

POLS003: COMPARATIVE POLITICS

MIDTERM EXAMINATION: ESSAY

What are the challenges of analyzing African states and state formation accurately?

Do Western models of state formation do a good job describing African states?

What do Western models do well? What aspects do Western models fail to capture?

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There exists an everlasting struggle between the West and ‘the rest.’ In terms of analyzing African countries, we face a phenomenon where we paradoxically feel a desire to lend a helping hand but also hold onto a need to allow each culture to prosper independently; unfortunately, we seem incapable of doing both without seemingly furthering a toxic stereotype or negatively impacting a systematic relationship. Therefore, the difficulty in accurately representing and learning about African states lies also in the pitfalls of our analyses of these very states — they all fall back on this central idea that the West has for so long wronged the Black African countries and have gotten into a habit of doing so, even when we try not to. In a way, we almost rely on their continued lives filled with instability and corruption intermixed with a personal culture unlike any other.

We find that sociologically and politically Western cultures, specifically the United States and European countries, have almost a chokehold on African and third world countries. As seen in the excerpts from DeGobineau’s “Civilization and Race,” there is a toxic mindset that ‘white is right,’ and countries of white origin and majority,

specifically in their powerholders, are superior in all walks of life. Specifically, DeGobineau's racist tendencies are shown in his analysis of the big three: white, yellow, and black. He utilizes physiological coincidences/evolutionary subtleties to account for the inferiority and ranking of the 'yellow' and 'black' people, the black of course representing African states among others. He also argues the power and phenomenal energy of the white race being the top of the racial totem pole. It is this kind of racist thinking that permeates white supremacists and sits at the back of many white peoples' minds as they are brought into the world. There exists innate biases, but only by outright acknowledging and working to combat these biases do we make progress in changing these racist narratives that ultimately obscure our views of the Black African states. Though outright racist personalities surely are not common, and as we live in the uprising of the Black Lives Matter movement, we see that this narrative can only live in the shadows, slowly creeping and surviving on the powerful (seeming) minority. In addition, while the BLM movement may be helping to combat intolerance on United States soil, it does very little for Kenyan, Sudanese, or Nigerian soil. What DeGobineau discusses so eloquently (rather disgustingly) is the foundation from which racist ideals stem, thus furthering this disconnect between the West and the rest, in this case African countries. Samuel Huntington also comments on this by essentially assigning a "to-do" list to the Western civilizations: keep your military and economic standings no matter what and be more knowledgeable of the non-Western civilizations in order to dominate them in the long run. This lack of empathy and cultivation of ignorance toward the black community

in Africa allows for the West to pay lots of attention yet little respect to these states, thus obscuring the analyses of their vivacious ontologies.

The attention received from these African states is typically very one or two-sided: never very complex or multifaceted. This oversimplifies the identity of the countries and undermines their complex natures. Journeyman Pictures seeks to capture the “havoc caused by the discovery of oil in Nigeria,” in this short documentary. Within it, we hear from families who are homeless, starving, begging for mercy. We also hear from government officials and only once from the liaison for the local oil company. Essentially, the film does an amazing job of victimizing the country, exemplifying the pitfalls and weaknesses of the African state without giving much attention to the innate corruption of the Western powers and of outside sources. The film centers on much of the political upheaval from the oil corruption such as new parties forming, a lack of central authority, etc. yet we only hear from the representative of the root of the issue once, extremely briefly. Why is this? In my opinion, the film was not about finding a solution or working *with* Nigeria rather it was used as a cry for help. We see women and children crying in the streets as the one white reporter walks through with a sense of proper authority and ‘betterness.’ We see and speak with the politically-radical and highlight their quais-fanatic actions and thoughts. Let’s face it, the answer seems quite clear: Western civilizations need to stop digging their noses in African states and their complicated ways of life, the film continues to highlight the need for intervention. I believe this is a fallacy to a certain extent.

Though it seems true that many African countries need some increased funding and simple humanitarian aid, it seems that Western civilizations continue to underscore these simple yet overlooked ideals. Instead, they victimize the countries, screaming “look at how poor these people are — be thankful for what you have.” Innate within that message is no tangible aid and no step toward a solution other than a feeling of sympathy and gratefulness on which the Western civilizations feed. This distorts our analyses of the African culture in the end.

Don’t get me wrong; I certainly believe in the power of journalism and in the necessity of foreign intervention. In this sense, I believe we are on the right track as we continue to try to intervene and learn more about Black and African life. However, it seems our intentions come from a more negative and “throw at them whatever we can” then giving them some legs up to aid them in developing their own vibrant cultures, ways of life, health care systems, political movements, etc. in a more positive setting. This would allow us to analyze the Black African states with less of a victimized lens and more of a complex, yet intriguing lens.

I highlighted a bit of what we have done well, but lots of the struggle to rightfully analyze these African states lies deeper within our own intentions. Even when we attempt to analyze archaeology of these states and other developing nations, something that would seem at least majoritively objective and harmless, only conducive to accurate research, we find that much of these findings have ties to colonization, preservation of old tyrannical or falsely-cultured ways that do not accurately reflect the true religions,

rituals, family life, or political spectrum of the people that came before and continue to thrive now. The concept of museums glorifies this idea that struggle can be monetized and put into yet another victimizing spotlight instead of being used for in-depth research or belonging directly to the people of the land: they adapt for Western cultures to buy them out.

Finally, in Anup Shah's "Structural Adjustment — A Major Cause of Poverty," we find the epitome of Western power on African civilizations. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are both spotlighted here as being these evil powers: ones that subtly but surely take advantage of these economically-weaker African states. We find that Western-run organizations such as these give the facade of overarching help and 'coming to the rescue' when in reality they are just keeping the countries afloat and in a constant state of disorder, whether it be economically by being in debt, politically by puppeting the political figureheads, etc. Here we view one of the most innate problems in analyzing African states: how are we supposed to accurately analyze and hopefully try to aid these countries when we are innately corrupting their ontology, ourselves. I ask, 'what would these countries look like without so much of our attention and energy put into changing their identities for the worst?'

When we look at the idea of juridical and empirical states, as Jackson and Rosberg do, we get to a very simplified definition of what a state looks like. It seems that, in Western eyes, we almost do not view African civilizations as such. What we do view them as, and exclusively as, is a 'wannabe state:' they have the potential to thrive, but need our help — whatever we can and will throw at them, they will accept. They are desperate. We have missed the point! African countries can be juridically, empirically, politically, economically, and culturally sound without

our constant corruption. We can help them monetarily and politically without toxifying their innate development out of where they stand now. Most importantly, we must learn to study and understand their ways of life without continuously destroying most of a continent's ontological presence.

I only hope we find a way to find balance and to make all that is wrong finally be on the correct track to right.