THE METAPHYSICS OF GOVERNANCE IN POSTCOLONIAL NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines governance in postcolonial Nigeria using conceptual analysis and metaphysics to reveal political structure and leadership beliefs. Many studies treat governance as a technical or administrative issue, but this study contends that governance is a philosophical and metaphysical matter rooted in the human 'being'. After a conceptual as well as critical review of African nationalist ideologies, the paper argues that governance failure, particularly in Nigeria and Africa in general, is caused by an ontological disconnect and epistemic misalignment between indigenous values and the adoption of modern governance systems. Metaphysics, the philosophical search for reality and first principles, is used to explain the conditions of governance. Governance is not merely a system of processes and structures, but a reflection of the human mind's fundamental propensity towards justice, fairness, and the common good, the paper claims. Finally, it suggests that Nigeria's metaphysically informed and human-centred administration begins with education, which liberates the mind from ethnocentric and prejudiced thinking.

Keywords: Metaphysics, Governance, Postcolonial Nigeria, Justice, African Philosophy

Introduction

Extant studies show that states in Africa, in general, and Nigeria in particular, operate on some form of 'duality'. One aspect of this duality is the resilience, legitimacy, and relevance of African traditional institutions in the socio-cultural, economic, and political lives of Africans and the parallel modern state, which exercises authority in rule-making, its application, adjudication, and enforcement.[1] Present in and characterizing most modern African states are ills such as godfatherism, nepotism, ethnicism, sycophancy, corruption, thuggery, election rigging and other consequences such as the negligence of the rule of law, poor health care system, infrastructure, the mere presence if not absence of education and morality, low standard of living and unemployment contributed practically and necessitated the subject of this study. These conditions in the literature are easily described as 'bad' governance. Some existing studies show that the suffix 'good' to the notion of governance has a positive impact on a wide range of outcomes, particularly on human wellbeing. This is supported by the development of various indices that measure aspects such as government effectiveness, levels of corruption,

[1] "The relevance of African traditional institutions of governance". Retrieved 24/4/2024 from: https://repository.uneca.org/bitstream/handle/10855/3086/bib.%2025702_I.pdf?sequence=1. iii.

and the quality of legal systems. Connected to the foregoing is the search for a nexus in terms of "the quality of government institutions that implement policies (control of corruption, the rule of law) and economic growth".[2] Some authors think that good governance helps reduce economic inequality[3] and improves individual wellbeing, or how individuals assess their overall quality of life.[4] The quality of governance is a stronger predictor of peace than democracy, as it explains the absence of violent interstate conflict[5] and civil wars.[6] Meanwhile, Gilley's findings concerning political legitimacy show that good governance is measured by the rule of law, control of corruption, and government effectiveness, and these provide the citizens with the opportunity to evaluate their state.[7] To this end, a mere description of this phenomenon (governance) is not sufficient. The various positions represented in works of national ideological philosophers are not enough. And so, primary to all these is an examination of governance in postcolonial Nigeria from a metaphysical perspective – a call for a philosophical and precisely a

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[2] Rothstein Bo, "Good Governance," In *Oxford Handbook of Governance,* ed. David Levi-Faur (Oxford: Oxford UP. 2012), 145.

[3] Alberto Chong and César Calderón, "Institutional Quality and Poverty Measures in a Cross Section of Countries," *Economics of Governance* 1, no. 2 (2000): 132-3; Alberto Chong and Mark Gradstein, "Inequality and Institutions," *Research Department Working Paper* N0. 506, (New York: Inter-American Development Bank, 2004), 5-6.

[4] Bo, "Good Governance," 145.

[5] Raby Fay and Jan Teorell, "A Quality of Government Peace? Bringing the State Back into the Study of Inter-State Armed Conflict," *Working Paper* 20, (2010): 4.

[6] Bo, "Good Governance," 145.

[7] Gilley Bruce, "The Determinants of State Legitimacy: Results for 72 Countries. *International Political Science Review* 27, no. 1. (2006): 57.

qualitative approach to governance in Nigeria. In this light, Governance is presented from the lens of person from whose thoughts, actions and attitudes generate the description of governance whether as good or bad so expressed in literature. Governance from a metaphysical lens involves some distinctive principle(s) and actions of the human person that distinguish humans from robots or the instincts of lower animals. Put differently, governance is an expression of what it means to be human: free, rational, moral, just, and ultimately human value at the centre. The true context of 'governance' is in the act of governing. Such an act should rest on an art/principle. In a general sense, governance is expressed in entrusting to a few individuals to create laws, set order, and define conduct for the remaining 'masses'. This form of social ordering has existed in many human societies and is found in the culture of kinship, dictatorship, democracy and so on. However, let us consider how governance is conceptualised.

Understanding Governance: Definitions and Features

The term governance can be understood in three senses, which rest on some concepts and notions. These are (a) etymological sense (b) as a signifier or science of change, and (c) as structure, process, mechanism, and strategy. From its etymological stance, the concept of governance finds root in the Greek as *kybernan*, which means to pilot, steer or direct and in Latin as *gubernare* – to steer or rule. These two culminate in the English word 'govern', which means 'to control, influence, and regulate a person or course of events, to conduct policy,

actions, and affairs with authority. This understanding is very much central to this paper's objective.[8] A second sense of governance is that the concept generates images and meanings of *change*. The question is, is it a positive or negative change? However, as a science of change, it implies new processes of governing or changed conditions of ordered rule, or new methods by which society is governed[9] This understanding brings to mind other terms such as transformation or paradigm shift in leadership with high expectation of transparency and accountability rather than corruption, proactiveness rather than reactiveness, as well as security and well-being of members of the state or community rather than living in fear of death or in the partial experience of the Hobbesian state of nature[10] A third sense of governance is within the following concepts as *structure, process, mechanism and strategy*. By structure, governance implies the architecture of formal and informal institutions; as a process, it means the dynamics and steering functions involved in lengthy never-ending processes of policy-making; and as a mechanism, it signifies institutional procedures of decision-making, compliance and control and, finally, governance in the sense of strategy stands for the actors' efforts to govern and manipulate the design of institutions and mechanisms in order to shape choices and preferences. Here, the human person's thought, choice, decision as

[8] David Levi-Faur, "From "Big Government" to "Big Governance?" In *Oxford Handbook of Governance,* ed. David Levi-Faur (Oxford: Oxford UP. 2012), 6.
[9] Levi-Faur, From "Big Government" to "Big Governance? 7.
[10] Levi-Faur, From "Big Government" to "Big Governance? 7.

well as attitude and actions are germane. Thus, governance is a reflection of the systems of rules, regimes of laws, judicial decisions, and administrative practices. It is dynamic and involves a process of steering or enhancing the institutional capacity to coordinate – a practice of governing. Also, it is about the institutionalisation and naturalisation of procedures of decision-making.[11] By this, governance entails the act of leaders to command, persuade and maintain solidarity in a political community. As an activity and action of men, it exhibits the following characteristics: participation, strategic vision, adherence to the rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus, equity, freedom of the press, effectiveness and efficiency in public administration and ultimately accountability and reliable flow of information. These representations and notions give one a view of what it is to experience governance. The succeeding paragraph presents us with some descriptions of governance. The absence of these in most literature is termed 'bad governance.'

This aspect in addition to the foregoing, intends to show some descriptions concerning the concept of governance considered also as definitions: World Bank (WB) 1992, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 1997 and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) International Bureau of Education (UNESCO-IBE). WB defines governance in the light of development as "the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to

[11] Levi-Faur, From "Big Government" to "Big Governance"? 7.

mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations, and mediate their differences".[12] UNDP claims that governance refers to "structures and processes that are designed to ensure accountability, transparency, responsiveness, rule of law, stability, equity and inclusiveness, empowerment, and broad-based participation. Governance also represents the norms, values and rules of the game through which public affairs are managed in a manner that is transparent, participatory, inclusive, and responsive. In a broad sense, it is about the culture and institutional environment in which citizens and stakeholders interact among themselves and participate in public affairs. It is more than the organs of the government."[13] In addition, UNESCO describes "Good Governance to encompass the role of public authorities in establishing the environment in which economic operators function and in determining the distribution of benefits as well as the relationship between the ruler and the ruled."[14] IBE specifies governance with a stem or suffix 'good'. This implies that governance should possess a quality or state. This quality or state comes from the human person manifested in dispositions. These definitions further posit proper economic management of

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[12] United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report 2011 (New York, 2011): Retrieved, April 15, 2024. https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Think%20Pieces/7_governance.

[13] pdf. 3.

[14] "Governance". ICSI Retrirved, April 15, 2024. https://www.icsi.edu/media/webmodules/03082022_SamplePages.pdf.
"Governance". ICSI Retrieved, April 15, 2024. https://www.icsi.edu/media/webmodules/03082022_SamplePages.pdf.

resources (human and natural) and control, and the presence of values in the management and administration of public affairs.

In all these, governance entails directing, ruling, regulating, making decisions and policies, inclusivity, equity, transparency and accountability, all resting on norms and values, principles and precepts for the wellbeing of the society, state or nation. At the centre of governance is the human person who steers, controls, persuades and influences. And, as part of this discussion, attention is directed to the human person (mind) that governs and how such translates to the reality of governance itself. However, there are individuals in African intellectual history who have offered insights into African social and political conditions, with the aim of liberating Africa and transforming its system of governance. These ideas shall form the next section of the discourse.

Ideology and Governance

In the history of African ideas, some significant nationalists were primary to the discourse of governance in Africa, namely Leopold Sedar Senghor, Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, and Obafemi Awolowo. They articulated variations of the idea of African socialism. These figures wrote in the 1960s with emphasis on certain terms all directed at the social ordering of 'modern African' states. Senghor's earlier idea of *Negritude* was driven by the passion of his youthful age and was uncompromisingly in rejection of European ontology and epistemological reasoning. Negritude describes a 20th-century cultural and political movement of some French speaking countries in Africa and French speaking

Negros of the West Indies against the French Policy of Assimilation. It advocated for the affirmation of Black identity, heritage, and values. The movement sought to reclaim African cultural roots and resist the erasure of indigenous traditions imposed by colonial structures. While it proclaims African cultural values, it was directed at the West, which denied the existence of such values as a justification for oppression, dehumanisation as well as political and economic domination. To this end, those values can be seen to have some transformational capacity for governance. In Senghor's thought, "Negro African society is collectivist, or more exactly, communal because it is rather a communion of souls than an aggregate of individuals. Africa had already realised socialism before the coming of the Europeans. But we must renew it by helping to regain its spiritual dimension".[15] The emphasis here is that the collectivist character – solidarity, the egalitarian posture and the humanist disposition are necessary and existential ingredients for political stability and economic development. What this means is that his conception of the character of socialism derives concretely from the norms of solidarity, generosity and care that make everyday modes of

[15] Leopold S. Senghor, On African Socialism (London: Pall Mall Press, 1964), 36.

sociality in the context of his birth[16] and development to maturity, a possibility for positive political experience and governance. The spiritual dimension as posited entails dignity and welfare of every member, complementarity, responsibility in public positions and activities as well as economic life and language for strengthening the communal bond.

Another figure is Julius Kambarage Nyerere. His idea of African socialism derives from his emphasis on the state of mind of individuals *concerning how one relate to other humans and the community in general. He noted that* 'traditional African society' was a society shaped by four interlocking norms: mutuality, generosity, work and collective ownership of the primary means of production – land. The premise is that in a society, all who can work must work and contribute to the commonwealth. Connected to this is the idea that land, the primary means of production, is (and should be) readily and freely available to all for cultivation on a usufruct[17] basis. The exploitation of one by another – which Nyerere associates with capitalism – is abhorred by such normative framing of sociality. Nyerere therefore speaks of African socialism as 'essentially distributive'.[18] In our traditional African society, he argues, "we were individuals within a community… We took care of the community, and the community

[16] Jimi O. Adesina, "Variations in Postcolonial Imagination". *CODESRIA*47, no. 1, (2022):36.
[17] *Usus*, which means the right to use and *fructus*, which refers to the right to derive profit from the property.
[18] Adesina, "*Variations in Postcolonial Imagination"*, 37.

took care of us."[19] The values that the modern African state should concern itself with are "equality and respect for human dignity, sharing of the resources which are produced by our efforts, work by everyone and exploitation by none".[20]

As the foregoing aims to restore Africa's humanist and egalitarian principles for her states (governance), Kwame Nkrumah indicated his disaffection with the term African socialism. He identified two broad types of African socialism: (a) Nyerere's concern with reconciling human values of egalitarianism and solidarity with modern technology and (b) Senghor's position as closely associated with anthropology rather than with political economy.[21] While Nkrumah contends that there is no evidence that pre-colonial Africa is classless, describing it as a 'facile simplification'; he shares a lot with Julius Nyerere which is grounded on the norms of mutuality. For Nkrumah, modern African states must be circular and the human person as a member of the state is and remains the basic unity which give rise to egalitarianism. Basically, "man is one, for all men have the same basis and arise from the same evolution according to materialism. This is the objective ground of egalitarianism [equality's objective ground]" His emphasis here is based on a materialist view of the world, given that matter, and thus humanity, is fundamentally one, and there exists no rationale for rigid hierarchies or class subjugation. In this manner, he

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[19] Julius Nyerere, *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism* (Dar es Salaam: Government printer, 1968), 7.
[20] Adesina, "*Variations in Postcolonial Imagination"*, 37.
[21] Kwame Nkrumah, *Revolutionary Path* (London: Panaf, 1973), 440.
[22] Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for De-Colonization* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964), 14.

claims that the cardinal ethical tenet of philosophical *consciencism* is to regard each individual as an end in themselves rather than as a means to an end or aim. This is essential to all socialist or humanist perspectives on humanity.[23] This principle provides the basis for his rejection of exploitation and subjection of class to class in the Marxist conception of class structure. Egalitarian as the tenet of philosophical *consciencism* seeks "to promote individual development, but in such a way that the conditions for the development of all become the conditions for the development of each," in other words, individual development must not create disparities that weaken the egalitarian framework.[24] In sum, the restitution of Africa's humanist and egalitarian principles of society requires socialism. It is materialism that ensures the effective transformation of nature, and it is socialism that the highest development from and transformation of society derives[25] What this means is that, for Nkrumah, socialism is not alien to Africa but the modern expression of traditional communal egalitarianism. It is the only viable path to restore justice in postcolonial governance. Evidently, both Nkrumah and Nyerere's thoughts and modes of statecraft or governance, which have to do with the deployment of African values in directing and controlling

[23] Nkrumah, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for De-Colonization,* 96, 99.
[24] Nkrumah, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for De-Colonization,* 99–100.
[25] Nkrumah, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for De-Colonization,* 79

the affairs of the state for the well-being of members of the society, could not be sustained in postcolonial Africa in general and Nigeria in particular if applied.

Following the cue, Jeremiah Oyeniyi Obafemi Awolowo popularly known as AWO, criticised Leopold Sedar Senghor and Julius Nyerere's views of African socialism. He says that while it was good to fashion an African social and political philosophy based on African traditional values, they ignore the present and future of Africa. For him, in so far as governance is concerned, his conviction is democratic socialism. In several works, he examines the merits and demerits of capitalism. He lists the benefits of capitalism as modernisation of industry and commerce, building new cities and improving old ones, promoting science and technology, lessening and weakening the strongholds of poverty, ignorance, disease, and making the rich richer and the poor better off than they have ever been.[26] But he also perceived some of the worst things about capitalism. He thinks that capitalism and its methodologies are not conducive to the welfare of humanity at large. The adoption of capitalism in Africa will only continue the dehumanisation, ruthless exploitation, and split people into opposing groups as was experienced throughout

[26] Suleimmon Olayinka Opafola, "African Philosophy and Development," *Igwebuike.* Retrieved, April 15, 2024. : https://www.igwebuikeresearchinstitute.org/igwebuikepedia-articles.php?open=7

slavery and colonisation.[27] In a capitalist system, there are lockouts, strikes, and other types of labour disputes, as well as a lot of anger and resentment between the rulers and the ruled. Besides, capitalism is actually unjust, not equitable and fair to all citizens. Thus, its methods are unsuitable for humanity. Considering other drawbacks associated with it against its benefits, Awolowo dismisses capitalism and advocates for democratic socialism or a transformative socialism.

By democratic socialism, he meant "equality under the law, respect for fundamental rights of individual citizens and the existence of independent and impartial tribunals where these rights could be enforced. We believe that the generality of the people should enjoy his or her life and in reasonable abundance."[28] The emphasis here is that at the heart of governance is the expression of and respect for human rights, dignity and the existence of a tribunal that ensures the safety and protection of these rights. Furthermore, democratic socialism is an ideology that aims to achieve social justice and equality for all through democratic methods, including socialisation.[29] Similar to other forms of socialism, it endeavours to establish

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[27] Suleimmon Olayinka Opafola, "African Philosophy and Development," *Igwebuike.* Retrieved, April 15, 2024. https://www.igwebuikeresearchinstitute.org/igwebuikepedia articles.php?open=7

[28] Eric Akinboboye, *Awo's Democratic Socialism: A Pragmatic Panacea to Africa's Crisis of Governance Today*(Akure: Don Bosco Printing Press, 2022), 19-20.

[29] Suleimmon Olayinka Opafola, "African Philosophy and Development," *Igwebuike.* Retrieved, April 15, 2024. https://www.igwebuikeresearchinstitute.org/igwebuikepedia-articles.php?open=7

benchmarks for social goals and economic conduct. The goals of democratic socialism encompass the creation of an economic commonwealth that addresses the needs of all individuals; the realisation of social justice and equality, the eradication of unemployment (or the attainment of full employment), provision of fair wages compatible with decent living and economic well-being, the free provision of essential social services such as education (at all levels) and healthcare (both preventive and curative), political stability, modernisation of agriculture, rapid industrialization, improvement in infrastructural facilities, progressive socialization and a comprehensive social insurance scheme for all citizens.[30] Democratic socialism rejects violence and revolutionary socialism. Its methods include periodic elections, socialist orientation, discipline, diligence, self-assurance, the establishment of the Institute of National Guidance, socialisation or nationalisation, and centralised control and coordination of economic activities.[31]

An extension of the above ideals is the tenets of democratic socialism, which encompasses national prominence, universal opportunities, equitable allocation of national resources, individual liberty and welfare, solidarity among humanity, and just consideration for

[30] Abegurin Olayiwola, *The Political Philosophy of Chief Obafemi Awolowo* (Lanham: Lexington Books), 526-7.

[31] Suleimmon Olayinka Opafola, "African Philosophy and Development," *Igwebuike.* Retrieved, April 15, 2024. : https://www.igwebuikeresearchinstitute.org/igwebuikepedia-articles.php?open=7.

labour[32] Democratic socialism advocates for benevolence against greed and selfishness, noting that the public and private sectors of the economy coexist in a democratic state. Democratic socialism emphasises state[33] ownership of the means of production, the elimination of individual enterprise and private property, and the regulation of consumption. Awolowo asserts that these procedures do not jeopardise personal freedom. To justify the restriction of personal freedom concerning specific categories of consumption, he notes that it is smart for the government to make it illegal to sell obscene literature and use medications that are harmful to health. It is also a good idea to make suicide illegal. But it is definitely not doing its job if it lets people drink alcohol, use tobacco, drink coffee, tea, and other things that slowly and cumulatively poison them. Consequently, if an individual is not permitted to commit suicide, possess, or consume any drug of his choosing, regardless of its toxicity, or if he is not allowed to create disturbances that irritate his neighbours, he lacks the right to complain when his freedoms concerning specific categories of consumption are restricted. If one does not constitute a denial of human freedom, the other certainly cannot.[34]

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[32] Suleimmon Olayinka Opafola, "African Philosophy and Development," *Igwebuike.* Retrieved, April 15, 2024. : https://www.igwebuikeresearchinstitute.org/igwebuikepedia-articles.php?open=7

[33] Awolowo Obafemi, *Voice of Reason* (Akure: Fagbamigbe Publishers 1981), 191.

[34] Awolowo Obafemi, *The People's Republic* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1977, 198.

These are, for him, the necessary and sufficient conditions for governance *per se*. Again, all the foregoing values and precepts of governance rest on his political and economic beliefs concerning the dynamism and special role of man in initiating change. "Man is the sole creative and purposive dynamic in nature. He [man] is the prime mover in all activities. Without him, nothing at all can be produced. The resources of nature are negative and inert; man is positive and dynamic. Man is the determinant of all economic and social change and the generator of all the impulse of progress".[35] It is noted that Awolowo put his idea into action while he was the Premier of the old Western Region of Nigeria. The Region had a lot of growth, tranquilly, and progress or advancement. It is arguably the most developed geo-political zone in Nigeria, particularly in terms of education.

What can be gleaned from the impossibility of the values and conditions represented above is that the proposed values rooted in African communal philosophy were systematically undermined by Western exploitative logic. This logic was characterised by bureaucratic centralism and racial hierarchy, among others. Also, individualised competition was elevated through European materialist rationality, which privileged personal advancement over collective welfare. Within these conditions, communicative practices shifted toward a legalistic and administrative tone, a subtle move from relational and dialogical forms common in African societies. Moreso, principles such as distributive justice

[35] Olayiwola, The Political Philosophy o f Chief Obafemi Awolowo, 523.

and communal land ownership were displaced by neoliberal metrics, including GDP growth, foreign investment flows, and private capital accumulation. Consequently, African modes of being and knowing which are wholistic, (perhaps spiritual), and communal were marginalised in dominant political theory and practice. This exclusion not only disrupted indigenous epistemologies but also constrained alternative pathways for meaningful political and economic transformation in postcolonial African states. What the foregoing calls for is a philosophical approach to governance. To this extent, an understanding of metaphysics is here represented.

What is Metaphysics?

Metaphysics is the theory of reality. It is a combination of two Greek words, *Meta*, meaning 'after' or 'beyond', and *Physika*, meaning 'material' or 'physical things'. It is an attempt to get behind appearances to tell the truth about things. Sometimes it is said to be what there is in contrast to appearance. Again, when metaphysics is defined as the search for ultimate reality, the *isness* of things preoccupies the mind of the metaphysician. Central to metaphysics is the concept of reality. Reality encompasses the totality of human experience, be it real or imaginary, tangible or intangible, material or immaterial, corporeal or incorporeal, visible or invisible, factual, fictional, or mere illusion. We can then say that metaphysics as a system is a holistic or totalizing

appraisal of reality.[36] Contemporary discourse in metaphysics focuses on the question, What is reality? And, how is reality distinguished from mere appearance? Metaphysics explores and investigates the meaning and nature of reality, attempting to discover the general underlying principles of what is real and how to distinguish this from what is not real but appears to be real. The central question of what sorts of things exist led to some basic theories, namely, Idealism and Materialism. Materialism holds that matter, which is measurable, quantifiable, and physical, is the ultimate reality. That is the only matter that has real existence. Nonmaterial things, such as soul, spirit, angels, and so on, which are not material, are not in themselves real. Meanwhile, Idealism posits that the basic reality is the idea. What are ideas? Ideas are concepts. This entails that for the Idealist, every material thing is an idea or a form of an idea. Furthermore, metaphysics, as a branch of philosophy, is interested in the essence of things. In terms of origin, it is the mark of the human mind to seek and provide a single general principle that characterises a kind or form of 'experience'. In this way, cultures and worldviews with people are capable of and interested in the search for a principle of the reality of 'care', marriage and family life, the phenomenon of death, social gathering and festivals, political setting, and ultimately the organisation and sustenance of the same society–governance. An important concern in this discussion is how metaphysical questions are concerned with the political space. Some of the questions identified here may not be fully answered, but will

[36] Chiedozie Okoro, "Problems of Metaphysical Philosophy,"African Nebula, 3, (2011): 123.

stimulate the readers' minds for possible alternatives, principles, and attention to mitigating some of the challenges experienced.

Based on the foregoing, some general questions may be of interest here: how is metaphysics as the search for principles, implicated in the political structure and, precisely, governance in postcolonial Nigeria? What is possibly the purpose of the Nigerian state? What does it mean for Nigeria to be a state or a nation? Why are things the way they are? Again, what laws govern it? To these questions raised, an attempt concerning the purpose of the Nigerian state requires identifying primarily a principle of justice or secondarily some appreciable level of peace that allows for human flourishing. When the principle of justice manifests in the minds and attitudes of leaders and policies and rules derived from the conditions particular to 'all' persons, a purpose is and can be noted. Also, rules and policies constructed ought not express inconsistencies but are promulgated to address, prohibit, and caution human vices. Without adhering to these, the country remains and is reduced to a struggle for resources. Concerning what it means for a territory to be called a nation directs one's mind to ontology. The ontology for the Nigerian state would simply demand unity. This understanding is implicated in the fragmented aggregation of her existence or beingness, wherein different and distinct ethnic groups and religions promote regional interest over the general interest. This is actually a result of amalgamation. However, leaders' integration

principles (justice, developmental standards and love) that result in human flourishing could reduce fragmented interests. Concerning laws and rules, a metaphysician is interested in the harmony that exists between the people and their leaders and between laws and justice. Also, the development of policies that build shared identity and solidarity are a concern to governance from a metaphysical point of view. Still, governance from a metaphysical sense challenges the alienation of leaders from the people and calls for a system that reflects balance, such as – unity, reciprocity, and moral order. Governance in this sense for postcolonial Nigeria requires purpose, balance and just acts all deriving from the mind which steers and directs.

The Condition of Governance in Pre-colonial Nigeria

The concept of pre-colonial refers to the values, belief systems, principles, and procedures that shaped social, political, economic, familial, and educational structures across various societies. Pre-colonial governance is concerned with how different groups and units organized themselves socially and politically before Western incursion. In pre-colonial times, each culture possessed a distinct worldview and civilisation. By the fifteenth century, Africa was home to hundreds of dynamic cultures. In regions now identified as West or Central Africa, communities distinguished themselves through diverse languages, religions, arts, technologies, and evolving worldviews.[37] Considering a few cultures

[37] Slavery and Remembrance," Precolonial Africa Retrieved, February 14, 2025, https://slaveryandremembrance.org/articles/article/?id=A0001.

within Nigeria, there are patterns of social and political arrangements considered here as governance, but described in some works as administration. In terms of political administration (governance), the Yoruba society, through its Oyo empire, presents a hierarchical structure with important functionaries residing in the capital. Oyo Empire was able to influence issues in other areas like Ekiti, Ijebu and Ife. Kingship was dynastic, with succession rotating among lineages, and the Yoruba practised a centralised form of government with the Alaafin as the King. As ruler, he served as the political, cultural, spiritual, and religious leader of the kingdom. Also, the Alaafin did not rule alone; he worked with chiefs who advised him, and together they kept each other's power in check. The Oyomesi served as kingmakers and administered the city or territory as the case may be. They advised the Alaafin on state matters and attended weekly meetings with the King. The provincial governors are the Baale or Oba. An important aspect of their lifestyles, social harmony and sustenance of the community is the presence of the Ogboni cult. This cult provides an institutional check on the powers of the Oyomesi and the Alaafin. They possess judicial powers, maintain and preserve the values of the people, and have the power to check the decisions of the ruler. According to J. A. Atanda, the Ogboni did not exist in the original Old Oyo, but developed after the evacuation of the imperial city in the 1830s.[38] Other important Palace officials included the Iya oba (official mother of the king), Iya kere (keeper of palace treasures),

[38] Oluwatoyin, Oluwaniyi, O. "Evolution of State and Society in Precolonial Nigeria," https://staff.run.edu.ng/oermedia/3696103805403.pdf 7.

the king), Iya kere (keeper of palace treasures), Osi efa (palace eunuch and political representative), Arokin (national historians), Tetu (executioners), and Ilari (messengers and bodyguards).[39] Finally, the struggle for power between royal authority and non-royal chiefs led to the collapse of the Oyo Empire and the evacuation of the capital in the 1830s. Today, Oyo is a state and a small city within the state.

Yet another significant aspect of pre-colonial administrative structure is the Hausa/Fulani people. The Hausaland is an area of West Africa consisting of large states in northern Nigeria. The political system is traceable to the actions and activities of Othman Bin Fodio and his flag bearers, who conquered the Hausa States, wherein Sokoto and Gwandu were made the headquarters for all the emirates. The Fulani Islamic reform jihad of 1804-08 established a centralised political and religious authority over the fragmented Hausa states in present-day Northern Nigeria, thereby unifying them into one political and linguistic unit. The Jihad homogenises and creates a politically useful narrative of Hausa identity, supported by religious and cultural associations. The social and political structure was based on the emirate system. It was large in size geographically and by population. The system has a hierarchical and centralised authority that combines religious and political authority. The office of the Emir exercises absolute authority. However, some represent

[39] Oluwaniyi, O. "Evolution of State and Society in precolonial Nigeria," Retrieved, April 15, 2024.https://staff.run.edu.ng/oermedia/3696103805403.pdf 8.

him at different levels delegated to carry out some legislative duties, while the Emir is the Chief Legislator. These persons are the district heads, village heads, and the advisory council, bearing different titles based on their functions. The Emir's office is autocratic and is assisted only by some office holders who are responsible and accountable to him. Also, as head of the judiciary, the Emir's court deals with serious cases and the Alkali sits as a sole judge to administer the Sharia, a body of Muslim laws.

The hierarchical and centralised nature of power and systems of governance, as represented above, is not so in most small and large groups in South-Eastern and South-South places in Nigeria. The Igbo people, for instance, respected age and leadership came from the elders. Respect was not servility and was balanced by the belief that birth did not confer advantage on any man. Politically, the society was intensely democratic and ultimately egalitarian. In segmentary societies, stable governance is achieved by balancing small equal groups against each other and by the ties of clanship, marriage and religious association; these institutions therefore have special significance.[40] The Igbo worldview allows for the existence of 'autonomous' communities without external interference from an autocratic King or paramount ruler. In the village, government consisted of two basic institutions, the Ama-ala or Ndichie (Council of Elders) and the village assembly of citizens. These

[40] James Webster, Albert Boahen and Idowu, H.O, *The Growth of African Civilization: The Revolutionary Years West Africa Since 1800* (Lagos: Longman, 1968), 177-8.

persons, sometimes including women, are those who have displayed integrity, wisdom, and adequate understanding of the community's customs and laws. Also, in routine matters, the elders ruled by decree and proclamation, but where decisions likely to produce disputes were to be taken, the Ama-ala could order the town crier to announce a village assembly in the marketplace or in a ward square. At the assembly, the elders laid the issues before the people. Every man had a right to speak, the people applauding popular proposals and shouting down unpopular ones.[41] Moreso, the administration of justice possessed the same democratic quality and was primarily restorative rather than punitive. Quarrels between individuals of different families were settled before the people, where the ward elders act as arbiters. The elders, therefore, seldom acted as judges pronouncing guilt and innocence but as arbiters assessing the degree of guilt of each party and punishing both accordingly. This inclusive form of governance was not static but evolved over time due to internal and external pressures from warfare, trade, and contact with other cultures. This then led to some Igbo communities, and for instance, at Nri near Awka had kings who were in some ways considered godlike. In Onitsha, for instance, the Obi (king) was chosen by and from the royal lineage of Eze Chima, while his council consisted of the Ndichie (Red Cap chiefs), all senior Ozo title holders. As part of the social structure, the priests were part of the political system and served as the mouthpiece

[41] Webster, Boahen and Idowu, *The Growth of African Civilization, 178.*

of the gods. And, the age-grade comprised people who belonged to the same age group.[42] The senior age group maintained peace and order, while the junior age group concentrated on cleanliness.[43] In this governance structure, authority is diffused and not centralised. All the above-listed institutions have their unique roles and responsibilities. Social stability was possible as one group did not dominate the other, but ensured and fostered a balance of power. Generally speaking, this kind of system ensures that leaders are accountable and responsive to the people and vice versa – solidarity.

These systems were considered to be less significant with the presence of physically temporal colonial settlers along with their ideals, values, and principles. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, colonial governance was frequently framed as a "civilising mission" aimed at educating what were considered barbarian societies,[44] of which Nigeria is not excluded. They willed command, sovereignty, and indirect mechanisms of control to establish what we now refer to as the modern system of governance, with its problems, though primarily and characteristically from the human person. Thus, the colonial experience in Nigeria was a

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[42] Webster, Boahen and Idowu, *The Growth of African Civilization,* 185.

[43] These groups are involved in community service/development, security, conflict resolution, and enforcement of social norms amongst others.

[44] Lea Ypi, "What's wrong with colonialism?" *Philosophy and Public,* Retrieved,February 14, 2025, https://www.uvic.ca/victoria-colloquium/assets/docs/Moore-Whats_wrong_with_colonialism.pdf160-161.

profound alteration of the existential and political realities of the people. It was a clash between two civilisations: one driven by the imperatives of empire, capital, and control; the other rooted in communalism, fluid governance, and organic traditions. The Oyo, Hausa/Fulani, and Igbo socio-political structures constitute the governance system in some key places in pre-colonial Nigeria. However, the encounter or clash of civilisations and the struggle to balance traditional values and governance principles with modern colonial patterns is a significant consideration to propose a basis for governance in post-colonial Nigeria.

Concluding Remarks: The Metaphysics of Governance

The experience of poor governance in Nigeria and the political attitude of 'reactiveness' rather than proactiveness, a degree of irresponsibility rather than responsibility, forms of corruption rather than accountability and transparency, including other democratic vices identified in the introductory part of this paper, stem from the human mind. The human mind is here considered as the faculty of the soul that is non-material. This presents it as well as the activities therein as a reality open to the discourse of metaphysics. The mind is the nonphysical aspect of a person from where decisions, attitudes, policy-making, directing, and promoting values of equity and inclusivity, as well as the control and exercise of authority, come from, and this needs attention.

It is in the mind, one that is open to clear (critical) thinking – a mind rich in sound judgment, fairness, the good, and truth that

governance *per se* can be actualised. A mind that is fixed on and rich in these realities will bring about a strategic vision for the state, influence participation, provide room for consensus, respect for the rule of law and equity, and, as such, the effectiveness and efficiency of governance will be experienced by the community, state, or nation, and in this case, Nigeria. This is the metaphysics of governance. Governance in this sense does not need further description as 'good' or 'bad' governance. The question that looms large is, how can a person or group of persons be disposed to governance in the light of this constriction? The paper suggests education. Education is not the mastery of literacy and numeracy or some level of 'intelligence'. While these are important to governance, the form of education which is emphasised here is education as *liberation*. Liberation from prejudices, biases, and ignorance of one's age. And so, one who is educated is liberated from thought processes, judgments, and decisions that favour his/her ethnic and religious groups, community, and political attachments for decisions, policies, strategies, and designs that are directed at the common good of the state. In this way, the purpose, the beingness, and the construction of rules rest and project justice, peace, and human flourishing.

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