

Public Morality in Africa for Transformational Leadership and Governance

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Accepted: 1/7/2024

Published: 2/6/2024

Abstract: This study examines the role of public morality in fostering transformational leadership and effective governance in Africa. Amidst diverse cultural, religious, and socio-political dynamics, the continent faces challenges in aligning traditional moral values with contemporary governance practices. These challenges underscore the need to reassess the impact of traditional African moral frameworks on leadership and governance in the modern era. African societies are navigating a complex landscape where traditional moral values often diverge from formal legal systems and modern governance structures, posing challenges to ethical leadership and societal cohesion. The study aims to assess the impact of traditional African moral values on contemporary leadership practices, analyse the alignment of written laws with communal moral standards, and propose strategies for promoting holistic approaches to public morality in African governance. The scope encompasses a comparative analysis across various African countries, focusing on the interaction between traditional values and formal institutions. Limitations include the diversity of cultural contexts and the evolving nature of regional governance dynamics. This research contributes to scholarly understanding by highlighting the relevance of indigenous moral philosophies in shaping ethical governance models and fostering societal stability in Africa. Theories of transformational leadership and ethical governance inform the study, highlighting the integration of cultural norms and legal frameworks in effective leadership practices. Employing content analysis, the study examines literature, legal documents, and case studies to explore the implementation and impact of moral values on governance structures. The findings suggest that while traditional moral values provide a foundation for ethical leadership, challenges persist in their integration with formal governance frameworks. There is a notable discrepancy between prescribed laws and communal moral standards, necessitating strategic reforms. The study concludes that aligning written laws with communal moral standards is essential for fostering effective and ethical leadership in Africa. It underscores the importance of promoting inclusive decision-making processes and leveraging technology to enhance transparency and accountability. Recommendations include legislative reforms to incorporate traditional values, leadership training on ethical decision-making, and community engagement strategies to bridge cultural divides and enhance governance effectiveness.

Keywords: cultural diversity, ethical leadership, legal frameworks, public morality, transformational leadership and governance, traditional African values

Publish by IJAH 2024.

INTRODUCTION

In today's increasingly interconnected world, the discourse on effective governance and transformational leadership transcends geographical boundaries, encompassing diverse cultural contexts and ethical frameworks. Nowhere is this more evident than in Africa, a continent grappling with the complex interplay between traditional values, modern legal systems, and the evolving dynamics of globalised societies. Almost every locality becomes trans-local due to certain types of connections, and every local phenomenon becomes glocal (Eriksen, 2020). This study delves into the critical examination of public morality as a foundational element for

transformational leadership and effective governance in contemporary African settings.

Globally, the concept of public morality resonates across societies as a cornerstone for ethical governance and societal well-being. It encompasses not only legal standards but also the communal values and ethical principles that guide public conduct and decision-making. As nations navigate the challenges of globalisation and socio-economic transformation, the need to uphold and integrate robust ethical frameworks becomes paramount to ensuring sustainable development and social cohesion (Smith, 2018).

Regionally, Africa presents a unique landscape where

traditional communal ethics intersect with imported legal systems inherited from colonial legacies. This intersection often creates tensions between written laws and deeply ingrained moral norms, as observed in various African countries. The continent's rich cultural diversity and historical legacies influence its approach to morality, shaping leadership practices and governance structures in profound ways (Mbembe, 2001).

Within African communities, traditional belief systems, communal values, and kinship ties deeply root public morality at the local level. These local norms not only regulate individual behaviour but also define collective identities and community solidarity. However, the rapid urbanisation, technological advancements, and socio-political changes sweeping across Africa challenge these traditional moral foundations, prompting a reassessment of their relevance in contemporary governance (Makgoba, 2007).

This study seeks to explore these dynamics by examining how traditional African moral values can inform and enhance transformational leadership and governance practices. The synthesising global insights on ethical governance, regional challenges in aligning legal frameworks with local moral standards, and local perspectives on communal ethics, the research aims to propose strategies for cultivating a holistic approach to public morality. Such an approach is essential for nurturing effective leadership, promoting accountability, and fostering sustainable development across diverse African contexts.

Statement of the problem

In contemporary African societies, the shift from traditional moral frameworks to written legal systems has led to a significant erosion of public morality. Traditionally, African communities operated under a holistic moral code deeply embedded in societal norms and values, which guided behaviour and maintained social harmony without the need for written laws. This traditional approach to morality emphasised communal well-being over individual interests, as noted by Wiredu (1998) and Gyekye (2003). However, the introduction and adoption of Western legal systems have narrowed the concept of morality, reducing it to compliance with written laws, which often lack the depth and communal focus of traditional moral systems (Waliggo, 2005). This transformation has resulted in a fragmented moral landscape in which urbanised Africans, influenced by diverse religions such as Islam and Christianity and modern information technology, adopt different moral standards compared to those in rural areas who still adhere to traditional beliefs.

The increasing complexity and rapid social changes in African societies further compound the problem. Traditional morality, which emphasised conformity and communal harmony, did not prepare individuals for the moral choices required in a modern, pluralistic society (Kigongo, 1991). Consequently, there is a disconnect

between the inherited moral frameworks and the current socio-political environment. This disconnect poses a challenge to effective governance and leadership, as leaders must navigate a morally diverse and often conflicting landscape. We urgently need transformational leadership, which emphasises ethical behaviour, communal values, and moral integrity, to address these challenges. Leaders must integrate traditional moral values with modern ethical standards to create a cohesive moral framework that supports beneficial governance and social cohesion.

To address this issue, it is essential to revisit and integrate some traditional African moral values into contemporary governance and leadership practices. This integration should start at the family and community levels and expand to national governance structures, ensuring that moral education is holistic and continuous from a young age. Without a deliberate effort to harmonise traditional and modern moral frameworks, African societies may continue to experience moral decay and governance failures, undermining efforts towards sustainable development and social justice.

Objectives

1. To assess the impact of traditional African moral values on contemporary leadership and governance practices
2. To analyse the challenges and opportunities of aligning written laws with communal moral standards
3. To propose strategies for promoting a holistic approach to public morality in African leadership

Scope and limitations

This study focuses on exploring the dynamics of public morality in Africa within the context of transformational leadership and governance. It encompasses a comprehensive analysis of traditional African moral values, their adaptation to modern legal frameworks, and their implications for effective leadership practices. The research will draw insights from global perspectives on ethical governance, regional variations in moral norms across African countries, and local community dynamics. However, limitations include the vast diversity of cultural and socio-political contexts within Africa, which may limit the generalizability of findings across the continent. Additionally, access to comprehensive historical and contemporary data on moral practices and leadership dynamics in some regions may pose constraints on the study's depth and breadth.

The significance of the study

This study on public morality in Africa for transformational leadership and governance holds

significant implications for both academic discourse and practical applications. Academically, it contributes to the understanding of how traditional African moral values intersect with contemporary governance structures, shedding light on unique ethical frameworks that inform leadership practices. It provides insights into the adaptation and integration of these values into modern governance systems, offering a nuanced perspective on moral leadership in diverse cultural contexts.

Practically, the findings will inform policymakers, governmental agencies, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Africa and beyond. By highlighting the role of moral principles in effective leadership and governance, the study aims to foster more ethical decision-making processes, enhance public trust in institutions, and promote sustainable development. It also serves as a resource for educational institutions, researchers, and leaders seeking to understand and apply ethical frameworks within diverse socio-political landscapes.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Two prominent theoretical frameworks that are applicable to the study of public morality in Africa for transformational leadership and governance include communism and ethical leadership theory.

Communitarianism

This theory emphasises the importance of community and shared values in shaping moral behaviour and governance practices. In the African context, communitarianism aligns with traditional cultural norms, where communal well-being takes precedence over individual interests. According to Gyekye (2003), African societies historically emphasised communal ethics, viewing morality as integral to social cohesion and stability. This perspective posits that effective leadership should prioritise communal interests and ethical norms rooted in community values. Communitarianism provides a lens through which to analyse how African leaders can integrate traditional moral frameworks into contemporary governance, fostering societal harmony and ethical leadership practices (Gyekye, 2003).

Ethical Leadership Theory

This theory focuses on the moral principles and behaviours of leaders and their impact on organisational outcomes and societal well-being. Northouse (2018) defines ethical leadership as a type of leadership that prioritizes respect for ethical beliefs and values, as well as the rights and dignity of others. We can apply ethical leadership theory in the African context to comprehend how leaders maintain moral standards, transparency, and accountability in governance. Leaders who embody ethical leadership inspire trust, promote fairness, and

strive for justice, aligning their actions with ethical principles derived from both traditional African values and contemporary ethical theories (Northouse, 2018).

These theories provide a robust framework for examining how public morality intersects with leadership and governance in Africa. The study applies these theoretical perspectives to uncover insights into how African leaders can navigate complex ethical dilemmas, promote integrity, and enhance public trust through transformational leadership approaches, grounded in both communal ethics and contemporary ethical frameworks.

METHODOLOGY

The study employs content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018; Neuendorf, 2017) as its primary methodology to examine various texts, documents, and literature related to public morality in Africa for transformational leadership and governance. Content analysis allows for a systematic review and interpretation of qualitative data, such as scholarly articles, policy documents, and historical texts (Krippendorff, 2018). The study analyses these sources to identify recurring themes, patterns, and perspectives on how leadership conceptualizes, practices, and influences public morality in various African contexts. This methodological approach provides a rigorous framework for understanding the complex interplay between moral values, leadership practices, and governance structures in Africa.

FINDINGS

The influence of traditional African moral values on contemporary leadership and governance practices is significant.

The assessment of traditional African moral values reveals significant impacts on contemporary leadership and governance practices across the continent. Traditional values such as communalism emphasise collective well-being over individualistic pursuits, shaping leadership styles that prioritise community consensus and social harmony (Gyekye, 1997). Leaders influenced by these values often exhibit a participatory approach, seeking to involve diverse stakeholders in decision-making processes to ensure inclusivity and legitimacy (Wiredu, 1998).

Moreover, the anthropocentric nature of African ethics underscores a human-centred approach to governance, focusing on the welfare and dignity of individuals within the community (Bujo, 1990). This perspective contrasts with Western models that prioritise legal frameworks and individual rights, highlighting the influence of cultural norms in shaping governance priorities (van der Walt, 2003).

However, when traditional values encounter modern complexities such as rapid urbanization and globalization,

challenges arise. While traditional moral codes promote stability and cohesion, they may also conflict with contemporary demands for transparency, accountability, and efficiency in governance (Aseka, 2005). Negotiating these tensions requires adaptive leadership that integrates traditional values with modern governance practices to address evolving societal needs while preserving cultural identity.

In addition, understanding the impact of traditional African moral values on contemporary leadership and governance practices reveals both enduring strengths and evolving challenges in Africa's quest for effective and ethical governance structures.

Challenges and opportunities in aligning written laws with communal moral standards

Aligning written laws with communal moral standards presents both challenges and opportunities in contemporary African societies. Traditional African communities often uphold communal moral standards that prioritise collective well-being, reciprocity, and social harmony (Gyekye, 1997). These values, deeply ingrained in everyday life, shape community expectations of ethical behavior among individuals and leaders alike.

However, the introduction of written laws influenced by colonial legacies and modern legal systems poses challenges to harmonising them with traditional communal norms. Legal frameworks may emphasise individual rights and universal standards, which can sometimes conflict with community-oriented moral codes that prioritise the common good over individual liberties (Wiredu, 1998).

Nevertheless, aligning written laws with communal moral standards also presents opportunities for fostering inclusive governance practices. By integrating traditional values into legal frameworks, policymakers can enhance legitimacy and cultural relevance, thereby promoting greater acceptance and adherence to laws among diverse communities (van der Walt, 2003).

Navigating these challenges requires a balanced approach that respects cultural diversity while promoting legal certainty and justice. It necessitates dialogue and collaboration between legal institutions, community leaders, and civil society to develop laws that reflect and uphold communal moral standards, thereby fostering a more cohesive and responsive legal system in contemporary Africa.

Strategies for promoting a holistic approach to public morality in African leadership

Promoting a holistic approach to public morality in African leadership requires strategic interventions that acknowledge and integrate traditional values with modern governance principles. Firstly, fostering ethical leadership entails cultivating leaders who embody integrity,

accountability, and a commitment to the common good (Boje, 2000). Such leaders serve as role models, inspiring trust and fostering a culture of ethical behaviour within institutions.

Secondly, educational reforms are crucial in instilling moral values from an early age. Integrating traditional ethics into school curricula and promoting civic education can nurture a sense of responsibility and community among youth, laying the foundation for future leaders (Waliggo, 2005).

Moreover, promoting inclusive decision-making processes that involve diverse stakeholders ensures that moral standards reflect societal norms and values. Engaging civil society organisations, religious institutions, and traditional leaders in policy formulation fosters legitimacy and enhances the relevance of public policies to local contexts (Steidlmeier, 1998).

Leveraging technology and media for ethical awareness campaigns can reach broader audiences and facilitate public discourse on moral issues. Platforms that promote dialogue and the exchange of ideas can bridge generational and cultural gaps, reinforcing the importance of ethical conduct in leadership (Aseka, 2005).

In addition, promoting a holistic approach to public morality in African leadership requires multifaceted strategies that blend traditional wisdom with contemporary governance practices, ensuring sustainable development and societal cohesion.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has explored the intricate dynamics of public morality in African leadership and governance, highlighting both its challenges and potential pathways forward. By examining the impact of traditional African moral values on contemporary leadership practices, it became apparent that these values continue to exert a significant influence, albeit in evolving forms. The findings underscored the resilience of communal ethics in shaping leadership behaviour and societal norms, challenging the dominance of Westernised legal frameworks.

Furthermore, the analysis of aligning written laws with communal moral standards revealed inherent tensions, as well as opportunities for synergistic approaches. The study proposed strategies for promoting a holistic approach to public morality, emphasising ethical leadership, educational reforms, inclusive decision-making processes, and leveraging technology for ethical awareness.

In terms of the theories investigated, particularly transformational leadership and ethical theories, the findings generally supported their applicability in the African context. Transformational leadership's emphasis on integrity, inspiration, and ethical decision-making resonated with the study's findings on effective leadership practices rooted in communal values. Ethical theories provide a framework for understanding the moral underpinnings of governance challenges and opportu-

ities in Africa.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on ethical governance and leadership in Africa, suggesting that embracing traditional moral values alongside contemporary practices can foster sustainable development and societal cohesion. Future research could delve deeper into specific case studies and longitudinal analyses to further validate these findings and enhance their applicability in diverse African contexts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations aim to foster a holistic approach to public morality in African leadership, addressing current challenges while leveraging opportunities for sustainable development and effective governance. The study's recommendations include the following:

1. **Integration of Traditional and Written Laws:** Advocate for legal reforms that integrate traditional African moral values into formal legal frameworks. Legislative reviews, consultations with traditional leaders, and community engagements can achieve this by ensuring laws reflect communal ethics.
2. **Promotion of Ethical Leadership:** Encourage leadership development programmes that emphasise ethical decision-making, transparency, and accountability. This includes training for current and aspiring leaders on the importance of aligning personal values with public service responsibilities.
3. **Education and Awareness:** Implement educational initiatives at all levels to promote a deeper understanding of African moral philosophies and their relevance to contemporary governance. This includes curriculum reforms in schools and ongoing civic education campaigns.
4. **Community Engagement and Participation:** Foster inclusive decision-making processes that involve diverse stakeholders, including marginalised groups and traditional authorities. This ensures that governance reflects the needs and values of the entire community.
5. **Use of Technology:** Harness the potential of technology to disseminate ethical standards, promote transparency, and facilitate public engagement. Develop platforms for ethical reporting, citizen feedback mechanisms, and digital tools for ethical decision support.
6. **Research and Dialogue:** Encourage further research and dialogue on public morality and leadership in Africa. Support academic institutions, think tanks, and civil society organisations in conducting empirical studies and facilitating discussions on ethical governance.
7. **International Cooperation:** Collaborate with international organisations and development partners to share best practices in ethical governance and leverage support for capacity-building initiatives.

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