Beyond eurocentrism and the Western organizational model

AFRICAN LANGUAGES AND AFRICAN STYLES OF ORGANIZATION

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Introduction

Organization in the international community has been extensively, if not completely, moulded over the past decades by the Western organizational model. Indeed an « organization » has come to mean a Western style organization. This model has acquired considerable credibility owing to its successes in many different arenas. The techniques contributing to these successes have been studied and reinforced by management schools, staff training colleges, diplomatic academies, international training programmes, and intergovernmental organizations themselves. Programme failures have been attributed to inadequate training and experience in these skills. The universal validity of the Western model has therefore not been questioned as a possible explanation of the very limited success of many development programmes. The purpose of this note is to draw attention to the possible merits of non-Western styles of organization, especially in non-Western cultures such as Africa. The point emphasized here is that it is the widespread use of Western language (and the procedures it reinforces) which both encourages the belief in the universal validity of Western styles of organization and conceals the non-Western basis on which other styles of organization could emerge. This problem is particularly distressing when considering the emergence of African organizations and their participation in the international community. Under present circumstances the prevailing mind set is such that it is doubtful whether any encouragement whatsoever would be given, nationally or internationally, to any form of organization which did not correspond to the « normal », « effective » Western model. This raises the question as to the « African-ness » of what are doc-

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umented internationally as « African international organizations ». Clearly some percentage of them, especially those sponsored with Western assistance or in terms of Western-inspired intergovernmental procedures, may well prove to be ineffective vehicles in the longterm for the expression of African interests and concerns.

Sources of clarification of the concern

1. Eurocentricity

The Ghanian scholar Herb Addo has drawn attention to the degree of Eurocentrism which pervades the political and economic thinking from which organizations tend to emerge. For Addo : « The term Eurocentricity is meant to express the belief that the dominant world-view within establishment political economy - all ideological hues within it considered - holds fast to the common fallacy of mistaking the European dominance (meaning the dominance of geographic Europe and Europe of the Diaspora) in the world-systems - the world-economy and the world-history - for the world-system itself » (1). Addo then suggests that the dominant figures in political economy share two dominant properties. One is the propensity or the occupational predilection to obscure the world for non-Europeans: the other is the propensity, even perhaps a conscious conspiratorial understanding, to illuminate the world for Europeans and Europeanized elements in the world only. In the light of such a fundamental « bias ». it is very difficult for either Europeans or Europeanized Africans to evaluate the merits of African grassroots organizational initiatives if they use non-Western organizational principles. The Eurocentric « language », whatever its supposed objectivity and value to « effective organization » is just one language. The organizational implication of other such languages has not yet emerged.

2. African management

Henry Bourgoin. Director of the National Bureau for Professionnal Training in the Ivory Coast, has confronted the problems of models of organizational management in Africa in a book entitled : « L'Afrique Malade du Management» (2). He notes in reviewing the forms of management used in Africa through the colonial period to the present period of « occidental management » that :

"... l'entreprise industrielle que nous connaissons actuellement dans le monde entier s'est surtout développée dans le contexte culturel de l'Europe du XIXᵉ siècle. Une telle organisation, malgré des aménagements en cours dans différents pays, reste fondé sur des « valeurs » particuliers qu'elle continue à véhiculer: productivité, rentabilité, etc. Elle s'appuie aussi sur des « logiques » particulières : planning, ordonnancement etc. qui intègrent elles-mêmes des éléments, qui, s'ils existent évidemment dans toutes ces cultures, n'y sont pas toujours aussi valorisés » (2, p. 20). He continues :

" C'est pourquoi, jusqu'à aujourd'hui, les différentes formes de « culture managériale » importée ont glissé sur notre comportement, comme une goutte d'huile sur une feuille de manioc... Il ne put s'agir ni d' « imiter les Blancs » ni de « faire comme nos ancêtres ». Une seule voie, celle du juste milieu, est réaliste, car elle prendra en compte le visage actuel de nos sociétés » (2, p. 20-21). In a section entitled « Des modèles bien à nous ». Bourgoin considers that valid organizational models invented by African societies must be discovered by research into the traditional political systems adopted by African people. « On peut en effet les considérer comme le reflet de la pensée du groupe dans les domaines du pouvoir, du commandement et de son organisation interne. Ces structures politiques sont en outre révélatrices des normes sociales élémentaires qui sous-entendaient l'organisation du groupe ». (2. p. 21).

Position of forty countries in relation to hierarchical distance and control of uncertainty.

Position of forty countries in relation to masculinity and control of uncertainty.
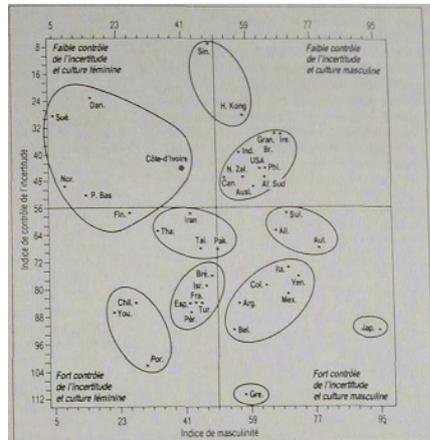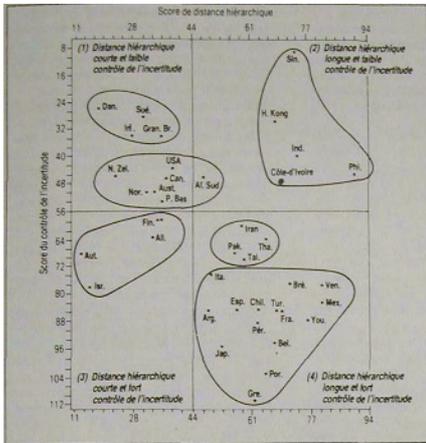

Table I

Table II

Reproduced from : Henry bougoin. L'Afrique Malade du Management (2, p. 198, 207), based on Geert Hofstede (3).

Bourgoin stresses the diversity of traditional African political systems from which organizational models may be derived. These may be divided into two main groups :

Centralized structures

- Pyramidal monarchy : Ashanti, Bemba (Zambia), Xhosas (South Africa), Hayas (Tanzania), Oyos (Nigeria), Balubas (Zaire), Langos (Uganda).

- Associative monarchy : Mandes and Senoufos (West Africa).

- Centralized monarchy: Mossis (Upper Volta), Fipas (Tanzania), Zulus and Swazis (South Africa), Hovas-Mérinas (Madagascar), Fons (Benin).

Segmented structures

- Classical segmented system : Krous (Liberia and Ivory Coast), Ibos (Nigeria), Lobis (Upper Volta and Ivory Coast). Nuers (Sudan), Kikuyu (Kenya). Tallensis (Ghana), Somalis (Somalia).

- Universalist segmented systems : Masais, Kipsigis, Merus (all in Kenya).

- Ritually stratified systems : Ankalis (Uganda), Chillouks (Sudan), Tékês (Zaire).

- Autonomous village and city-state : Baloués and Bakones (Ivorey Coast), Ibibas (Nigeria).

In endeavouring to explain the cultural differences by which African societies respond to the problem of self-organization, Bourgoin draws on his own Ivory Coast survey and a study by Geert Hofstede, Director of the Institute for Research on Intercultural Cooperation (Arnhem) entitled « Cultures Consequences » (3). The study covered 40 countries on all continents and demonstrated that the cultural characteristics determining the favoured organizational model in a given country could be described by four dimensions.

- Hierarchical distance, namely the degree of preference for marked hierarchical distinctions.

- Control of uncertainty, namely the degree of tolerance of situations of uncertainty.

- Individualism.

- Masculinity, namely the degree of preference for marked manifestation by men of their traditional characteristics (agressivity, ambition, competition), with accompanying preferences for corresponding female behaviour.

This information is presented by Bourgoin in the form of Table 1 and 2 (p. 198 and 207).

From Table 1 he draws attention to four possible types of organizational models :

- « Market place » model, namely neither formalized nor centralized, typical of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries.

- « Extended family » model, namely centred on a figure of authority but not formalized, typical of India, Ivory Coast, Philippines, Singapore, Hong Kong.

- «Machine» model, namely with formal decentralized structures, typical of Germany.

- « Pyramidal bureaucracy » model, namely with formal centralized structures, typical of Japan and France. Bourgoin points out that attempting to use some organizational structures in Africa, like the matrix organization favoured in the USA, is quite inappropriate, as his Ivory Coast survey demonstrated. He concludes that important factors to be borne in mind in developing a specifically African form of organization include :

- learning to consider the organization as a village or an extended family;

- avoiding alienating Western concepts of cold, bureaucratic efficiency (which in Africa result either in laxity or in formalism);

- use of collective salary funds rather than individual salaries;

- extensive use of intermediaries;

- visible evidence of hierarchical differences.

It is interesting to speculate on the implications of this perspective for understanding certain conflicts within international organizations with staff from different cultures (for example, the current situation within UNESCO!.

3. Family structures as an infra-logic

In the light of Bourgoin's conclusion concerning the need to conceive African organization as a family structure, it is interesting to review Emmanuel Todd's recent study of family structures in relation to ideological systems (4). Todd has explored the hypothesis that family relations constitute a model for the socio-political relations in each society. He points out that until recently this old hypothesis had proved quite useless due to the embryonic state of social anthropology. He argues that any such comparisons have lacked significance because of the narrowly Eurocentric (cf. Addo(1)) concept of valid socio-political forms. « Est-il difficile d'admettre que la repartition mondiale des idéologies politiques et religieuses ne définit pas une structure dichotomique mais un ensemble multi-polaire et dont tous les pôles - communistes, libéraux, catholiques, sociaux-démocrates, hindous, musulmans, bouddhistes - sont également normaux, légitimes et dignes d'analyse » (3, p. 12).

For Todd the family structure is an infral-ogical mechanism governing the reproduction of specific human values. This leads him to question the « grand illusion » that politics makes society rather than the converse. Each culture, founded on a specific anthropological base, then engenders an ideological form of its own family values (3, p. 24). Emphasizing that it is just one of many possible descriptions (3, p. 34), Todd starts with the value dimensions liberty/authority and equality which allows him to distinguish four family types on the basis of (in)equality of childrens rights to parental heritage, and possible cohabitation of married children with their parents. He considers that this revision of a classic Eurocentric study is unable to reflect the diversity of non-European family structures because it does not take account of the anthropological significance of endogamic marriage relations, especially characteristic of non-European culture. Todd then presents eight family types which he associates with different socio-political systems :

- Exogamic communal family (e.g. Russia, certain Slavic countries. China, Vietnam. Cuba, Northern India) which favours the emergence of community socio-political systems.
- Exogamic authoritarian family (e.g. Germanic countries, Sweden. Norway. Gaelic countries, Northern Spain, Japan, Korea, Jews. Gypsies) which favours an asymmetric pluralism characteristic of socialist and socio-democratic forces.
- Exogamic egalitarian nuclear family (e.g. Northern Prance Northern Italy.
-Greece, Poland, Latin America. Ethiopia) which favours the emergence of individualistic systems of one kind.

- Exogamic absolute nuclear family (e.g. Anglo-Saxon world, Netherlands. Denmark) which favours the emergence of a second kind of individualism.
- Endogamic communal family characterized by frequent marriage between children of brothers (e.g. Arab countries, Turkey, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan and southern Soviet Republics) which favours socio-political systems such as that based on Islam.
- Endogamic (asymmetric) communal family characterized by frequent marriage between children of brother and sister (e.g. Southern India) which favours emergence of the caste system.
- Anatomic family, characterized by flexible heritage and cohabitation arrangements with possible consanguinous marriage (e.g. South-East Asia and South American Indians) which favours political ambivalence and socio-political systems such as that based on Buddhism.
- African family systems (which Todd points out have only been studied to a limited extent). They are characterized by dynamic instability of the domestic group and polygyny. These favour the emergence of socio-political systems dependent on the army as the main force capable of maintaining control.

The unfortunate feature of this presentation is that it appears excessively deterministic. This is in large part due to the absence of any indications as to how family structures themselves develop in conjunction with socio-political systems. It does not reflect the way in which all such variants tend to emerge side-by-side within a given post-industrial society. In the light of the learning cycle approach, each such pattern is best viewed as a « frozen » portion of such a cycle - or as a « standing wave ». Furthermore none of the modes is necessarily pure. What is required is a study which brings out more clearly the rich variety of different types of alternation in the interactions between people (possibly conditioned by such family structures) and the transitions between them.

4. Epistemological mindscapes

Related to Todd's concern that family structures constitute a form of infra-logic governing preferred modes of organization, is that of the Japanese scholar Magoroh Maruyama. In a remarkable series of articles, Maruyama has studied patterns of cognition, perception, conceptualization, design, planning and decision processes. His central concern is the role of epistemological types, especially as they affect cross-disciplinary, cross-professional, cross-paradigm and cross-cultural communications. In contrasting his own work with that of previous research in this area, he distinguished two traditional approaches : the psychological and psychoanalytical bases of individual differences in patterns of cognition, and the cultural

and social differences as determined by sociologists and anthropologists, Maruyama notes the various terms that have been used to describe such patterns : models, logics, paradigms, epistemologies. To these might be added Kenneth Bouidings « image » (55). In Maruyama's latest work he favours « mindscapes ». Although he no longer favours the term, he defined paradigmatology as the « science of structures of reasoning » whether between disciplines, professions, cultures or individuals. He notes that the « problem of communication between different structures of reasoning had not been raised until recently », since scholars tended either to advocate their own approach or describe that of others. Contributing to this neglect is the fact that the choice between logics is based on factors which are beyond and independent of any logic. Although he carefully emphasizes that there are many possible mindscapes or paradigms, Maruyama argues that « for practical purposes » it is useful to distinguish four main types (8, p. 6). He stresses that these are not meant to be either mutually exclusive nor exhaustive and warns that any attempt at separating them into non-over lapping categories « is itself a victim of a paradigm which assumes that the universe consists of non-overlapping categories » (8, p. 142). What is intriguing is that over the years he has continued to struggle with the same attributes, grouping them first into three types (6), extended to four (7), then to five (8) and now seemingly stabilized at four again (9).

(a) **H-mindscape** (homogenistic, hierarchical classificational). Parts are subordinated to the whole, with subcategories nearly grouped into supercategories. The strongest, or the majority, dominate at the expense of the weak or of any minorities. Belief in existence of the one truth applicable to all (e.g. whether values, policies, problems, priorities, etc.). Logic is deductive and axiomatic demanding sequential reasoning. Cause-effect relation may be deterministic or probabilistic.

(b) **I-mindscape** (heterogenistic, individualistic, random) Only individuals are real, even when aggregated into society. Emphasis on self-sufficiency, independence and individual values. Design favours the random, the capricious and the unexpected. Scheduling and planning are to be avoided. Nonrandom events are improbable. Each question has its own answer; there are no universal principles.

(c) **S-mindscape** (heterogenistic, interactive, homeostatic) Society consists of heterogeneous individuals who interact non-hierarchically to mutual advantage. Mutual de-

pendency. Differences are desirable and contribute to the harmony of the whole. Maintenance of the natural equilibrium. Values are interrelated and cannot be rank-ordered. Avoidance of repetition. Causal loops. Categories not mutually exclusive. Objectivity is less useful than « *cross-subjectivity* » or multiple viewpoints. Meaning is context dependent.

(d) *G-mindscape* (heterogenistic, interactive, morphogenetic) Heterogeneous individuals interact non-hierarchically for mutual benefit, generating new patterns and harmony. Nature is continually changing requiring allowance for change. Values interact to generate new values and meanings. Value of deliberate (anticipatory) incompleteness. Causal loops. Multiple evolving meanings.

The above descriptions are brief summaries of extensive listings of characteristics in relation to overall social philosophy, ethics, decision-making, design, social activity, perception of environment, human values, choice of alternatives, religion, causality, logic, knowledge and cosmology (7,8,9). Maruyama considers that the influence of such « pure » types predominates in certain cultures, although in practice the types are quite mixed. Thus the H-type predominates in European, Hindu and Islamic cultures. The I-type develops in certain individuals, such as those of existentialist philosophy. The S-type is characteristic of Chinese, Hopi, and Balinese cultures. The G-type predominates in the African Mandenka culture, for example. H, S, and G characteristics can be distinguished in different streams of Japanese cultures.

Maruyama has recently (9) compared his four types with an extensive survey of epistemological data grouped by O.J. Harvey into four « systems » (10).

(a) System / : high absolutism, closedness of beliefs, high evaluativeness, high positive dependence on representatives of institutional authority, high identification with social roles and status position, high conventionality, high enthnocentrism.

(b) *System II :* deep feelings of uncertainty, distrust of authority, rejection of socially approved guidelines to action accompanied by lack of alternative referents, psychological vacuum, rebellion against social prescriptions, avoidance of dependency on God and tradition.

(c) *System III:* manipulation of people through dependency upon them, fairly high skills in effecting desired outcomes in his world through the techniques of having others do it for him, some autonomous internal standards especially in social sphere, some positive ties of the prevailing social norms.

(d) *System IV:* high perceived self-worth despite momentary frustrations and deviation from the normative, highly differentiated and integrated cognitive structure, flexible, creative and relative in thought and action, internal standards that are independent of external criteria, in some cases coinciding with social definitions and in other cases not.

The two authors find that they agree on three types and differ on the nature of the fourth (which Jungian's would presumably consider as corresponding to a partially « *repressed function* » they have in common). It is much to be regretted that such surveys have not explored the epistemologies in « developing » countries to a greater degree, nor the extent to which different epistemologies are co-present in the same culture, group, individual or lifecycle.

It is to be expected that groups sharing preferences for one of these systems of perception would form organizations of a corresponding type, whatever the prevailing culture in which they are located. In this sense it is to be expected that Westernstyle organization models would indeed be appropriate for certain groups in an African society, just as non-Western styles are favoured by some groups in Western society. It is perhaps from such « alternative » modes of organization that the range of useful or complementary modes of organization appropriate to international organization can be learnt.

Such investigations would hopefully, undermine the prevailing assumption that only the one Western-inspired mode of organization should be used within the international community.

5. Alternation between languages
The possibility of using several « languages » or modes of organization must take into account a most important phenomenon. That is that few groups, projects, or schools of thought have difficulty in discovering and promulgating an answer. The difficulty for society as a whole arises from the conflictual relationship between such answers, or their denial of each other as irrelevant, out-of-date, erroneous, or unworthy of consideration. In the words of Jacques Attali, Special Adviser to François Mitterrand, concerning remedial ideas about the current crisis :

« Au-delà des problèmes que pose toute sélection d'idées..., voici l'essentiel : si tout ce savoir n'est encore aujourd'hui ni synthétisé, ni assimilé, s'il reste un lieu d'affrontement et d'anathèmes, c 'est parce qu'il charrie une image du monde d'une intolérable fixité; et que tout groupe social trouve intérêt à en occulter certains fragments pour tenter d'asseoir sa domination (11, p. 10-11).

Perhaps the most important feature of this phenomenon is that every effort is neces-

sarily made to ignore it, to deny its significance, but especially to avoid exploring non-trivial routes beyond the barrier it constitutes to social development. As Attali continues :

« Face à l'immensité de l'enjeu, faut-il alors cesser ce combat rudimentaire entre un vrai et un faux, mettre un terme à cette dénonciation de la parole de l'autre ? Et avoir le courage d'admettre que plusieurs discours peuvent être simultanément vrais, c'est-à-dire peuvent valablement intépréter le monde ? » (1, p. 11).

Attali notes in passing that the multiplicity of truths is also encountered in physics (for example the wave vs particle theory of light). Maruyama recommends a « polyocular » use of different perspectives since the complexity viewed cannot be represented adequately through any one language. In a separate paper (12) it has been argued that in this light, current international efforts in search of « the » one appropriate policy or mode of organization are misdirected. It is argued that non-equilibrium dissipative *structures* with self-organizing characteristics are required to contain the discontinuities of the development process. The resulting new order is thus engendered by the fluctuation in practice between the extreme policies of essentially antagonistic modes of organization, the very fluctuation which the proponents of each mode at present make every effort to prevent as a way of ensuring their dominance in the short-term but at the expense of their development over the longer term. Development is then best reinterpreted as learning (itself more broadly understood) through such discontinuous fluctuation processes. Such learning needs to be conceived as cyclic rather than linear, with current modes or policies being integrated. The desperate search for « the » new magical *alternative* model of development (of necessarily temporary and limited appeal) can thus be usefully complemented by a concern for *models of alternation* to order the pattern and timing of cyclic transformation between many such alternatives, as and when they emerge. In such a context, so called « primitive » alternatives from the past may also prove to be temporarily desirable under certain conditions.

6. Cross-cultural communication
In a report for the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation. Andréas Fuglesang, an authority on cross-cultural communication (especially in relation to Africa) illustrates the many ways in which « even *social anthropologists, despite their good intention, are caught in the language-trap* »

« While the law of contradiction in the syllogisms or the law of the excluded middle in the negative may be useful thinking tools for some people in some life situations, they are not necessarily useful for all people in all situations... The Aristotelian heritage in West-

em *or European culture is embodied in our scientific attitude to reality, and being an attitude of fundamental desire to change reality, it carries with it a seemingly inseparable arrogance towards those who think otherwise.*

The significant feature of European culture is not only its scientific and technological achievement. It also exudes disrespect for other cultures as well as insensitivity to the miraculous multiplicity of life and human behaviour... We are oblivious to the fact that all other cultures are described and interpreted in the concepts of our own culture. Our ethnocentrism is close to total. We are not able to sense how literally and daily we express our arrogances in our language... Whilst we are the educated, other people are un-educated... il-literate, ir-rational, pre-logical and, let us add, un-productive and in-effective (13, p. 17-18).

In the light of these remarks and of the many examples and insights that Fuglesang offers it is necessary to be extremely cautious in interpreting Bourgoin's description above of the desirability of a village model of African style organization with the special importance attached to the elders. In the Western « non-oral » world it is almost impossible to sense the cultural reality of the oral African context. Fuglesang notes in this connection that :

« In a type of social formation such as the tribal society, it is the memory of the elders who control the storage and retrieval of the information resources of the society... Consequently, any attempt to direct social transformation and behavioural change has to address itself first to the issue of transforming the fundamental programme for information processing » (13. p. 109).

Western intellectuals should also be very cautious in evaluating the intellectual significance of such non-Aristotelian approaches. There are now many authors commenting on the need for such approaches in fundamental physics. Kinhida Mushakoji, Vice-Rector of the United Nations University, has also argues extensively for the need to move beyond the accepted limits of Western formal logic, especially in relation to interparadigmatic dialogues (14).

The significance of hidden assumptions concerning the organization of space and time in different cultures has also been explored in a remarkable series of books by anthropologist Edward T. Hall (15, 16.

17, 18). These factors can even be demonstrated to be of significance within and between organizations in Western cultures.

It is to be regretted that UNESCO's valuable series of studies on different perceptions of the nature of time in cultures (19). philosophies (20! and sciences (21) has not been extended into consideration of the significance of such insights for models of organization and development. If is not acceptable that the practical dimensions should only be the concern of such practitioners as Fuglesang and Hall, given the importance of such facts for international development programmes.

Conclusion

The purpose of this note has been to point to ongoing work on the relation between language, culture, thought and organization. The relation between language and thought is well-recognized (22), even if it is ignored for practical purposes. The influence of different cultures is recognized for practical purposes, even if the theoretical discontinuities they imply are impossible to deal with at present. The position of organization in the complex language-culture-thought-organization seems to have been almost totally ignored in so far as its significance for appropriate models of organization is concerned. The implications for international nongovernmental organization were first examined at an earlier colloquium of the Union of International Associations in 1974 (23).

Ironically, perhaps the special significance of Africa in relation to organization, identity, and participation may well derive from the *special understanding of belonging* in African cultures as recorded by Fuglesang in concluding his study :

« The main impression from Africa 's colourful and profuse social diversity is not confusion but the governing idea of unity. In a single sentence, Suzgo, a 20-year-old Ngomi from Zambia, revealed to me the essence of African societies. I had asked: « How are you this morning, Suzgo ? » The reply : « I am very fine, since I came to your house and belonged » (13, p. 227.228). It is such insights that suggest to Fuglesang that Africa offers unique examples of social behaviour from which Western society has much to learn.

« Africa demonstrates a variety of social models, some of which provide viable op-

tions for a restructuring of Western society in a more human direction. Far from being anachronisms, tribal societies are pools of valuable social experience and sociological knowledge... Identity is achieved through social unity, not through individual achievement. Social security is achieved through the systematic development of family and kinship, not through a yearly insurance policy » (13, p. 227.228). International organization has much to learn from African-style organization as such models emerge within the international community.

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