

Why African Countries Implode (Last Part)
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The “POWER EQUATION” lies at the root of Africa’s never-ending cycle of war, political instability and chaos. The “power equation” can be summarized as the centralization of power, the monopolization of power and the exercise of power to benefit certain persons or groups to the total exclusion of other groups. Sustainable development in an African country is not possible without addressing the “power equation.”

Currently, Rwanda is touted as an economic success story. It has reduced poverty by more than 50 percent and attracted billions in foreign investment. But that economic success is not sustainable because President Paul Kagame has not addressed the “power equation.” Neither has President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, who in 1986 declared that “No African head of state should be in power for more than 10 years.” In 2012, he is still in power.

Recall that in the late 1980s, Ivory Coast was called an “economic miracle.” What happened? The power equation was not addressed and the country descended into chaos (1991) and civil war (2005 and 2011). The following countries were also described as economic success stories but collapsed into chaos, mayhem and war because they too did not solve the power equation: Zimbabwe (2000), Madagascar (2003), Tunisia (2010) and Egypt (2011).

It is vitally important to recognize that the “power equation” is not a new phenomenon but an ancient one which our so-called “backward and primitive” ancestors had grappled with. They recognized the dangers of concentrating power in the hands of one individual or centralizing power in the hands of the state – that is, the state and the individual heading it is necessarily dangerous or evil. So they crafted two unique ways to deal with this potential threat. The first was to abolish the state altogether and dispense with centralized authority. These societies are called acephalous or stateless societies. Examples are the Ga, the Igbo, the Gikuyu, the Somali, the Tallensi, among others. These tribes have no chiefs or kings. The Igbo expression, “*Ezebuilo*” (the king is an enemy) says it all. The Somali dismiss government as “*waxan*” (the thing). Thus, stateless societies solved the “power equation” by eliminating it; it does not exist in their societies. For more on stateless societies, see <http://bit.ly/IC67UB>

The second way was to have states and centralized authority but surround them with councils upon councils to prevent them from abusing their powers. Without the council of elders, for example, the chief was powerless and could not make any law. African kings had no political role; their role was spiritual or supernatural and they were mostly secluded in their palaces to keep their royal fingers out of people’s business. The Yoruba *Oona*, for example, can only venture out of his palace under the cover of darkness. He can come out of palace at night and bark all the orders he wants but the people would be fast asleep – snoring. Clever people, the Yoruba. In fact, their political system, the Oyo Empire, contained a complex web of checks and balances – in existence in the 17th Century, well before the US was born. For more, see this link: <http://bit.ly/IDkJBh>

Note that the traditional way that African tribes and clans form a nation is by confederating. The Ghana Empire, Songhai Empire, the Mali Empire, the Oyo Empire and Great Zimbabwe were all confederacies. Even smaller polities, such as the Ga and Ashanti Kingdoms, were confederacies. Confederacies are characterized by great decentralization of power and devolution of authority. Modern day Switzerland, where African bandits stash their loot, is a confederation of 26 cantons.

In traditional Africa, kings have little or no political roles. Theirs was supernatural or spiritual – to maintain perfect harmony among the three cosmological elements: the sky, the world and the earth. Each was represented by a god and the king's role is to propitiate them and keep them "happy." The sky god is the supreme among them and if it is "angry," there will be thunder, floods, etc. If the earth god is angry, there is poor harvest, famine, barren women, etc. If the earth god is angry, there will be conflict, war and devastation and state collapse. Thus, if there was famine or poor harvest, it meant the king had failed to perform his duties and off went his head (regicide).

At the tribal level, there are various centers of power: The royal family, the Queen-Mother, the Chief, the Council of Elders, the Village Assembly and other political pressure groups. The Chief can be removed at any time by any of these groups for dereliction of duty or incompetence.

Decision-making is by consensus at village meetings variously called *asetena kese* by the Ashanti, *ama-ala* by the Igbo, *guurti* by the Somali, *dare* by the Shona, *ndaba* by the Zulu or *kgotla* by the Tswana. Taking decisions by consensus is a different form of democracy where all minority positions are taken into account to reach one acceptable to all. Its downside is the length of time it takes to reach a consensus the larger the number of participants but it precludes dictatorship. It is incompatible with political systems that reach decisions by consensus. The larger polities were confederacies where power and decision-making were decentralized.

The most notable feature of traditional African governance was its inclusiveness. The indigenous political system was such that anybody -- even slaves -- could participate in the decision-making process. There was representation of slaves, the freeborn and the nobility at the royal court in most African states.

In Ashanti, Oyo and Bornu, slaves held important offices in the bureaucracy, serving as the *Alafin's* Ilari in the subject towns of Oyo, as controller of the treasury in Asante, and as Waziri and army commanders in Bornu. Al-Hajj Umar made a slave emir of Nioro, one of the most important of the emirates of the Tokolor empire, and in the Niger Delta states slaves rose to become heads of Houses, positions next in rank to the king. Jaja, who had once been the lowest kind of slave, became the most respected king in the delta, and was no exception; one of the Alaketus of Ketu, and Rabeh of Bornu, rose from slave to king (Boahen and Webster, 1970; p.69).

There was even foreign representation. The kings and chiefs of Angola and Asante, for example, allowed European merchants to send their representatives to their courts. No one was "locked out" of the decision-making process, to use modern phraseology. "The Dutch dispatched an embassy to the *Asantehene's* court as early as 1701" (Boahen, 1986; p.58). In Angola, King Alfonso allowed the Portuguese merchants to send their spokesman, Dom Rodrigo, to his court. Europeans could even be selected chiefs. For example, in 1873, Zulu king Cetshwayo made an English hunter/trader, John Dunn, chief of an *isifunda*, or district. "Dunn, not content to hover on the periphery of Zulu society, became fully integrated into the social system. He married forty-eight Zulu women, accumulated a large following of clients, and even rose to the rank of *isikhulu*" (Ballard, 1988; p.55). There are still white chiefs in Ghana today. For example, the Englishman Jimmy Maxen, became the *odikro* of Anyaisi at Aburi in Ghana in 1968 <http://bit.ly/TGmv67>. Africans should be proud of this heritage because it may be argued that it took the US for than two centuries to elect a black as president. Africa's traditional system of government was open and inclusive.

From the above, it should be crystal clear that centralization of power, the monopolization of power and the practice of politics of exclusion are products of alien systems and cannot be

defended or justified upon the basis of African political heritage. Politically, a large polity can be organized along three main lines:

- A unitary system of government, where decision-making is centralized in the capital city. This is the European model, where decisions are taken in London, Paris, Brussels, Madrid, etc.
- A federal system of government, where the constituent states retain some powers but the center is more powerful – as in the American and Canadian models.
- A confederate system of government is one where power is extremely decentralized. The center is weak and the constituent states have more power and can break away if they choose to.

During colonial rule, the Europeans imposed their version of state configuration (unitary state system) and democracy (decision-making by majority vote) on Africa. Historically, the unitary system probably emerged as the most suitable for Europeans because their nations consisted of citizens of single or homogenous ethnic stock. However, centralization of power and decision making process enhances the threat of despotism and thus unsuitable to nations of multiple ethnicity. Even in Europe, the unitary form of government is beginning to rupture. The Scots now have their own parliament. In the Netherlands the Walloons seek independence and the Basque in Spain are battling for separation. In Belgium, there are three linguistic groups – Dutch, Flemish and French-speaking Walloons – who seldom agree. They failed to form a government after parliamentary elections in June, 2010. Catalonia, Spain's northeastern region, is set to be led by a government demanding greater fiscal autonomy from Madrid. There are many sub-cultures in Europe that are clamoring for autonomy. The European Union (EU) itself, built on a unitary concept and centralization of power in Brussels, appears to be floundering. Britain remains outside the EU; France wants EU powers to be more centralized, while Germany favors more decentralization.

After independence in the 1960s, the incoming nationalist leaders did not dismantle the unitary state system and the majoritarian form of democracy. They retained them and the results are what we continue to see today: The centralization of power, the competition to capture it, its monopolization and use by one buffoon, his family, tribe or race to advance their own interests to the exclusion of all other groups (the politics of exclusion or political apartheid). The cause of these are the alien political structures, first imposed by the European colonialists and then retained by Africa's nationalist leaders after independence. Politically marginalized and excluded groups will always rise up and rebel against political apartheid, resulting in rebel insurgencies, civil wars, massive destruction, state collapse and economic devastation.

Recall that the development scenario in many African countries can be described like this: Bad driver, bad vehicle, bad roads and angry passengers fed up with lack of progress. Clutching the wheel is a megalomaniac fiend, who insists that the vehicle belongs to him and his family alone and must be the driver for life. So he grooms his sons, wives, cats, dogs and goats to succeed him. Meanwhile, the vehicle is kaput. The tires are flat and the battery is dead. Since the 1960s, we have been changing the driver without fixing the vehicle or the defective statecraft. The defects in that statecraft are centralization of power and the politics of exclusion. Framed this way makes the solution obvious: decentralization of power and the politics of inclusion in consonance with Africa's own political tradition or a new political dispensation arrived at by consensus. Only a few African countries have sensibly made this effort.

Recall that when a crisis erupted in an African village, the chief and the elders would summon a village meeting. There the issue was debated by the people until a consensus was reached.

During the debate, the chief usually made no effort to manipulate the outcome or sway public opinion. Nor were there bazooka-wielding rogues, intimidating or instructing people on what they should say. People expressed their ideas openly and freely without fear of arrest. Those who cared participated in the decision-making process. No one was locked out. Once a decision had been reached by consensus, it **was** binding on all, including the chief.

In recent years, this indigenous African tradition has been revived by pro-democracy forces in the form of "sovereign national conferences" to chart a new political future in Benin, Cape Verde Islands, Congo, Malawi, Mali, South Africa, and Zambia. Benin's nine-day "national conference" began on 19 February 1990, with 488 delegates, representing various political, religious, trade union, and other groups encompassing the broad spectrum of Beninois society. The conference, whose chairman was Father Isidore de Souza, held "sovereign power" and its decisions were binding on all, including the government. It stripped President Matthieu Kerekou of power, scheduled multiparty elections that ended 17 years of autocratic Marxist rule.

Congo's national conference had more delegates (1,500) and lasted longer three months. But when it was over in June 1991, the 12-year old government of General Denis Sassou-Nguesso had been dismantled. The constitution was rewritten and the nation's first free elections were scheduled for June 1992. Before the conference, Congo was among Africa's most avowedly Marxist-Leninist states. A Western business executive said, "The remarkable thing is that the revolution occurred without a single shot being fired . . . (and) if it can happen here, it can happen anywhere" (*The New York Times*, 25 June 1991, A8).

A similar national conference in Niger in 1991 denounced the military dictatorship of Colonel Ali Seibou and stripped him of his power, leaving him with one main task: To organize the transition to civilian rule. "For the first time since the independence of the country in 1960, free and fair elections were held and in March 1993, Mahamane Ousmane became the newcomer in the political arena" (*West Africa*, Dec 6-12, 1999).

In South Africa, the vehicle used to make that difficult but peaceful transition to a multiracial democratic society was the Convention for a Democratic South Africa . It began deliberations in July 1991, with 228 delegates drawn from about 25 political parties and various anti-apartheid groups. The de Klerk government made no effort to "control" the composition of CODESA. Political parties were not excluded; not even ultra right-wing political groups, although they chose to boycott its deliberations. CODESA strove to reach a "working consensus" on an interim constitution and set a date for the March 1994 elections. It established the composition of an interim or transitional government that would rule until the elections were held. More important, CODESA was "sovereign." Its decisions were binding on the de Klerk government. De Klerk could not abrogate any decision made by CODESA -- just as the African chief could not disregard any decision arrived at the village meeting.

Clearly, the vehicle exists -- in Africa itself -- to solve the "POWER EQUATION" and make way for peaceful transition to democratic rule or resolution of political crisis -- that is, fix the broken statecraft. But the leaders in most African countries either are not interested or seek to control the outcome of such national/constitutional conferences. Ask them to reform their abominable political and economic systems and they will perform the "coconut boogie" -- one step forward, three steps back, a jerk to the left and another to the right and then a tumble for a hard landing on a frozen Swiss bank account <http://bit.ly/KyBMbu>. But without reform, more African countries will implode. Ask Ben Ali of Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, Muammar Khaddafi of Libya or Laurent Gbagbo of Ivory Coast.

Again, those who do not learn from history are bound to repeat it.