

Rethinking the question of identity for indigenous public administration within public administration

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ABSTRACT

In African Public Administration, this article considers the subject of rethinking identity for indigenous public administration. It seeks to determine whether the lack of indigenous traditions as a foundation for current Public Administration will actually fulfil the essential knowledge demands of government by solving challenges that cannot be answered by public officials. This epistemic discrimination of indigenous public administration in Public Administration has been widely disseminated without taking into account the value systems of African societies that have established their own distinct administrative structures within their respective cultural settings. This has resulted in a plethora of misunderstandings and contradictions in contemporary public administration practices. This is due to P[p]ublic A[a]dministration modulating the influence of Africans, their processes and institutions in the development of the discipline. In light of this realization, this paper discusses how rethinking the issue of identity for indigenous public administration can and should serve as a foundational tool for promoting Africa's Public Administration. This paper employs Afrocentricity as an avant-garde to untangle this discourse based on the above-mentioned breakdown. The paper is conceptual in nature and is based on a review of literature from a variety of sources, including policies, popular media statements, and academic publications.

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Introduction

When it comes to Africa's governance structures and their operation, the absence and non-documentation of its indigenous administrative system and cultural institutions has created a knowledge vacuum. Maserumule (2014) is of the view that, Africa runs the danger of being defined by the West in its absence. Henceforth, Basheka (2012), states that there were sound administrative principles to justify the existence of governance systems and culture in Africa before colonialism. Yet, the majority of African countries continue to rely on Western public administration practices and philosophical orientation to study and practice the operations of government. This paper's main tenacity is on rethinking the question of identity for indigenous public administration within Public Administration. The purpose is to "disentangle the conceptual antecedent for the need of an indigenous paradigm in the discipline" (Ndaguba & Ijeoma, 2019) and to address the intended neglect of the indigenous systems of governance (Basheka, 2015). The epistemic discernment and distortion of indigenous public administration in Public Administration is promoted without regard for the value systems of African societies that have established their own distinct administrative structures within their respective cultural settings (Shai, 2020, Mahlala & Shai, 2022). Such value systems comprise of *Ubuntu*, a Xhosa derived word and notorious on the Nguni clan such as isiZulu speaking people, meaning (humanity) that is universal in the corridors of our different cultures and ethnic groups in South Africa.

For the purposes of this paper, it is argued that the days of the West taking charge of what Public Administration should entail with its plan to dominate Africa's knowledge structures, and how African states must administer themselves, should be long gone. The

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continent's value systems should instead dominate the thinking about how societies should be administratively organized around the world (Shai, 2021). Moreover, these frivolous misconceptions and contradictions on the value of African administrative systems in the underpinning of the discipline of Public Administration and its activity have tarnished the fabric of our African society in inculcating humanity and pride in contemporary public administration. The goal of this paper is to instill and raise awareness of indigenous public administration within the field of public administration. This is critical because it will produce indigenous self-understanding and self-determination, thereby alienating the misrepresentation of indigenous public administration practices in Africa and on knowledge accumulation control. While there are many such African values that can inform public administration, we use the Ubuntu which is communal to demonstrate our argument.

Literature review

Conceptualising and contextualising Ubuntu in public administration

The term Ubuntu is derived from Bantu Nguni languages such as Xhosa, Zulu, AmaSwati, and amaNdebele (van Binsbergen, 2001). Scholars including (Asante, 1987; Ntibatirirwa, 2009; Prinsloo, 2000; Ramose, 1999; Shutte, 1993; Tracy, 1990; Van der Merwe, 1996; Basheka, 2015) have investigated the concept philosophically. Ubuntu philosophy, in its various manifestations, is at the heart of African philosophy of life and belief systems, in which people's daily lives are reflected (Nabudere, 2005). Africans have had the most experience on this continent in their struggles to survive and exist as a human society. Ubuntu, as a philosophy, has always been used on a daily basis to demonstrate humanity in disagreements and conflicts at various levels while providing critical services. It is thus central to the idea of rethinking the question of identity for indigenous public administration within Public Administration. This attests to the philosophy's vitality and vivacity in whatever African linguistic expression it may take.

"Ubuntu" signifies "humanness" or "being human," according to Basheka (2015). "Within the ideology of Ubuntu is the community ownership and respect of society, as opposed to individualistic tendencies typified by pre-colonial governance frameworks," Basheka adds. The better awareness for Ubuntu as a major idea in public administration and in Public Administration, will revitalize the sense of humanity in providing services, while also reinvigorating practitioners' sense of urgency to serve rather than be served. Ubuntu, as a worldview perspective or guiding philosophy, holds potential for a progressive African public administration, according to this article. It could also be a reassuring chance for public administration in today's Southern African society, when little else appears to be working (van Binsbergen, 2001).

The foregoing embraces a caring and community spirit, harmony and hospitality, respect and responsiveness (Mangaliso, 2001). Furthermore, Ncube (2010) asserts, citing (Malunga, 2009), that Ubuntu necessitates leaders modeling the way for others. The leader legitimizes his or her leadership as a role model by committing to African values such as honesty, sincerity, truthfulness, compassion, empathy, dignity, and respect for others. As a result, this paper calls for a reconsideration of indigenous public administration practices as the foundations of the discipline of Public Administration. This, on the other hand, can only be accomplished if contemporary intellectuals in the discipline instill the importance of indigenous public administration practices as foundations in the scientific field of inquiry. In this paper, the following section conceptualizes African identity in public administration.

Afrocentricity as a theoretical framework

According to Asante (1991), Afrocentricity is the study of ideas and events from the perspective of Africans as key players rather than victims. This theory becomes a fundamentally empirical project as a result of an authentic relationship to the centrality of our own reality... it is Africa asserting itself intellectually and psychologically, breaking the bonds of Western domination in the mind as an analogue for breaking those bonds in every other field... According to Afrocentricity, our main problem as Africans is our often unconscious adoption of the Western worldview and perspective, as well as the associated conceptual frameworks. Mazama (2001). According to Nabudere (2011), who quotes Archie Mafeje, "Afrocentricity could be regarded as a methodological requirement for decolonizing knowledge in Africa, or as an antidote to Euro-centricity through which knowledge about Africa could be filtered" (2011). As a result, Mafeje claims that African scholars should study their societies from the inside out and stop being purveyors of alienated intellectual discourse.

As a result of the foregoing, this paper adopts Afrocentricity as its theoretical and contextual lens. Because of the diversity of Afrocentric alternatives, this paper draws heavily on the works of Asante (2003), Mazama (2003), Mafeje (2011), Shai (2020), and other Afrocentric scholars. This paper advocates for the rethinking of indigenous public administration in Public Administration, which is based on the perception that African governance issues can only be solved using an African perspective, which is a key premise of Afrocentricity in this paper. At the heart of Afrocentricity is the urgent need for African studies, whether through mechanisms or processes such as peer review, to be centered on African culture, history, and values Shai (2019). In light of this, it is critical that the study of rethinking indigenous public administration be centered on culture, African value systems, history, and lived experiences of Africans in order to lay the groundwork for Public Administration in Africa.

Methodology

The current research paper used a qualitative research strategy that took the shape of a document review and/or analysis. Scholarly literature, journal articles, news pieces, novels, web reports, official and popular literature are all used in this methodological strategy.

Because the author was not concerned in data quantification. Thematic Content study (TCA) was used to examine the obtained data at all levels of study. The analysis included structuring the material with theoretical, conceptual, and descriptive interpretations to better inform the paper's fundamental purpose.

Key findings and Discussions

African indigenous public administration: Dissecting the key features

Being proud of one's African roots and black culture has always been important to Africans on the continent, and even more so to people of African descent in the diaspora (Adedeji, 2017). Furthermore, African collective identities as informed by Indigenous African cultural experiences, local cultural knowledge, and histories of resistance politics that have shaped and continue to shape our existence as African beings Dei (2011). At this time, African contemporary scholars must engage in sometimes uncomfortable conversations about the history of the discipline in an Africanised or indigenous context. Based on the foregoing, this paper concludes that rethinking indigenous public administration in Public Administration would be critical due to the fact that Africans had their own set of values and principles. Consultation is one such principle that has been enshrined in the transformation of Public Service Delivery (White Paper on Batho Pele, 1995).

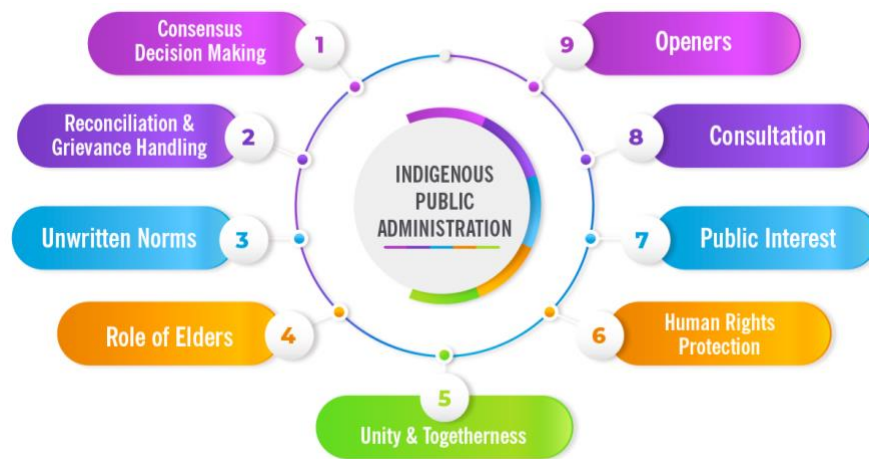


Figure 1: Illustration of components associated with Indigenous Public Administration

Consultation

Consultation is essential in African primitive societies for informing communities about administrative issues and ensuring that services are provided impartially, fairly, equitably, and without bias. Because of its ability to "enhance the quality and accessibility of government services by improving efficiency and accountability to the recipients of public goods and services," this principle should be a guiding tool for public administration and a lodestar in Public Administration. Furthermore, the African value system should play a significant role in identifying the African context and content in P(p)ublic A(a)dmistration. African values are unwritten moral codes that are commonly identified by people living within the continent's geographical sphere. They are moral principles that guide the actions and belief systems of people who live both inside and outside the territory but are of African descent (Online).

Openness

Honesty, sincerity, truthfulness, compassion, empathy, dignity, and respect for others are examples of such values (Ncube, 2010). These values to be critical for rethinking indigenous public administration, as African Chiefs were expected to be honest and dignified leaders of society, ruling with compassion and empathy for the betterment of their people in primitive times. Certain fundamental values are also shared by African societies (Ngangah, 2020) that guide the day-to-day lives of residents, values such as respect for elders and acceptance of hierarchical structures' supremacy.

Unity and togetherness

When you look closely at the word community, you will notice the word unity in it. Community means coming together as one. The term community refers to places where people work, live, and play. It entails creating an environment where everyone feels welcome. A community's people should be united and come together in times of adversity to face one common goal. The concept of brotherhood, togetherness, a harmonious community, peacefulness, synonymous, mutually reinforcing, complementary community, and as a picture of an ideal and perfect society (Aji, 2020). This concept value is critical for rethinking indigenous public administration because African Chiefs together with the community, were expected to build a society united in a spirit of togetherness in order to succeed and for Ubuntu experiences to emerge significantly. The Ubuntu belief system in indigenous public administration reflects on how the African culture and way of life are based on the principles of mutuality, unity, and kinship (Musikavhanu, 2019).

Public vs private interest

Due to the fact that Africans had their own set of values and principles, the distinction between public and private interests appears to be a way of rethinking indigenous public administration in Public Administration because both cannot be isolated from a whole set of social, economic, political, and ideological changes heralding the entry of society into an era of good governance. According to Kwerimana, Joseph, and Munene (2019), the general public's interest is the outcomes obtained when government leaders fulfil their obligations for society's long-term survival and well-being, particularly public institutions that provide quality services to citizens. It entails the outcomes that are most beneficial to the long-term survival and well-being of a social collective construed as a public (Bozeman, 2007). When people fulfill their commitments and effectively exercise their rights, it is common good (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2007). African indigenous leaders and individuals alike promoted the common good rather than what favored individual or minority interests in order to advance society as a whole. Instead of self-interests driven by personal wealth or private interests, the public interest is about superior ideas and concerns for the welfare of society.

Protection of human rights

Indigenous peoples are among the world's oldest populations, having existed for thousands of years. Despite their tenacity and will to live on as different racial and ethnic groups with own cultures, languages, values, and ways of life, many of them still endure grave difficulties and daily human rights violations (Hanna & Vancley, 2013). Indigenous peoples are disproportionately affected by structural forms of discrimination in modern society, which results in countless ongoing rights abuses, poverty, marginalization, negative stigmatization, and a lack of political power (Logan, 2007). Since people of different races did not frequently interact in the same culture, human rights protection was simply not a concern in many ancient indigenous African communities. However, an African Chief had to ensure that all members of society are treated with respect, integrity and have the right to self-determination in communities like the Xhosa villages in the Eastern Cape region of South Africa and other Nguni clans.

Role of elders in society

A solid foundation for a strong self-image and a healthy identity is provided by traditional teachings and knowledge (King, Smith & Gracey, 2009). It is widely believed that elders are essential for Indigenous societies to reclaim their positive identities. Elders and elderly persons need to be distinguished from one another. In Indigenous societies, both are essential. Elders are those who, though they may not always be elderly, have demonstrated knowledge and leadership in topics of culture, religion, and history within their communities. Elders represent an essential connection with the past; they are keepers of (Busija *et.al*, 2020) the community knowledge and supporters of its collective spirit. Moreover, this paper is of the view that, Indigenous offspring are empowered to connect with family, community, and the land because of the significant role played by elders in handing down traditional beliefs, languages, and cultural practices. Elders serve as role models for fostering a good sense of cultural identity and for fostering connections to Indigenous customs, values, and practices such as truthfulness, compassion, empathy, dignity, and respect.

Unwritten norms

The most basic description of culture is "how we truly do things around here." It is the unwritten norms that, if left unchecked, steal the culture and keep it prisoner, regardless of the written regulations, codes of conduct, and wall-mounted plaques endorsing principles. Cultural norms are created by the unwritten laws (Yee, 2016). Unwritten norms are behavioural restraints imposed in indigenous African communities but not expressed or recorded. Because they are a component of the logical argument or path of action implied by tacit assumptions, they typically exist in an unheard and unwritten manner. These social norms are the unspoken guidelines for what is proper or acceptable in our specific group or culture. They frequently involve things we all "just know" to be true or appropriate, and they are frequently upheld by others through rewards or penalties. In African traditional events, for instance, you should wait for elderly people to select seats rather than squabbling for them.

Conclusion

In this essay, we examined how revisiting the problem of identity for indigenous public administration may and can serve as a fundamental instrument for strengthening or rather infusing African Public Administration. Afrocentricity was used as an avant-garde in this essay to clarify such a discourse. Because of this, when we discuss indigenous knowledge practices, we need to grasp how the theoretical and applied worlds are interconnected and how to appreciate these intricate interactions. At first sight, it seemed that the main focus of this study was on how African administrative systems might support effective governmental systems and aid in the fulfilment of African concerns by providing African solutions. Premised on what has been said thus far, this paper concludes that it is imperative to rethink indigenous public administration in public administration because Africans had their own set of values and principles that led to Ubuntu as a major principle for serving our indigenous communities.

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