

## DISCOURSE THEORY IN DEVELOPING A CRITICAL POLICY ANALYSIS OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE IN SELECTED AFRICAN COUNTRIES

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**Abstract:** *In this paper, discourse theory, and critical policy analysis in relationship with environmental management and governance in selected African countries are the central discursive issues. However, the relationship of discourse and theory with the nuances of language expression, power and ideology has been explained with a view to underscoring the instrumentality of discourse and its contribution to critical policy analysis. The paper has elicited a historical past of the colonial and post-colonial experiences, culture, politics, land practices, colonial legacy, and lingering issues of coloniality – over exploitation, degradation, structural and governance policy concerns as critical policy analysis issues of environmental management and governance in Africa.*

**Key words:** Discourse Theory, Critical Policy Analysis, Environmental Management, Governance

## **Introduction**

Discourse theory in developing a critical policy analysis of environmental management and governance in selected African countries strands the terms, management – a function in the categories of planning, organizing, staffing, leading and controlling (Leslie and Lloyd, 1993), and governance – the exercise of control within society through the making and enforcement of collective decisions (Andrew, 2004). The terms beg the question of their usage in the paper. Not technically the same in meaning, they may be found to be used synonymously and interchangeably in environmental governance discourses. A databases search of literature on environmental governance in the Southern African region that confirms the observation, identified ‘governance or environmental governance,’ ‘environmental management or natural resource governance’ or ‘natural resource management’ among a combination of terms used in reference to the same discourse (Menelisi et al, 2021). These usages apply in this paper and seem to suggest environmental management and discourses’ varied conceptualizations by governments and states. The usages inform approaches to environmental management i.e., (1) people centred and (2) governance entered approaches (Moswete et al, 2019). Again, they pinpoint governance challenges (Cundill, 2010, Mutekwa, and Gambiza, J. 2016) some of which have been identified as (1) maintenance of system integrity and functioning, (2) equity, (3) and institutional robustness. The challenges correlate with adaptability and flexibility of institutions to changing environmental and social conditions with social learning, adaptive governance and innovation implications. Thus, the multifarious terms referencing environmental governance and management suggest focal and particular challenges within specific locations being addressed by actors.

## **Methodology**

Foucault’s model of critical theory and the Frankfurt School ideas of the adequacy of critical theory in assessing social reality have been adopted as theoretical framing for the discussion of critical policy analysis. Those dictated a qualitative design of the paper on a backdrop of historicist views, power, politics and governance patterns of the colonial and post-colonial narratives of selected African countries – Kenya and Ghana, and the West African sub-region as a whole. Rita Abrahamsen’s views describing post-independence governance in Africa as ‘grafted’ onto traditional societies are implicated in the discussions of the paper. Equally, the narratives of the past and present (governance) of Africa by Claude Ake find salience in the paper.

## **Literature**

Claude Ake (1996), analysed the post-colonial African situation and concluded that absoluteness and arbitrariness indexed the power politics of the colonial states. Their institution of commodity boards, administrative instruments, tax legislations, forced labour, education tailored to serve the interest of the colonial state led to the breakdown of traditional social relations of production, atomization of society and proletarianization. By and large, land was concentrated in the hands of the colonizer which forbode of tension over land for cultivation as a challenge of environmental management and governance. Contributing to the discourse about natural resource governance and management in the southern African region between 2010 to 2020 (Menelisi et al, 2021) it was highlighted, through scoping reviews<sup>1</sup> how

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<sup>1</sup> Scoping review is a tool to comprehensively synthesize available knowledge on a topic (Arksey and O’Malley, 2005). Also, scoping review is useful to provide an overview of the state of knowledge in a particular field, document knowledge, gaps, as well as shape research agenda, see O’Brien, et al, 2016, in: *BMC Health Services Research* 16: 1-12.

governance challenges manifested in natural resources management. Numerous studies have pinpointed and analysed governance difficulties hampering the capacity of natural resource management systems both at the local and national levels in Southern Africa (Orchard, Stringer and Stringer, (2016), Hegga, Kunawene, and Zierogel, (2020). The difficulties impact environmental management and governance to suggest the limitation on the capacity for natural resource systems environmental delivery and socially sustainable outcomes (Pahl - Wostl, 2009), in the Southern African Region. Globally, governance systems face a continuous struggle to improve social ecological systems due to factors that throttle the relationship between core variables of critical policy analysis of environmental management and governance (Potts, 2020), such as actors, and institutions – framing as agents and structures, with mediatory processes.

### **Theoretical Framing**

Discourse theory as popularized by Michel Foucault is a form of analysis that originated in his genealogical work, where he associated power with the formation of discourse within specific historical periods. This analysis inspired new historicists' view of historical analysis.<sup>2</sup> According to Foucault, 'power circulates in all directions, to and from all social levels, at all times (Tyson, 2006). He further explains that power propagates through various forms of interchange as for example in material goods through buying, taxation, charity, gambling or selling; people exchange through the framework of marriage, adoption, kidnapping or slavery; and intellectual exchange by means of various discourses as produced by culture. In other words, discourse theory centres on meaning and power relations. These are distinct variables that are unavoidably linked and express the theory's character as displaying in language and behaviour, thus emphasizing the relationship between language and power in discourse. The articulation of the social world (the discourse) which is expressed in language does not escape power impact from various voices; as such the approach of discourse achieves social constructivism as it tends to shape existing power relations. Discourse therefore reflects how an individual experiences and constructs the world. The experience is shaped by the prevailing conditions and trends at the time. For instance, people may be experiencing poor governance, corruption by politicians or environmental degradation at the time and these will construct a discourse for individuals or groups.

The terms, 'ideology' and 'discourse' are interchangeably used to imply a common understanding but more importantly, we get a sense of the role of language as a conduit of ideology. The Webster Dictionary defines ideology as 'the integrated assertions, theories, and aims constituting a politico-social programme, often with an implication of factitious propagandizing, an example of which was Fascism that was altered in Germany to fit the Nazi ideology (Geertz, 1973). Discourse then is instrumental for the dissemination of ideas and popularizing of programmes. Clifford Geertz (1973) corroborates Mannheim<sup>3</sup> in conceding that ideology is not neutral but carries 'bias, over-simplification, emotive language, and adaptation to public prejudice.' Implied in the assertion is a non-scientific notion of ideology which exposes the potency of discourse and its instrumental agency in propaganda to achieve socio-political ends. New historicists' perspectives maintain the view that discourse on its own, faces the inadequacy of explicating the complexities of cultural dynamics of social power. This inadequacy springs from existential notions. Firstly, it is the non-availability of a monolithic

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<sup>2</sup> Traditional historical analysis focuses on 'What happened?' and 'What does the event tell us about history?' In contrast, new historicists ask, 'How has the event been interpreted?' (Tyson, L. (2006).

<sup>3</sup> Mannheim, K., (n.d.), *Ideology and Utopia*, (Harvest ed.) : New York, pp. 59-83: See R. Merton, 1949, *Social Theory and Social Structure*: New York, pp. 217-220.

spirit of an age, and secondly, a lack of a totalizing explanation of history. At no time has society been influenced by the same spirit nor has a common historical explanation provided answers to a culture's quests. The reality has always been that discourse is fluid and power negotiations keep featuring in the social milieu. The implication here is that, discourse empowers those who initiate it and privileges them with hegemony but at the same time triggers opposition from the hegemonized. Discourse then constitutes identities leading to renegotiation of power in a circulatory manner.

For the maintenance of power and supremacy for instance, the dark-skinned were classified as inferior and the white-skinned as superior according to Darwin's theory of survival of superior species through the process of natural selection. Such postures were described by Foucault as social constructs by which the powerful exercised control. The powerful tend to press such reifications, justifying their control and responsibility over the inferior (but this leads to tension and resistance) to sustain the cycle of hegemony. This exposes the framing nature of discourse. By connecting the differing issues and segments, the packaging of a narrative of cause-and-effect with schemed interventions correlated with set objectives occur (Keely and Scoones, (2003). Such objectives require the responsibility of development partners' transferring their expertise, technology/technocracy, funding, agency and programmes to the inferior. Thus, a dichotomy of the developed and developing countries crystalizes and the dependency relationships of the rich and poor nations persistent. Discourse hence, triggers a regime of practices and actions that generate received wisdom which functions on assumptions and intentions along with a framing of institutional values such as transparency, accountability, and social justice among others. In a sum, discourse creates perceptions, boundaries, focus and restraints. The reflection of meanings and ideas that anchor binding practices in institutions manifests in state enterprises. Examples of such institutions are Utility Service providers such as the Electricity and Water Companies, Education, Health, Agriculture, Industry and so on. In the end, policy is produced as an end game of discourse formed from story lines and moral stories and may lead to doctrine that is adopted as policy of a state. In the following section, attention is drawn to the relationship between policy and discourse.

Policy is embedded in the interactions of those with responsibility for a given policy area but it is stimulated by discourse which triggers formal statements and positions on issues that are formalized and executed bureaucratically. Between discourse and formalization of issues by bureaucracy, there are processual and lineal dimensions spanning the stages of agenda-setting, decision-making and implementation to a culminating point. Policy therefore, is inherently political and broad course action-oriented. For the many stakeholders and hierarchized relations involved, the question of interests dictates pluralistic approaches to decisions and actions (Keely and Scoones, (2003). Sabatier (1996), has noted as a critique that the linear dimension limits usefulness because it works up to a point. This observation is confirmed in a case study which has indicated that, "things do not actually work in a tidy way" under a lineal schema (Keely and Scoones, 2003). Also, the multi-directional origination of policy complicates implementation under the same schema.

Policy discussions need to be pushed forward and this requires focus to facilitate understanding and analysis of day-to-day dealings. A second but critical policy dimension hinges on the relationship between knowledge and power as a nexus of analysis and in this regard, a Foucauldian perspective is deemed as instructive: 'Foucault, for instance, sees policies operating as 'political technologies,' enmeshed in the relations of power between citizens, experts and political authorities' (Foucault, (1991). The interplay of power, expertise and policies emphasizes the mobilization of legitimizing discourse thus, what in essence were

political problems transform as scientific, and hones the articulation of discourse in trope, that is, the use of metaphors and similes to express meaning in order to create a particular mental image or effect. As argued by Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982), discourse then becomes neutral and purged of politics. In relation to the point above, is the self-transforming power of discourse by which it is or can be slanted in scientific and technical terms. This legitimates the detection of black boxes (Latour, 1987), a concept which presumes the existence of hard facts, powerful theories or indisputable evidence for which official support has been granted for policy-making, and this through the power of expertise paves the way for normalization and internalization of policies by individuals (Shore, and Wright, 1997). Juszczak (2019) has explained that black boxes undergo simultaneous transmission and transformation through groups association and networks of actors. He further argues that black boxes traverse spaces and gain validation over time through the actions of many but fizzle out and ceases to be known when they are not adopted. It gives the impression that black boxes in spite of their discernibility and common knowledge are not necessarily reckoned and applied across board. They may be adopted by those who appreciate their significance and import. This implies that the adoption of backbox is mainly of technocratic and expert concerns due to its nuanced scientific details. Discourse then assumes a hierarchized and prioritized status, reflective of actions and policies at the level of bureaucrats and decision-makers. The non-adoption of black boxes may arise due to uncertainties that are removed from assumptions and this introduces 'black boxing,' another concept that expresses the blocking, concealment or removal of not adopted assumptions at the policy level. Black boxing therefore is an inversion which implies that there is closure or ignoring of further enquiries (Keely and Scoones, 2003).

### **Critical Policy Analysis**

In this section the focus of the paper is shifted to critical policy analysis but this is done with the views the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972), on critical theory in mind. The Frankfurt School distinguishes critical theory from traditional theory but postulate that, a theory is critical if it aims at emancipation from slavery, acts as a liberating force and creates a world that satisfies human needs. The Frankfurt School seems to project a nuanced sense of human needs and imply that whatever constitutes those needs – material and psychological, require to be met to ensure man's satisfaction. From a definition of Max Horkheimer, it may be deduced that, the adequacy of critical theory is consisted in a three-point criterion as follows; the theory must be simultaneously (1) explanatory, (2) practical and (3) normative. This means that what is wrong (with the social reality) require explanation, secondly actors must be found to remedy the wrong, that is, effect change, and thirdly, provide a critique and as well outline goals to achieve a transformation of society (Horkheimer, 1993). From the assumptions of the Frankfurt scholars, it should be clear that critical analysis finds essence in the problematization of policy. From this background a safe-landing presumably can now be made but first at developing a critical policy analysis of environmental management before doing similarly to governance. African models are hereby used, as objects of critical policy analysis in the paper.

By way of explaining the wrongs affecting environmental management, a narrative of events based on Ethiopian environmental management as related by Keely and Scoones (2003 pp. 72-84), serves as a model of critical analysis of policy. Ethiopia had experienced epochal shifts from 1974 to 1981 that had transformative effects on their environmental management. Change of governments affecting imperial, Marxist and democratic ideologies reflected policies that impacted agriculture in Ethiopia. Landlordism was associated to the imperial rule. A strict state management of agriculture through control pricing, input supply, marketing and plans of large scale villagization defined the Marxist era. Thus, a discontinuity in traditional practices brought in new practices whose land degradation practices are not as fast and heightened as

large-scale farming practices. The regime also saw rising insurgency in the North of the country, a sign of instability, implying a freeze in sustainability of policies. Following that era, a confederate system was introduced which opposed a prevailing culture of centralized government. All the policies rolled out under those changes no doubt impacted environmental management. The proscription of landlordism under the communists for example exposed land to large scale exploitation which compromise conservation. Common to all the regimes were food self-sufficiency concerns, authoritarianism, hierarchy and lack of transparency issues. These crystalized into national life and transformed as cultural identity and played out negatively in land tenure system. In Ethiopia there is a North/South divide along the lines of political and social systems, resources and participation in national politics. These being a fallout of colonial legacy (Jean-Francois and Romain. pdf) of divide and rule or direct rules systems in the past (Conklin, 1997). This situation is found among West African countries where culture and natural endowments are fault lines existing between the North and South. In West Africa, these conditions determined colonial types of administration and policies of governance with implied consequences on the environment. On the backdrop of the above, the introduction of agricultural policies to address food shortages came with new land policies and practices in extension services, fertilizer usage, and technology transfer in departure from traditional methods. The result was over-exploitation of land leading to soil erosion, over-grazing, bio-diversity loss, declining yields, food deficits, deforestation, poverty and starvation. These impacted environmental management in Ethiopia and are engaging to critical policy analysis. In the analysis of environmental policy and governance in Ethiopia therefore, the variables of history, culture, politics, land practices and technologies are not to be overlooked. Again, the account of governance in Africa by Claude Ake (1996), is deemed as deserving in explaining the wrongs affecting environmental management and governance in Africa. According to Ostrom (1994), 'governance refers to the ordering of relationships between people and groups through institutions structures and processes.' In Africa, Governance represents two periods of the past and the present, symbolizing colonial and post-independence models of governance. In the colonial past, land redistribution and determination of crop production defined governance as of the statist kind. The state then controlled labour supply through conscription and force. The educated elite was raised to pander to the bureaucracy of colonial administration by means of a school system, and taxation. The result was the breakdown of the traditional means of production, atomization of society and proletarianization. Railways, roads and ports infrastructure was built to facilitate the export of African products and the importation of imperial goods. The colonial state controlled internal trade through commodity boards. Commodities were produced to feed imperial markets. In this regard, Ghana produced cocoa which resulted in her becoming a world leader in the export of the crop by 1901 and by 1935 eighty per cent of her export was in cocoa. Kenya produced coffee through White farmer exclusivity. The rationale was to make African labour available to White farmer plantations, it was also to make it impossible for Africans to steal their coffee; if they did not farm the crop, then logically, its possession was illegal. The style of governance adopted by the colonial state fashioned a governance paradigm that has survived as a living legacy. Again, the variables of history, colonial legacy and its lingering implications must be factored in pursuing a critical policy analysis of environmental management and governance in Africa.

The arbitrariness and absolutism framed by colonial state policies that led to oppression live on. Examples of these were the reservation of the White Highlands for White farmers, and the 1935 Marketing of Native Produce Ordinance that concessioned wholesale exclusivity to Europeans in Kenya. It led to resentment and rebellion. Such were the anti-colonial demonstrations in Ghana in 1948 and the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya in the 1960s. A legacy of arbitrariness and absolutism has been sustained which is reflected in politics and

governance of the now. Post-independence has been contingent on colonial governance therefore, critiquing and suggesting remedies on a backdrop of critical analysis of policy must as well factor a review of post-independence governance. Having sketched the colonial experience, post-independence sketch is as well necessary to give a rounded image of governance in Africa and its reverberating impact.

Rita Abrahamsen (2000), is referenced for the post-independence governance described as 'grafted' onto traditional societies. In the view of development experts, instead of African governments adopting Western models, they imposed Weberian democratic principles on governance (World Bank Governance and Development, 1992.). Rapid industrialization (that could not be sustained) and hurried modernization imposed a top-to-bottom hierarchization with concomitant issues that were inconsistent with African socio-cultural systems, accounting for the crumbling of post-independence governance on the departure of colonial administrators (Mills, 1992). Thus, they blamed the failure of African governance on flawed developmental paradigm. These explanations in the view of Abrahamson befuddle the truth and (are an attempt to) absolve the good governance agenda (later introduced to cure development and governance problems) and its proponents of the blame of the programme's failures. Those failures, impinging on governance as they did, legitimize the modern Weberian state with underlying structures that are alien to African social systems and values and hence, out of tune with traditional values and customs. These again are estranging and frustrating to state interventions and results in erosion of governance gains. The imposition of Western state enterprise models as imperative of Weberian paradigm run contrary to African (traditional) capitalist orientation and market values and hinder African entrepreneurship. Under the state enterprises regime as an example, capitalization for entrepreneurship is prioritized for state enterprise to the disadvantage of private enterprise. In the above, the variables of critical policy analysis centre on structural and governance policy concerns which benefits state participation in environmental management and governance.

Focus is in now turned to actors, remedies and goals inferred in Horkheimer's postulation of the adequacy of critical theory to conclude the discussion of topic. In developing a critical policy analysis of environmental management and governance, the variables namely actors, remedies and goals are relevant. Actors are represented as individuals, experts, organization, networks, agency or government. These either initiate or push discourse. They may also be involved in policy decisions and implementation. The Global Sasakawa 2000 acted by providing funding, technical support and technology transfer for cereal production to achieve food security in Ethiopia under prime minister Meles Zenawi. Remedies and goals are contingent on policy and the two must be explained through interactions involving actors, society and the state. Explanation is critical to resolving the challenges of competition among groups over resources and regulations (Truman, 1951). All those variables must necessarily be reckoned in developing a critical analysis of environmental management and governance policy.

## **Findings**

In this paper, the discursive issues have derived from its topic, discourse theory in developing a critical policy analysis of environmental management and governance. The issue of discourse and its nuances including its contributions to policy have been discussed in line with the theme's imperative, and their relationship examined. The discussion elicited critical policy analysis variables of environmental management and governance as History, culture, politics, land practices, colonial legacy and lingering issues including structural and governance policy concerns. This was achieved on the backdrop of Foucauldian discourse theory and critical

theory postulations of Max Horkheimer and the Frankfurt School. Also, the multivariate terms that brand environmental management and governance in view of critical policy analysis were exposed to include 'governance or environmental governance,' 'environmental management or natural resource governance' or 'natural resource management.' These brand names and usages seeming to suggest environmental management and governance discourse across Africa implied varied conceptualizations by various governments and states. The usages provoke dialectical approaches to environmental management in the categories of (1) people centred and (2) governance entered approaches. The approaches pinpoint prominent governance challenges identified as (1) maintenance of system integrity and functioning, (2) equity, (3) and institutional robustness. The challenges implicate adaptability and flexibility of institutions to changing environmental and social conditions with social learning, adaptive governance and innovation concerns. Thus, the multifarious terms referencing environmental governance and management suggest focal and particular challenges within specific locations being addressed by actors to broaden analytical perspectives on the topic by the paper.

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