



Culture, Development, and Public Administration in Africa

Ogwo J. Umeh and Greg Andranovich

Foreword by Jong S. Jun


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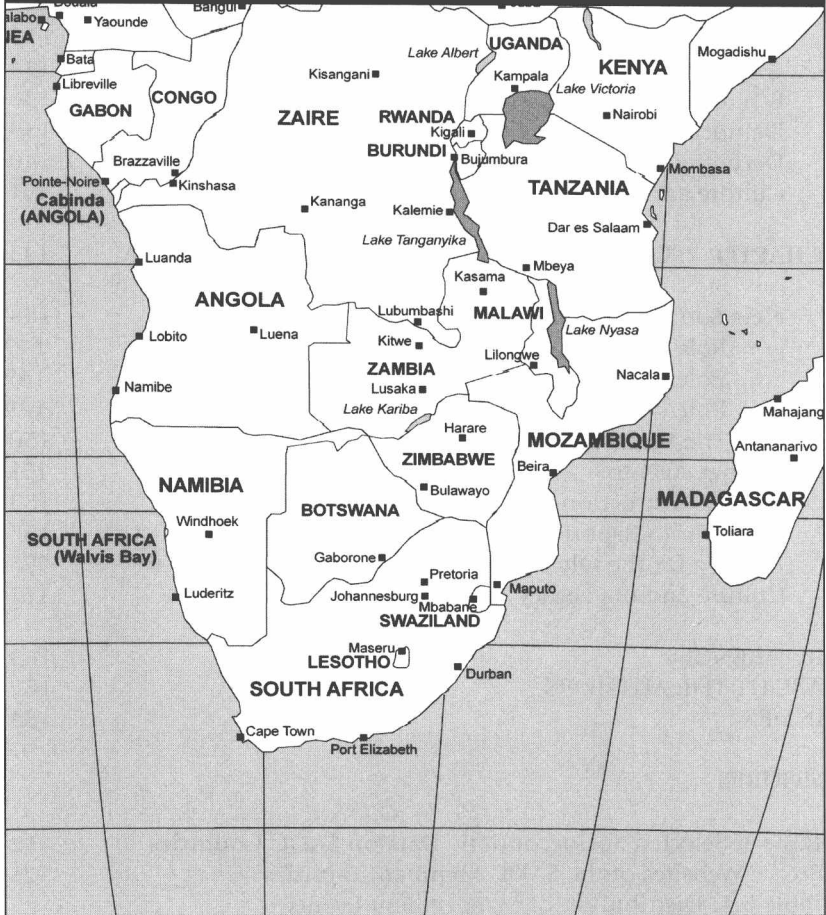
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SOUTHERN AFRICA



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Foreword

In the past, comparative public administration focused on the exploration of similarities and differences in structure, functions, and processes among countries, using Western theories and approaches. The tacit assumption underlying comparative study was that public administration in Western countries was rational, functionally efficient, and professionally competent, and hence could be used as a model for cross-cultural comparison. When a Western framework was used in comparative research, however, various social and cultural elements unique to any non-Western country were left out. Realizing this limitation in recent years, scholars have employed an interpretive approach, seeking the hidden dimensions of political and administrative contexts. To truly understand the problems and uniqueness of a country, comparative research needs to reflect the changing conditions of society, including its political, cultural, and socioeconomic aspects. When these dynamic aspects are neglected, development policies inevitably produce various unintended consequences in their implementation.

Because southern African countries strive for modernization and development, it is important that they develop an efficient and effective institutional capability in order to improve their projects. Public administration practitioners assert that non-Western countries should learn Western methods in order to improve their administration. This assertion, however, is true only up to a point. Western ways of managing public institutions and their role in social change and development are superior to those of less industrialized countries in many ways. But development policies and administration in African countries are value laden, and the cultural norms of each country are constituted by its historical, cultural, and social traditions. Values and cultural norms in different administrative settings are numerous, flexible, hidden, changing, and intersecting. Because they are influenced by various factors, they cannot easily be understood through the scientific research method by applying Western theories and concepts. Language and symbols

express the values and meanings embedded in administrative culture and people's experiences. Thus in order to discover the meanings underlying the successes and failures of development policies, we need to interpret and understand qualitative and quantitative information, stories and cases, communication, and the experiences of individuals in different administrative settings.

The authors of *Culture, Development, and Public Administration in Africa*, Ogwo Jombo Umeh and Greg Andranovich, explore local cultures and their influence on southern African development. They offer invaluable lessons for improving the development process by emphasizing the linkages among culture, values, politics, and bureaucracy, and by critiquing the available statistical information.

Culture is easier to talk about than to define. The authors view culture as "the system of values, symbols, and shared meanings of a group, including the embodiment of these values, symbols, and meanings into material objects and ritualized practices." Every administrative system is influenced by the greater culture, whether the greater culture is democratic or autocratic in its governance. In order to change policy and administrative processes, we must understand the political, historical, and cultural contexts in which they have arisen.

I believe that more interpretive and cross-cultural research focusing on culture and development will lead us to locally practical knowledge, which is exceedingly useful to an understanding of human issues in development. The internationalization movement will, ideally, be built on the participation of, and interdependence among, government organizations, businesses, civic organizations, groups, and citizens both locally and globally. Ineluctably, the process will involve critical discourse and dialogue: both are necessary for socially constructing the meaning of development and human action. Comparative development administration needs to reflect not only the historical, social, economic, and cultural aspects of a country's development, but also the problems and processes of global interconnectedness.

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Acronyms

ANC—African National Congress
CAG—Comparative Administration Group
CAR—Central African Republic
CCM—Chama Cha Mapinduzi
CIN—Culture in the Neighborhood
COSATU—Congress of South African Trade Unions
EEA—Ethiopian Economic Association
GEAR—Growth, Employment And Redistribution
HIPC—Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
IDASA—Institute for a Democratic Alternative South Africa
IOC—International Olympic Committee
MFDP—Ministry of Finance and Development Planning
MLGLH—Ministry of Local Government, Land and Housing
NASPAA—National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration
NCOP—National Council of Provinces
RDP—Reconstruction and Development Program
SADC—South African Development Community
SADCC—South African Development Coordinating Conference
SAMDI—South African Management Development Institute
SMS—Senior Management Service
TANU—Tanganyika African Union
ULGS—Unified Local Government Services
USAID—United States Agency for International Development
ZAPU—Zimbabwe African National Union

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Chapter One

Introduction

One of the stark realities in the twenty-first century is that people need government. Oftentimes, the abilities of people to articulate their demands are not matched by the capacities of governments to provide security and public services. Increasingly, as people demand a stake in their future, the initial task of the state is to simultaneously provide services and conduct nation-building. Yet in country after country, in case after case, efforts in both service provision and nation-building are hard fought and the results seem less than spectacular. Are expectations too high? Are the conditions on the ground too tough? Why do the challenges of public administration in developing countries seem to be insurmountable?

In this book, we argue that the absence of a culturally sensitive orientation in conceptualizing and analyzing administrative management presents limitations that undermine how we research and evaluate findings within and across countries. We begin our inquiry with a critical assessment of prevailing models and frameworks used to explain the dynamics of public administration from a comparative perspective, and then present an interpretive approach that we believe adds a missing ingredient back into the mix. Then, we apply this interpretive approach to further explain a comprehensive set of responses on administrative and managerial tasks reported by public officials across the region of southern Africa. But this is getting ahead of our presentation.

By way of general introduction, this chapter first surveys the literature on the study of politics and public administration in Africa. Then

we discuss the rationale for using an interpretive perspective. The third part of the chapter provides an overview of public administration in the African context. The chapter closes with brief profiles of the southern African countries that are the focus of the book.

Challenges in Contemporary Africa

Analyses of contemporary sub-Saharan African affairs paint a fairly dismal picture of the conditions of the people and the prospects for their economies and states (Chabal and Daloz 1999; Diamond and Plattner 1999; Harbeson 2000; Joseph 1998; Osabu-Kle 2000; Uzodike 1997). However, these same analysts have begun to probe more deeply the historical reasons for current challenges, and their findings are suggestive of a more complex reality in twenty-first century Africa south of the Sahara. A brief overview of their arguments, evidence, and suggestions provides a valuable introduction to the context within which we place our work. As a prelude, however, consider the remarks of the then-newly installed President of Uganda in an address at Dar es Salaam University in July 1986. His speech was entitled, "What's Wrong with Africa?" and he listed two primary reasons for the initial backwardness of the continent, first, the natural obstacles, such as deserts and topical forests, to the spread of ideas and commerce, and second, the climate ("which is a bit too comfortable"); a third reason that came later, was the "intrusion of foreign forces into the affairs of Africa" (Museveni 2000, 146-147; Kasfir 1999).

Recent scholarship on Africa focuses on these same challenges. Despite the relative success seen in the last years of the twentieth century, economic conditions in sub-Saharan Africa have deteriorated from the small but positive levels of growth in the decade following independence. These nations, for the most part, remain among the world's poorest (Callaghy 2000). Both the reasons for this and its consequences include national, regional, and global dimensions, and play an important explanatory role in the study of the emergence of democracy in African nations. At the level of the nation-state rapid population growth, increasing urbanization, weak agricultural output and the continuing food crisis, the inequality of women, and the ravaging effects of the AIDS crisis have contributed to ongoing economic problems and political challenges in these nations (Simmons 2001; World Bank 1989). Regional attempts to mitigate these problems have generally ended without success; the same difficulties that ensue elsewhere are problematic in Africa: perceptions of unequal gains, inadequate methods of compensation, ideological differences with regard to problem

definition in policymaking, and the impact of foreign influences particularly with regard to aid and investment have undermined regional collaboration (Ojo 1985). Recent attempts at cooperation have either been functionally-oriented (such as in transportation, energy, health, or communication projects) or, as in the case of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (reconstituted as SADC in 1992), have recognized the importance of the role of politics in establishing and maintaining regional relationships.

Globalization has marginalized much of sub-Saharan Africa. Nicholas van de Walle, summarizing the changing African political economy over the past two decades, concludes that the structural adjustment program put into effect by the World Bank did achieve some of its stated policy goals, such as simplifying tariff structures, establishing reasonable exchange rates, deregulating financial markets, and privatizing the parastatal sector. But the answer to the next question—what difference has this made?—is more complex. Donor support probably lessened the likelihood of real economic reform because African governments did not have to deal directly with the consequences of not attracting foreign capital investments in the 1980s and 1990s (van de Walle 2000, 276). Instead, these governments were able to continue to get money while not making any progress in reform. The results were increased indebtedness and a proliferation of donors and their institutional infrastructure in many nations, resulting in conditions of economic dependency (van de Walle 2000, 276). In the end, sub-Saharan Africa has remained marginalized in the world economy as the currents of globalization have become stronger.

At the same time, political analyses have addressed the changes that occurred in the transition toward democracy, including the public policies of western nations in support of free and fair elections, executive branch accountability, legislative branch professionalization, civil society strengthening, and a broadening of democratic values. For comparativists, elections—a sure signpost in the transition toward democracy—were the main focus of political analysis in the 1990s. Yet, as Goran Hyden has pointed out, neither the state nor the formal democratic processes are responsible for the lack of democracy and democratic practices. Quoting Michael Lofchie, Hyden reminds us that real authority is often not located in the institutional structure of the state: the importance of “informal and unofficial relations” in influencing political outcomes requires a broader framework for analysis (Hyden 1999, 182; Hyden, Olowu, and Okoth-Ogendo 2000). Given that the rules of politics are not those that are written, Hyden calls for a more nuanced analysis of African politics to include “the politics that sur-

rounds the reconstitution of the political order in Africa" (183). Calling for the adoption of a governance focus, Hyden argues that there is now a need to shift the analytical lens away from the study of politics (who gets what, when, and how, as Harold Lasswell [1936] puts it) toward the examination of "issues related to the rules of the game...[or] 'constitutive politics'" (186).

Together, these dimensions point to the uses and management of power; that is, to the political context of democracy in southern Africa (Harbeson 2000). Crawford Young's conclusions about the third wave of democratization in Africa, for example, are derived through an examination of symbolic politics, particularly in how leaders in the 1990s have used the trappings of democracy (including freer presses, more respect for human rights, and contested elections) to navigate the "comprehensive superstructure of international accountability to which Africa is subject" (Young 1999, 34-35).

Young's conclusions might suggest that African leaders are playing a complicated game to remain in power, presenting themselves as part of a democratization movement to the international donor community while tightening their reigns domestically. How African leaders see themselves, and how they see the political system reflecting and shaping politics, are dimensions that need to be addressed in any assessment of democracy in Africa. U.O. Uzodike (1997, 28) notes that in many African societies, "traditional conceptions of democracy" focused on the group and emphasized the group over the individual. Current conflicts between such different roles in politics, society, and the economy are played out in the political economies of these nations. These conflicts are analyzed from the perspective of the legacy of colonial domination, which introduced the privileged role of the individual (and other capitalist ideas, such as property ownership) to these societies (Haugerud 1995). This new line of inquiry has also re-introduced the cultural basis for differences into the analysis of African politics.

One of the best examples of this line of inquiry is found in Daniel T. Osabu-Kle's *Compatible Cultural Democracy*, which makes the case for establishing a jaku democracy; jaku is the Ga word for "African." Osabu-Kle argues that understanding culture is the key to development in Africa, and that establishing culturally compatible political preconditions is different in Africa than it is in the West. He begins by differentiating between African and European politics. African politics is based on a culture of cooperation and compromise, where competition plays a destructive role (2000, 74-75). Prior to colonialism, the representation of different African clans on ruling councils at various

levels in the political system provided opportunities for bargaining and reconciliation. Since colonialism and the founding of political parties on top of extant communal divisions within African societies, it has become much harder to create a climate for bargaining and reconciliation. Furthermore, given the different cultural bases for societal decision-making in Africa (valuing consensus rather than individualism, cooperation rather than competition), the circulation of elites is not as important as gaining the input of all elites (75).

Osabu-Kle discusses the different types of indigenous African political systems and argues that these fall into two main types (79). One type did not have a centralized authority, the administrative machinery to implement decisions, a centralized judicial system, or a sharp division in rank or social status. The second type, which was more prevalent, had a centralized authority, an administrative machinery, and a centralized judicial system. It utilized a hierarchical and concentric system of regions, zones, districts, towns, villages, and huts, to provide for the union of heterogeneous groups or clans. This political system worked to ensure the cohesion of the various groups or clans, and their capacity to pursue common interests (80). While the head of "state" was the territorial ruler, power was devolved to the subdivisions of the "state," where administrative and judicial functions were carried out. Given the enormous challenges of communication and transportation, the devolution of power served to check the central authority's powers (80).

At the local levels of this political system, the chiefs played a dual role. On the one hand they represented the interests of the local people when participating in decision-making outside of the region; on the other hand, the chiefs represented the central authority to the local people. The chiefs and the local councils balanced these two roles with the consent of the central authority and the consent of the local people.

Finally, Daniel Osabu-Kle notes that the role of leaders in this consensus-oriented political system went beyond the usual secular functions (80). As the embodiment of social and political values and mores, the leaders also reflected the mystical values of society. The importance of these mystical values and the symbols through which these values were held, played an important role in protecting against the abuse of political power, providing legitimacy to the exercise of power, and holding the political systems together through times of political crisis (80). Indeed, "these supernatural aspects of African rule—conditions that puzzled the Western mind—constituted an essential cohesive force that kept destructive centrifugal forces and abuse of power in check" (80-81).

The re-emergence of witchcraft and other mystical notions goes hand in hand with the transformation of the state and conceptions of public space in Africa. Cyprian Fisiy and Peter Geschiere (1996) point out that witchcraft historically has held a powerful role in political discourse, focusing on power, inequality, and tension between an individual's ambitions and communitarian values. However, in the early twenty-first century, in Africa's new urban centers and in its politics, press, sports, health care, educational institutions, and popular culture, the criteria for evaluating behavior in terms of the individual vis-à-vis the community is tied to broader societal issues of personal ambition and the growing inequalities in African society (Chabal and Daloz 1999, 63-76; Zeleza and Kalipeni 1999).

Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz (1999) take mainstream analysis to task for failing to understand that many of the concepts used to analyze Africa—democracy, multi-party elections, and political culture—have in practice been Africanized. Rather than concluding that Africa can't or won't modernize, Chabal and Daloz demonstrate that Africa works in a way that is different from Western societies, and the role of the state and the relationship between state and society is different. For these authors, there is a built-in bias for greater levels of disorder, and against the formation of Western-style legal, administrative, and institutional structures necessary for development (as we in and of the West define it). One of the keys to better understanding Africa is to realize that in the present time, cultural dynamics should be examined within the context of modern instrumental uses; that is, Africa's present circumstances encourage the creative use of "the traditional" (147). Chabal and Daloz make a powerful case for changing our paradigm for analyzing African politics (Chabal 1996).

Indeed, things are so different in Africa that Jean-Francoise Bayart, Stephen Ellis, and Beatrice Hibou's *The Criminalization of the State in Africa* suggests that it is returning to the "heart of darkness." The authors are careful to note that this is not a return to tradition or primitiveness, but rather the way in which Africa was first brought into the global economy and the international political system: through economies of extraction or predation, with foreigners leading the way, and with African partners using armed force assisting. In using this lens to analyze the current changes that are occurring in sub-Saharan Africa, the authors confront the politics, cultural myths, and economic practices that make Africa what it is today. They also use this framework to make suggestions to international aid donors regarding the consequences of giving aid.