

# Resolving the African Leadership Challenge

Insight From History



**Okechukwu Ethelbert Amah**

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**OKECHUKWU ETHELBERT AMAH**

*Pan Atlantic University, Nigeria*



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## List of Acronyms

AD	Anno Domini
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BC	Before Christ
Commoner	Occupant of a level of authority below the Kgosi in Precolonial Botswana
Emirs	Traditional Ruler in the Northern Nigeria
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HDI	Human Development Index
IIGA	Mo Ibrahim Index for Governance in Africa
Kgosi	Precolonial ruler in Botswana
Kgotla	Precolonial community parliament in Botswana
Oba	Traditional Ruler in the Southern Nigeria
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PM	Prime Minister
Royal ones	Occupant of a level of authority below the Kgosi in Precolonial Botswana
TPFL	Tigrayan People's Liberation Front
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNIP	United National Independence Party
USSR	United Soviet Socialist Republic
WGI	World Governance Indicators

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## About the Contributors

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## Preface

Two sources provided the drive for this book. The first was about how leaders in Africa reacted to the COVID-19 pandemic. The second was the search for answers to some questions arising from the review of leadership behaviors observed in the COVID-19 reactions of African leaders. The Western world locked down its economy, took care of its people and industries, opened up its economies again, introduced COVID-19 regulations, developed vaccines, and vaccinated its people. African countries followed the same sequence but with some inadequacies. Africa could not take care of its people and industries and waited for the world to develop vaccines and supply them to the continent. Africa was again on the street with its begging bowls. When the vaccine was discovered, the world developed a plan to vaccinate their people within a short period; Africa could not make such plans because, like beggars, we were unsure when the vaccines would be available to the continent. Questions that kept coming to me were: Did colonization make Africa a perpetual follower of the paths of the West? How did Africa get to the position of waiting on others? Is this hereditary, or it began at some point in our history? When did this happen? Can it be found in the understanding of leadership in the history of Africa across various eras? Can we be visionary and craft a path for our development? What would this entail?

I decided to look at the challenges from the leadership journey in Africa across the precolonial, colonial and postcolonial eras. I know that much has been written about Africa's underdevelopment and whether the marks of colonialism were permanent or not. Still, I decided to go through the journey following another route. The route was to compare leadership effectiveness across precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial eras in some countries in all the regions of Africa. The book made valuable contributions but is not likely the final on leadership challenges in Africa.

Okechukwu Ethelbert Amah

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# Prologue

Researchers across the precolonial and postcolonial eras of the African continent have insinuated that the persistent leadership failure in the political setting is the primary cause of the continent's underdevelopment (Chaves & Robinson, 2011; Jallow, 2014; Johnson, 2010; Kumuyi, 2007). These authors have made recommendations on the way forward in resolving the crisis. Unfortunately, knowing and discussing these challenges across the entire life spectrum of the continent has not yielded the expected outcomes; instead, the continent has witnessed a continuous deterioration of the quality of leadership. A “popular accomplishment” that has gained ground and is expanding in Africa is the prevalence of long-serving leaders who leave their countries divided and in economic woes when they exit the office. For example, the civil wars in the horn of Africa and some countries in West Africa have their origin in the exit of a long-serving leader who did not prepare a successor to the throne. A mistake that cuts across all the long-serving leaders is their inability or unwillingness to appoint and train a successor to themselves. Hence, their exit usually leaves behind a vacuum whose filling gives rise to wars between rival groups.

It is not debatable that Africa is one of the world's least developed continents. However, researchers have not articulated the origin of the challenge and the factors responsible for it (Austin, 2010; Thovoethin & Ewalefon, 2019). The history of Africa has traversed various eras ranging from primitive, slavery, precolonialism, colonialism, and the controversial neocolonialism (Olanrewaju, 2015). What is clear is that Africa had some of the well-managed and economically prosperous empires in precolonial Africa (Gumede, 2015; Hoffmann & Nolte, 2013). Something must have happened during the colonial era that destroyed the wealth of the precolonial era and left the postcolonial continent underdeveloped. Hence, the current book assumed that the underdevelopment of Africa could be traced to the abandonment of the precolonial leadership model and the adoption of the foreign leadership model. The precolonial leadership model had its foundation in the continent's customs, culture, values, and history. In contrast, the postcolonial leadership model did not conform to what the continent expected from its leaders.

Incidentally, certain books have discussed governance in each of the eras in the history of Africa (Boone, 1994; Cheeseman, 2015; Davidson, 1994; Dube, 2020; Englebort, 2000; Farah, Kiamba, & Mazongo, 2011; Jallow, 2014; Johnson, 2010; Kasongo, 2010; Okafor, 2009; Rodney, 1972; Thovoethin & Ewalefon, 2019). These books highlighted governance's effectiveness (and otherwise) in these eras.

Some analyzed the causes of the African leadership challenges in the postcolonial period and advocated specific leadership behaviors to remedy the situation (Amah, 2018; Azikiwe, 1970; Eme, 2013; Kumuyi, 2007). However, these books did not align the suggested styles to the continent's customs, values, history, and culture.

The current book addresses four definite areas that existing books did not cover. Firstly, several prevailing books concentrated on specific African regions; however, this book will cover the entire continent. This is necessary since scholars have discovered that differences across Africa must be recognized despite the homogeneous nature of some cultural values (Awoniyi, 2015; Diller, 2013; Eyong, 2017; Idang, 2015; van den Berghe, 1983). Secondly, this book will use information from the various eras to identify the origin of Africa's leadership challenge. For example, Robinson and Parson (2006) and Chaves and Robinson (2011) stated that since the people saw the postcolonial governance of Botswana as a continuation of the effective and popular precolonial governance, this led to the success experienced, while in Sierra Leone, where such continuity was absent development was not as much. This means that comparing leadership styles and success across eras in several regions of Africa will be a better way of understanding the leadership challenges and underdevelopment of the continent. Thirdly, this book will identify issues that can point to a resolution of the leadership challenge. Lastly, this book will use the first three objectives to craft a possible leadership behavioral change to achieve effectiveness. The various chapters in the book will cover leadership in the different eras across the regions of Africa. After that, the epilogue will collate and analyze the inputs from these chapters to address the leadership challenges and the way forward.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

*Okechukwu Ethelbert Amah*

Africa's lack of development is well documented and not debatable, but the factors responsible for the underdevelopment have not been articulated (Thovoethin & Ewalefon, 2019). The history of Africa has traversed various eras ranging from the primitive slavery society, pre-colonialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism (Olanrewaju, 2015). In some eras, Africa's lack of development is attributed to many factors (Amah, 2018; Jallow, 2014; Kumuyi, 2007; Rodney, 1972). The factors are classified as exogenous (externally inflicted) or endogenous (self-inflicted) (Amah, 2018; Kasongo, 2010; Thovoethin & Ewalefon, 2019). Factors such as Africa's unequal representation in the capitalist economy (Amin, 1974; Organization of African Unity, 1980), self-serving leadership (World Bank, 1981), and state capacity and institutional quality (Lewis, 1996; World Bank, 1994) have been listed. The dependency theory (Bruce & Harvey, 1981) is an offshoot of the exogenous explanation which asserts that Africa's underdevelopment is the product of completely embedding its economy into the world capitalist system (the former based on the principle of collaboration and cooperation, while the latter is based on competition). Thus, poverty in Africa is attributed to the reliance of Africa's economy on developed societies (Eme, 2013).

Those with an external locus of control believe that Africa's challenges originated from colonization and subscribe to exogenous factors. Proponents of the exogenous factors refer to Africa's post-colonial era as neo-colonization because they think the present-day leaders only execute plans handed down by colonial masters. Some proponents of this approach have insinuated that colonial masters took what was operational in Africa and rendered it inoperative (Farah, Kiamba, & Mazongo, 2011; Fatile & Adejuwon, 2017). While there may be some truths in these assertions, it is indecorous for Africans to detach themselves from the ensuing occurrences on the continent. Africa cannot alter the events of the past. However, the continent can focus on planning a future where history is neither repeated nor allowed to become an obstacle. Leaders must plan the process, formulate relevant development policies, and implement the plan and policies for effective development in Africa (Economic Commission for Africa, 2011). Therefore, the relevant questions are: What is the foundation of the plans and policies used by African leaders? What principles govern the implementation of

these plans? The answers to these questions will justify aligning the current with what is borrowed or developing a new one that pursues development aligned to African history, customs, and culture (Ribeiro, 2011; Rodney, 1972).

Proponents of the endogenous factors begin with the premise that Africa is endowed with human and natural resources but has the worst economic indicators and governance structure because of the actions of its leaders (Aliu, 2014; Fonchingong, 2005; Osimen, Adesuwa, & Sam, 2014). They attribute the root of Africa's problem to the leadership action of borrowing foreign ideologies without considering their alignment with African history on leadership. This agrees with the comment by Rodney (1972) that those who use borrowed ideologies in Africa must consider their alignment with the superstructure of the old, reflected in African's behavioral patterns and belief systems. In supporting the endogenous cause of lack of development in Africa, Englebert (2000) explained that the continent's underdevelopment arose from the clash resulting from the difference between precolonial and postcolonial African institutions. The author asserted that the greater the conflict between the institutions, the more leaders adopt neo-patrimonial rather than developmental policies. This is referred to as the "imported state hypothesis" (Englebert, 2000, p. 7; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

Thus, from a political theory perspective, Africa's underdevelopment is attributed to the postcolonial leaders' adoption of policies and institutions handed down by colonial masters for personal gain while abandoning the precolonial institutions responsible for erstwhile positive developments (Bayart, 1993; Boone, 1994; Lewis, 1996). Since there is a disconnect between what postcolonial African leaders do and what the context dictated required to drive effective development, the leaders governed the states as appendages of the colonial masters. They appreciated and valued norms and cultures foreign to Africa (Aliu, 2014; Chabal, 1999) and pursued policies that enhanced personal gain instead of the common good (Adejuwon, 2014; Aliu, 2014; Arowosegbe, 2011). Such leaders diverted the benefits from governance to "private use or used them for limited people" in the in-group circle (Aliu, 2014, p. 2).

Despite the diversity in the causes of the poor leadership performance in Africa identified by several authors, terms such as leadership quality, decisions, and the conflict between precolonial and postcolonial African governance can be implicitly or explicitly implied in the suggested factors. Thus, the situation narrows down to how African leaders handled precolonial and postcolonial institutions and the decisions that fostered either neocolonialism or development. Hence, the concept of imported statehood stated by Badie (1992) becomes critical in African leadership and development. Imported statehood is where the postcolonial leader rigidly follows what the colonial master laid down without regard to whether it aligned with tested precolonial institutions. The colonial masters imposed the mindset on postcolonial leaders as a condition to offer patronage to the latter. According to Englebert (2000, p. 11), such imported statehood can only enhance development if it is "congruent with informal institutions and norms." Congruency determines the level of legitimacy a leader has. A leader's lack of legitimacy is the primary factor responsible for underdevelopment or uneven development in Africa. Vertical legitimacy confers the right to rule on a leader,

while horizontal legitimacy is an agreement that such a rule should be exercised within a community. When legitimacy is low, it hampers the leader's ability to govern appropriately. Leaders with low legitimacy find it easy to adopt neocolonial policies that enhance compliance, clientelism, nepotism, and regionalism (Englebert, 2000). Illegitimacy drives leaders to strive for power at the expense of informal institutions (Bayart, 1993; Lewis, 1996).

Determining the factors necessary for underdevelopment is the first step in solving Africa's leadership crisis. A significant follow-up step is determining the exact period in Africa's history where underdevelopment began or attained a dangerous level. This will point to the critical factor responsible for underdevelopment (Rodney, 1972). Since leadership behavior is generally accepted as the primary factor, tracing the changes in leadership behaviors across the various eras in Africa's history will further explain the dilemma. Thus, this handbook attempts to identify leadership behaviors in primitive, precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial Africa. Researchers attribute uneven development across African countries to two conclusions (Englebert, 2000): lack of alignment between leadership action and norms permitted by culture and the variation in leadership behaviors across eras and African countries (Thovoethin, 2015).

For African leaders to succeed, they must borrow from the comment by Kollinger and Minniti (2006) that the businesses established by African entrepreneurs had little chance of survival because of a lack of role models (Fairlie, 1999; Rhodes & Butler, 2004; Robb, 2002). What are the sources of these role models? This book takes the approach that leaders can find the role model they need in the precolonial leaders who had established effective governance and acceptable levels of development. Indeed, some postcolonial leaders have referred to the need to borrow much from precolonial leaders (see Aliu, 2014; Azikiwe, 1970). This book advocates that the time has come for Africa to observe the conduct of primitive and pre-colonial leaders to understand what enabled them to run such successful and longstanding empires. The Benin empire and the Mali empire, for instance, were highly successful and remained relevant till the entry of the colonial masters (Dube, 2020) because their governance was based on existing structures created by the precolonial leaders. Thus, adopting the precolonial systems by the colonial masters affected how citizens were governed and the level of economic development achieved.

In exploring leadership behaviors and actions across the entire spectrum of Africa's history, the book is structured into four parts that address leadership success and challenges in the different eras. The book will borrow much information from politics and sociology and use such information to model leadership behaviors across Africa's history. The book is structured into four parts.

## **Part 1: Precolonial, Colonial, and Postcolonial Era in Botswana**

Part 1 contains three chapters that handled leadership in Botswana's precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial eras. The precolonial leaders ran an autocratic system of governance, but they exercised their powers for the common good. They left an

economy described as “self-sufficient, autonomous, and ecologically sound” (Monageng, 2006, p. 69). The colonial masters derailed the progress that started in the precolonial era. They marginalized and alienated people from their work and the result of their work and left Botswana underdeveloped. The postcolonial Botswana began with the elites aligned with the colonial masters and had a questionable legacy with the people. However, the chiefs in power in the precolonial era assumed leadership of the nation and integrated the traditional and postcolonial institutions. This eventually produced a link between the old and the new, giving rise to continuity of development in the postcolonial era.

## **Part 2: Monarchical and Post-monarchical Era in Ethiopia/Tanzania**

Part 2 contains three chapters that handled leadership in the monarchical regime, the post-monarchical regime in Ethiopia, and the leadership legacies of Julius Nyerere in Tanzania. The monarchical rule in Ethiopia ended in 1974 and left trails of failure such as exclusive rule with ethnic under-tone, autocratic, and transactional leadership behavior that eventually led to the under-development of the nation. Ethiopia is one of the countries that were not colonized. However, the leaders aligned themselves with the colonial powers around the region and obtained authority to become “another colonizing power in Africa” (Mohie-Eldin, 2012, p. 1) but paid a colossal price. Ethiopia was well-positioned to grow, but the monarchy started badly, and subsequent regimes followed their path. The final chapter positioned Julius Nyerere as a charismatic leader who accelerated the process of decolonization of Tanzania and built the foundation for modern Tanzania.

## **Part 3: Precolonial, Colonial, and Postcolonial Era in Nigeria**

Part 3 contains three chapters discussing Nigeria’s precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial leadership. Before the arrival of the colonial master. Nigeria had over 470 ethnic groups with three major ethnic groups. They practiced two forms of government, centralized and decentralized, both hierarchical and bureaucratic, and based on the cultural values of the ethnic groups. Leadership in the precolonial era emphasized achieving societal needs, growth, and development. The postcolonial master, Britain, did not factor in the culture, history, and background of the various ethnic groups before amalgamating them and setting up a common form of governance. Hence, Britain elevated ethnic rivalry and regional nationalism, which stalled progress in Nigeria. Postcolonial leaders inherited a divided nation with ethnic, religious, and ideological differences. This faulty foundation created fragile states and led to failed statehood that characterized postcolonial governance.

## Part 4: Precolonial, Colonial, and Postcolonial Era in Egypt

Part 4 has three chapters that discuss precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial leadership in Egypt. The Pharaohs had supreme authority in ancient Egypt, which was not open to questioning. However, the Pharaohs recognized the source of their competitive advantage and managed it very well to achieve many feats, among which were the many pyramids built. The era was filled with innovative and creative developments, making governance and leadership adapt to environmental changes. Egypt had various colonial masters that occupied the country at different times. The colonial masters had diverse motives and reasons for their occupation. None of the motives included linking the present with the prosperous past. Hence, when Egypt obtained self-rule, the developmental clock of the nation was reset to zero. Since Britain, the last colonial master, was reluctant to leave and grant self-rule, the nationalists used force to remove them and their surrogate Egyptian rulers. This action laid the foundation for using force to bring about social change and granted the military a foothold in Egyptian politics.

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