an unhealthy dominance by western ideas that effectively hampered scholarship on development administration among African intellectuals and academics whose works were often dwarfed by their western counterparts, if such works existed. African scholars demonstrated a total lack of rigour and commitment in documenting the unique features of African administrative systems, which were, by modern standards, sophisticated (although they had some weaknesses).

At its core, Africa's problem has remained that of underdevelopment where people are poor, resources are under-utilized, and the institutions established are ineffective in facilitating the very individual and collective action needed to resolve the problems of society.[27] It is such a state of affairs that possibly informed the views of Chanie[28] who wonders why so much is still unimposing in Africa, despite some modest help from western countries. It is possibly not out of context to insist that the failure of these institutions cannot be divorced from the cultures, beliefs

and customs that long provided a nuclear for the social governance infrastructure within the context of African values. An attempt at finding answers to the question as to why Africa remains underdeveloped should have its central unit of analysis focused on the nature of administrative systems that have driven African society over time.

Existing scholarship on Africa's administration systems takes two major orientations. The first group of literature is bent on denying that Africa had any system of governance before colonialism.[29,30,31] Amaeshi and Yavuz[32] insist that it is very difficult, in the context of sub-Saharan African countries, to conceptualize and identify indigenous approaches to management or administration. This obviously is a position often taken by the advocates of colonial governance. The second school of thought on Africa's indigenous systems demonstrates the sophisticated nature of pre-colonial African administrative systems.[33,34,35] Kottak[36] ably demonstrates how it was not uncommon for pre-colonial societies to establish a form of governance through tribes, chiefdoms and polities while Inyang[37] reminds us of the serious erosion of all efforts at developing indigenous management theories and practices in Africa by colonialism. The colonial administration, he states, introduced western management theories and practices, considered as the drivers and the panacea for the continent's socio-politico-economic development. Western scholarship and literature generally devalued and deprecated the astonishing management prowess and practices of early African civilizations.

Boone[38] deplores how most political analysis assumes that African states have no organic links to indigenous societies. One consequence of this analysis is that the issues of state formation has not been taken seriously, as many analysts tend to study the aggregate growth of the post-colonial state apparatus, or only describe similarities in the structure and processes of modern African governments, while effectively ignoring the social origins of cross-national differences in administrative practice and in the organizational configuration of state power. Moreover, it is uncontestable, as Vyas-Doorgapersad and Thombe[39] articulately illustrate, that African communities had traditional leaders who were political heads with strong family orientation and imposed customary laws to maintain order among their people. Ignoring these facts creates an uncalled for knowledge deficient among the African academic community, thereby challenging the duty of African Public Administration scholars.

Contrary to what colonial architects advocate, Fashoyin[40] strongly posits that management in Africa existed and was rooted in the cultural beliefs and traditions of its diverse people. The cultures had evolved over thousands of years and represented successful attempts to integrate themselves with their environment. African institutions were marked by interrelatedness, yet they also exhibited a wide range of diversity. Facts on Africa ought to be told by Africans. However, Martin[41] warns that to suggest that the history of African political ideas is a neglected field of study is a major understatement, as Africa is replete with examples of excellent

practices of public administration as they existed before the advent of colonialists. He recommends that an instructor wishing to put together a collection of readings on the subject needs to delve into an extremely broad range of sources and materials widely scattered in many books, articles and primary sources dealing with African history, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, politics, biography and literature.

We learn from the works of Osei-Hwedie[42] that before colonialism, sub-Saharan African societies were organized around friends and relations, with authority exercised through a system of chieftaincy, clan elders and heads of households. As long as such an arrangement created harmony and a sense of unity among the communities where it existed, the governance apparatus brought about social transformation as understood from the periodic lens of time. Several other practices existed as well. For example, the medical history of Africa, though vital, remains a neglected field. Patterson[43] reports how disease has been a significant factor throughout African history, and attempts to control endemic and epidemic afflictions have been an important aspect of change in the twentieth century. Unfortunately, historians have rarely paid more than cursory attention to issues involving human health; yet they are central to the effectiveness of any governance mechanism.

Politics is one of the oldest activities of humanity and, as soon as people began to live in organized groups, a need to devise ways to govern themselves emerged[44] as a broader strategy to create social order. Njoh[45] gives a comprehensive description of the governance apparatus that existed in pre-colonial Africa, and that African scholars should proudly espouse in their teachings of Public Administration. Pre-colonial African societies had sound administrative systems that featured a variety of polities, including the city-states, empire-states, as well as conquest states. The continent is known to have had a great deal of accomplishments in the areas of political and social organization, architecture, city building, arts and crafts, commerce and trade, tax administration, grievance-handling and discipline as well as democratic arrangements.[46] This pre-colonial governance apparatus was based on communalism, which revolved around the *Ubuntu* ideology.

Ubuntu means humanness or being human.[47] Within its philosophy is the community ownership and respect of society as opposed to individualistic tendencies characterized most by pre-colonial governance frameworks. The family, clan and tribal orientations were a common bond that provided unity. It was common for family members to scatter geographically for better occupation prospects and, in the process, develop new territorial authorities.[48] As Ifechukwu[49] posits, the core values of African communities involved the extended family, human relations orientation, co-prosperity or social mutual concern, respect for elders and tradition, consensus, competition and hero-worship.

Pre-colonial political governance arrangements guided power and authority

distribution as exercised by the various elements of government.[50] The political systems were brought together by acceptable common norms, institutions and cultures of people, and had a common language in a territorially delineated space or in different situations. While many different types of governance systems existed, three political categories, namely, (1) centralized kingdoms and empires; (2) centralized small kingdoms and city-states and (3) decentralized or stateless political societies, summarize the systems. In each of these political systems, trade and a strong military force were important factors in the development and maintenance of social order. Ukpabi[51] elaborates, for example, how kingdoms and empires evolved elaborate and often complex military organizations to ensure adequate protection of the royal court and the safety of the rulers. They had a group of professional warriors charged with this responsibility and whose qualification for office included unquestioned loyalty to the government in power.

Public administrators perform legal duties within society. Indeed, leaders of the pre-colonial period had a regulatory function which covers the legal definition of public administration. Njoh[52] documents how leaders of the time were pre-occupied with discipline and administering punishment to those who went against the established rules of society. These systems ensured harmony and discipline, an indication of a well-organized society. Mazrui[53] also explains how the fragmented or highly decentralized systems were the majority, while the highly

centralized polities were few and included the well-known kingdoms such as the Songhai Empire, Ashanti Kingdom, the City-State of Benin, all in West Africa, the Bakongo Kingdom in Central Africa and the Buganda Kingdom in East Africa. African societies, throughout the centuries, were organized on the basis of a social contract.

On the same subject, Jarret[54] has done a fine job of describing the governance apparatus of pre-colonial African polities that typically comprised three major elements. In their hierarchy, the administrative bodies included (1) the council of elders, (2) chief priests and moral elders and (3) chiefs; all capable of executing functions ranging from mundane tasks, such as using the talking drum to summon a meeting of the king's aides, to complex undertakings, such as planning and executing war. Each body was placed in charge of a well-defined set of activities. The council of elders had the responsibility of conceiving, planning, implementing and managing the community's development projects, which were critical undertakings expected by members of the society. Projects, such as public infrastructure building and maintenance, building and maintaining the chief's palace, and building and maintaining weekly markets, fell under the jurisdiction of the council of elders. The idea of crime as an anti-social act certainly existed, and it was the concern of those entrusted with authority in society to restore and promote social relationships. Reconciliation and the restoration of social harmony were the objects of judicial proceedings, rather than retribution. Hence, the

importance attributed to compensation, and even ritual feasting as the outcome of a process of reconciliation, was great.

The chief priests, who were people endowed with special spiritual powers and or/skills that were often inherited rather than learnt, had important governance responsibilities. As Jarret[55] points out, these people functioned as religious authorities and acted as a bridge between members of the communities and their ancestors. The belief in ancestral powers was a common practice in pre-colonial societies and a special body of administrators had to be responsible for such spiritual matters. The chief priests were also charged with the responsibility of educating the community on African spiritual laws, religious doctrines and principles. In this regard, they provided knowledge on the importance of living in harmony with the natural environment, including land, rivers, lakes and forests, and why members of the community must see themselves as custodians and not owners of the natural resources. The chief priests further performed the role of modern day health officials or medical practitioners, as they were responsible for healing the sick.

The moral elders (who were similar to the officials responsible for ethics and integrity in most contemporary systems) were responsible for teaching moral conduct and upholding moral standards throughout the community. They were also responsible for recording all major events that took place in their communities. In this case, they served as community historians. The fact that most

pre-colonial African societies did not boast a written culture does not mean they were incapable of recording information. This task was often accomplished through two main strategies:

1) The most common involved story telling. These stories were then passed on from one generation to another until they became legendary.
2) Through drawings or sketches. Such drawings and sketches have surfaced in caves, and other artifacts have been uncovered through archaeological and other discoveries.

Examples of the Songhai's empire, whose governance apparatus comprised, among other units, several ministerial bodies as Njoh[56] reports, help us to understand the pre-colonial governance apparatus. Prominent in the empire was a ministerial body in charge of agriculture, headed by an inspector of agriculture; an equivalent of contemporary ministries of agriculture. There was also a ministerial body in charge of etiquette, headed by a chief of etiquette and protocol. Another ministry was responsible for the Calvary under the leadership of the chief of Calvary. They also had the ministerial body in charge of minority affairs, which had several agencies responsible for the various minority groups resident in the empire. In the empire, justice was an important issue, as the leadership created positions of chief of justice or *cadi* (*qadi*). The *cadi's* who were posted to major cities, such as Djemne and Timbuktu, were appointees of the king and were responsible for dealing with disputes

between citizens and foreigners or among citizens. The king or loyal justices were in charge of more serious crimes such as treason. Individuals found guilty were sentenced based on the severity of the crime.

In another elaborate attempt at demonstrating how pre-colonial African societies were organized politically, Ndlovu-Gatsheni[57] gives an account of the governance apparatus in the Ndebele polity, which had very elaborate mechanisms with checks and balances that significantly regulated the power of the king. The hierarchy of power facilitated communication between the leaders and the ordinary people, the lesser chiefs and the senior leaders, up to the king. The governance arrangements are shown in Figure 1,

which demonstrates that the king was at the apex of a power hierarchy and had no absolute powers, as several layers of officials existed to check the king. The king was the head of state, head of government, religious chief, commander-in-chief of the armed forces and the supreme judge of all criminal cases. Below the key were layers of powerful officials who played an active role in the governance of the state as well as checking on the absolute dictatorship of the king.

The first layer of the administrative official in the Ndebele kingdom was the prime minister called *indunankulu yesizwe* and he acted as the head of government. This compares effectively to the ancient Greek society

FIGURE 1: Hierarchy of power in the Ndebele state

Inkosi (King)

⬇

Indunankulu Yesizwe (Prime Minister)

⬇

Umphakathi (Inner Advisory Council)

⬇

Izikhulu (Outer Advisory Council/Council of Prominent Men)

⬇

Izinduna Zezigaba (Provincial Chiefs)

⬇

Abalisa (Headmen)

⬇

Abamnumzana (Homestead Heads)

Source: Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2008) Who Ruled by the Spear? Rethinking the Form of Governance in the Ndebele State, *African Studies Quarterly*, 10 (2 & 3):76

arrangement where the prime minister occupied the top hierarchy position and a number of gods (ministers) below him were responsible for specialized functions. The Ndebele king did not rule by decree as state policies were subjected to serious debate, and meetings were considered important in deciding the future of the state. The king's personal confidants, comprising inner advisers, collectively termed *umphakathi,* played a crucial role in determining state policy and they effectively made difficult judicial decisions.

Another set of advisers of the king were a large group of the state's prominent men collectively termed *izikhulu.* It was through these two councils that the ordinary Ndebele people were able to participate in the government of their country. This has a resemblance to our contemporary governance apparatus where elected representatives represent the people's views. *Umphakathi* and *izikhulu* in the Ndebele society operated as representative councils. Like the commercialized politics of modern African societies today, before colonialism, the members of these representative councils were mainly rich people, rather than ordinary persons. They were not freely chosen by the people; their positions were largely hereditary.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni[58] further reports how the Ndebele king tried to keep as much power in his hands as possible, but the leaders of *izigaba* worked tirelessly to gain more and more power and increasing influence in state affairs. It was these people who practically commanded the armed forces

during military assignments. They also determined outcomes of difficult judicial decisions. While the king could differ with the views of his advisers on a number of issues, he was often forced to endorse the popular views of his advisers. The leaders of *izigaba,* rather than the king, were the practical representatives of *amahlabezulu* (the ordinary population). The king had to listen to their views in order to keep in touch with the popular sentiments of his people. Chiefs of *izigaba* were initially appointed by the king, especially during the inception of the state and the formation of specific *izigaba* as the state grew. Provincial chiefs, however, had to work hard to cultivate the allegiance of the people within the territorial area of their rule. Upon the death of an appointed chief, the king's power to appoint another chief fell away, as the deceased chief was to be succeeded by his eldest son from his senior wife (*indluenkulu*). If the senior wife failed to produce a son, other sons from junior wives were accepted as successors.

Similar societies in pre-colonial Africa exhibited a well-organized governance mechanism based on common societal beliefs. Tosh,[59] while writing from the contexts of the Uganda Protectorate, reports how in both centralized and acephalous societies, the British ruled through a uniform system of native administration. This arrangement was found prudent to align the British system to the indigenous structures through what is popularly known as indirect rule. The indigenous administrative governance structure had on its apex the District, which usually corresponded to the

territory of one tribe, or a combination of related tribes. With few exceptions, local people did not occupy executive positions at District level, as such was the preserve of European officials.

The internal administration of the District was carried out by locally recruited chiefs, appointed from above, and distributed over four grades according to the territory they ruled: county, sub-county, parish and village. Each of these constituted an administrative unit. At each of the administrative levels, the chief had responsibility for maintaining law and order, tax collection, the mobilization of labour for public works and the enforcement of administrative orders from his superiors. In the senior grades of county and sub-county, the chief also exercised judicial authority: his court settled the vast majority of civil and petty criminal cases, and he could use a small detachment of armed police to make arrests. This system appealed to British officials, because it was endowed with some traditional legitimacy. The system was derived from the pre-colonial Buganda where the basic principle of graded administrative posts was a common administrative governance mechanism among the Bakungu hierarchy of nineteenth-century Buganda.

Politics and economics have historically been hostile partners although their outright "divorce" has not yet materialized. The two have a symbiotic relationship although such a relationship is largely ignored in most discourses. By its nature, politics shapes the economics of any society. However, the economics also determine the kind of politics by those who are in charge of managing society affairs. Some economic decisions are political mechanisms to control the affairs of the state. Africa's economy, in the pre-colonial period, was diverse and in a large measure was driven by extensive trade routes that developed between cities and kingdoms. Some trade routes were overland, while others involved navigating rivers and some developed around port cities. Large African empires became wealthy due to their trade networks.

Falola[60] reports to us how the Yoruba indigenous economy and politics were organized. In the empire, extensive commercial activities linked one Yoruba-speaking town to another, and the whole of the southwest with northern Nigeria and some other parts of Africa. The trade with the Europeans on the coast was similarly intense and the network of commerce involved both local exchange, long-distance trade between the Yoruba and others, and exchange with foreigners, Europeans and Arabs. The Yoruba Empire had an elaborate toll system with toll gates operational in all Yoruba towns. Such tolls were a major source of revenue, together with taxation, levies, judicial fees and fines and death duties. The Yoruba also had large-scale production of agricultural and crafts products such that the markets were constantly supplied, despite the endemic warfare of the century. It involved large-scale movements of people and goods, and called for transport, markets, currency and other institutions. Commercial activities provided opportunities for individuals and the state to exploit and benefit from.

While individuals produced for the market, sold to make profits and offered their labour for different services, the state, through the political leaders, made use of commerce in varying ways to sustain itself: traders not only offered gifts to rulers, but paid dues in the markets and different types of levies and tolls when they engaged in trade that transcended boundaries. All these economic activities were undoubtedly supported by a sophisticated administrative mechanism.

While African political systems had all the trappings of government, with the consent of the governed and a balance between centralized and decentralized power to prevent the misuse of authority by one person,[61] there were some weaknesses worth noting in our effort to develop an African Public Administration theory. While indigenous systems had a governance apparatus with checks and balances as well as an accountability mechanism, they had some degree of exclusion. Secondly, indigenous societies survived on wars, conquests, raids, kidnappings and the collection of tribute payments, which led to the enslavement and sale of millions of men, women and children as Falola and Warnock[62] demonstrate. In primitive societies, fighting was recognized as a legitimate means of obtaining redress for an injury, though not a means of dominating others.[63]

Certain African rulers used slave soldiers as the means of creating a centralized administration aimed at enhancing the authority of the monarchs against the competition of their subordinate chiefs. The Kabaka Kalema of Buganda, in the late nineteenth century, when he found himself losing popular support, relied on the Arabs and their bands of slaves for his safety.[64] Ndlovu-Gatsheni[65] tells us how the Ndebele system of governance was not fully based on consensual politics. It was characterized by a mixture of democratic tendencies, on the one hand, and aristocratic, autocratic and/or militaristic tendencies on the other. Tension, competition, jealousies, and violence also characterized Ndebele systems of governance. Kinship was one major ideology, in the Ndebele state, that was a source of both strength and weakness.

PARADIGM SHIFT: A THEORY OF AFRICAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION?

The preceding section has exemplified how the indigenous governance apparatus operated during pre-colonial times. The section recognized that, despite weaknesses in pre-colonial governance apparatus, the balance sheet of its unique features makes it worth the scholarly attention of African Public Administration scholars. This demands a paradigm shift from a western-based theoretical stand to one shaped by the indigenous realities, especially as they existed before colonialism. Gbadamosi[66] reports how western management concepts and writings have dominated the thinking of academics and managers in Africa for a long time. This approach has been a dire disadvantage to administration theory development based on African cultural beliefs and values.

Colonialism disoriented the systems of administration with a western-based ideology, a historical error that needs to be reversed. Kiggundu[67] long warned how various colonial powers destroyed or devalued local institutions and management practices, substituting them with their own colonial administrative systems out of the belief in western cultural, biological and technological superiority over Africans. Kasfir[68] challenges African scholars that so little of value had been written about development administration in Africa, as much of the writing came from expatriate civil servants and academic personnel involved in technical assistance to administrative training institutes. Duke,[69] in his analysis of the impact of colonialism on the development of management in Nigeria, affirms how the administrative system, adopted in managing the Nigerian state by the British, essentially organized government apparatus along a centralized and hierarchical structure. This system emphasized direct and strong control, as it required that all personnel remained unquestionably subordinate to the top (colonial) authority, personified by the High Commissioner and his executive lieutenants. The local content of the administration – the native political agents, warrant chiefs, clerks, messengers and constables – were merely subordinate field executors or foot soldiers of colonial policies and decisions of the top hierarchy.

Osabu-kle,[70] on the same subject, demonstrates how major policies and decisions that governed colonized people were determined by the colonialists, but their implementation was effected through the local chiefs. They redefined indigenous institutions and customary laws and chiefs effectively became officers of the colonial administration, and were no longer responsible to their own people who had originally selected and made them chiefs. Fashoyin[71] is of the view that any management education that facilitates the entrenchment of western management theories and practices in Africa is not desirable. His call was that African scholars needed to transform imported theories and concepts into acceptable cultural norms that could be applied to management practices in Africa. The only way out was the development of indigenous African management principles and practices that accommodate African cultural, social, political and environmental factors. Africa's Public Administration academia needs new leadership.[72] The new academic leadership should be pre-occupied with the reconstruction of African management models and theories. Such coordinated efforts will nurture an African theory of public administration.

A theory, in the context of our debate encompasses a systematic collection of related principles and management theory as a way of categorizing pertinent management knowledge.[73] This would imply that African public administration theory should involve a collection of indigenous African principles, practices and knowledge that depict how such societies managed public affairs. One of the underlying root causes of the west's inferiorisation of African indigenous management practice stems from lack of concerted efforts by African

scholars to document their own indigenous systems to counteract those espoused by western ideologues. African scholars need to build a coherent analogy of the elements of African systems that would see the African paradigms of administration being covered in public administration training. This effort should primarily be informed by the extensive indigenous knowledge as a starting point to the construction of alternative administrative theories. This knowledge should be adequately disseminated and shared among interested scholars of Public Administration as well as among policy makers and practitioners for a vivid understanding of the uniqueness of the African culture.

The African paradigms/theories of public administration could be coined under at least four sections: (1) the indigenous African administration, (2) colonial African administration, (3) post-colonial African public administration and (4) the contemporary paradigm. The first paradigm would be examined under three forms of governance systems that existed – centralized polities, decentralized and stateless societies. A description of the fundamental characteristics that informed governance practices will form a critical component of the paradigm building. The purpose is to educate our students and other actors about the uniqueness in the African governance apparatus. That paradigm of nomenclature would largely follow four strands of the (1) pre-colonial bureaucratic African administration, (2) colonial public administration, (3) comparative public administration, (4) post-colonial public

administration and (5) contemporary public administration.

Concluding Remarks

If underdevelopment can be seen as a major cause of Africa's problems, the experience of the last three decades suggests there is still a very unclear understanding of what to do about it. Liberal democracy, exhortation, ideology, force, expertise, mobilization, central direction and recent structural adjustment reforms have all been tried, and have all failed.[74] The question is what next? This paper advises that re-founding the administrative systems based on African values is likely to be the answer to the development challenges bewildering the continent. While some elements of globalization will undoubtedly have to be adopted in solving some of the contemporary governance and administrative challenges, efforts must be made not to immensely disadvantage the unique features in Africa's administrative systems.

One of the reasons for the failure of most reforms has been the importation of systems under the one-size-fits-all phenomenon and total neglect of the African context factors. We need to learn from the way African societies governed their affairs and what lessons can be picked up from such systems, especially the best practices that united people to a common purpose, which are lacking in contemporary administrative systems. It becomes the ultimate duty of African scholars to carefully document these facts and pass them on from one

group of students to another. There is a need to develop an African theory or paradigm of administration whose paradigm of nomenclature would largely follow four strands of the (1) pre-colonial bureaucratic African administration, (2) colonial public administration, (3) comparative public administration, (4) post-colonial public administration and (5) contemporary public administration.

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