

# **The *Bonum Commune* Dilemma:**

## **Patrimonial State Failure in Africa**

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### **A. Introduction**

The *bonum commune* is a complex issue. At a general level it is a philosophical, theological and cultural concept. At a less abstract level it is an economic and legal issue which becomes more concrete when viewed from a sociological or behavioural perspective. Political scientists deal with this topic on all of these levels. For them the *bonum commune* can be part of both political philosophy and ethics. It is somewhat less abstract at the level of political institutions and comparative politics. In the study of political behaviour it has a more tangible form. While the present article addresses all these three levels, its main focus will be on the concrete rather than the intangible levels.

The key issue examined here is the link between the *bonum commune* and patrimonial state failure, also known as neo-patrimonialism. The latter is a form of politics that is widespread in Sub-Saharan Africa and has, for some years, captured the attention of political scientists. An examination of the case of Cameroon will illustrate this point clearly.

Cameroon is a typical example of state failure as a result of patrimonialism and thus finds itself in a true dilemma. By African standards, Cameroon is a very stable country in which the *bonum commune* is assured in terms of political stability and continuity. The people of Cameroon need not fear state collapse, as is the case in Somalia, former Zaire, Ivory Coast or Liberia. Cameroon owes its stability to a large part to the integrative side of neo-patrimonialism.

But Cameroon also suffers from a *development deficit*. Since independence, the standard of living of the average citizen has hardly improved indicating stagnation rather than development. This shows that the economic *bonum commune* is definitely not guaranteed in Cameroon. Ironically, and in the opinion of many social scientists, it is neo-patrimonialism that is also responsible for the absence of economic development. What we observe here is a system in which political stability is tied to a lack of economic growth. Thus, Cameroon suffers from a dilemma where its stability is directly proportioned to its economic stagnation. This article will also shed some light upon this contradiction.

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The present article is divided into five parts. The first part sets out the basics and presents a definition of politics in terms of the *bonum commune*. The second part looks at the phenomenon of state failure. Starting from a notion of politics as a cycle that revolves around the authoritative allocation of values, I will show that state failure can take place at both ends of the cycle: at the decision-making end (the input side) and at the enforcement end (the output side) or both. Part three handles state failure in Africa by illustrating problems in the state of Cameroon. Here the development dilemma that characterizes Cameroon and its consequences for achievement of the *bonum commune* are presented in brief. In part four, the root causes of patrimonial state failure are examined and it is shown that they can be both internal or external to the country. Contemporary political analyses tend to emphasize the importance of internal (or endogenous) sources of the problem and to regard neo-patrimonialism as the main cause. Part five takes a closer look at this special form of politics. The article concludes with some remarks on possible alternatives.

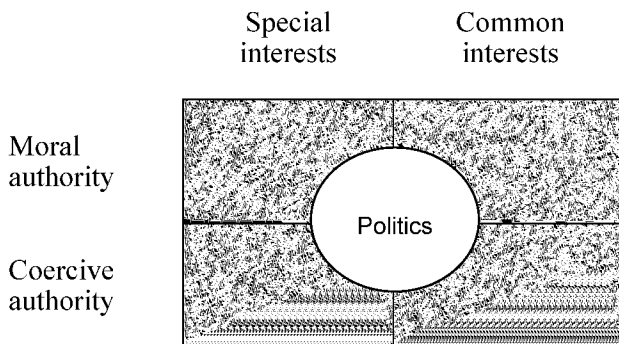
## B. *Bonum commune* and Politics

It is the political system of a state or country that regulates the collective life of individuals which explains why the highest goal of every political ethics is to reconcile the *bonum individuale*, or good of the individual, with the *bonum commune*, or the common good. It is a notion contained in all major political writings – be it Plato’s philosopher king, Locke’s idea of natural law, Rousseau’s general will or Marx’s utopia of the classless society. For all these authors the polity is one where the good of the individuals and that of the collectivity coincide. If this does not happen the *bonum commune* has not been realized.

However, there is no perfection in everyday life. Politics, too, is characterized by tension between the common good and the good of the individual. In a situation of perfect social harmony there is no need for politics and therefore the existence of politics is an indication that problems do exist. Thus, an agreement between the *bonum commune* and the *bonum individuale* often represents a goal rather than a reality.

As shown in Figure 1, special and collective interests may constitute two different spheres. This separation becomes clear in political decision-making. The process of decision-making is characterized by a common interest in regards to procedural issues or the *rules of the game*, but it is special (and divergent) interests which dominate the issues or the content of politics.

Figure 1 – Political Dichotomies



However, politics knows yet another dichotomy relating to the *authoritative* dimension of the *bonum commune*. As David Easton explains, politics embraces the authoritative allocation of interests and authority has an ethical and a coercive dimension. Families, companies, or schools all strive for harmony between individual and collective interests, but these interests are not enforceable by a public authority.<sup>1</sup>

As indicated, such authority has a normative as well as a coercive component. For a decision to be authoritative or binding it must not only be fair and just but also enforceable. This dualism characterizes Max Weber's well-known definition of the state. For Weber, the doyen of German sociology, politics is about the "monopoly of the *legitimate* use of *force*."<sup>2</sup> It is an indication that where needed the political *bonum commune* can be enforced against the will of individuals and interest groups.

Ideally, the political *bonum commune* links both components. The raw exercise of power and authority without legitimization is just as apolitical as is pure ethics without enforceability. It is of little use to the members of a group if the laws created by the political system are ethical but non-enforceable or vice versa i.e. enforceable but immoral. Ethical norms are an important but not the only prerequisite for laws and authority. As shown in Figure 1, it is the *combination* of moral and physical force that constitutes the core of politics.<sup>3</sup>

Ethical and physical power imply different forms of authority. Ethical authority is *voluntary* because it is based on conviction, while physical power is necessary when conviction is lacking and compliance is *involuntary*. In politics

<sup>1</sup> D. Easton, *A Framework for Political Analysis*, NJ 48-50 (1965).

<sup>2</sup> "...a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory." See M. Weber, *Politics as a Vocation*, in H. H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills (Eds.), *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* 78 (1958).

<sup>3</sup> Pacifist anarchists would not agree with this definition of the political system, as they reject all forms of enforceable authority. See W. Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1976). This book was originally published in 1793.

it is crucial to know which of the two components (voluntary or involuntary) constitutes the rule and which the exception. In a sustainable and stable political system, voluntary or ethical authority is the rule and involuntary or enforced power is the exception. In such a state people uphold the law because for the most part it corresponds with their own will and accords with their interests and values.<sup>4</sup> In the opposite situation – a state formed on enforced subjugation of its people – the political systems are bound to be unstable as, in the long run, neither traditional nor modern regimes can solely rest on involuntariness and the exercise of brute force.

Equally important is the relation between individual interest and common interest. If diverging special interests predominate in a collectivity and common viewpoints are missing, the system will lack sustainability. As mentioned above, successful politics entails permanent striving to bring the *bonum individuale* and the *bonum commune* into harmony with each other as well as ensuring authoritative enforcement of the latter. For this reason, politics is constantly weighing all four tendencies – *bonum commune*, *bonum individuale*, voluntary and involuntary authority.

The need for sustainable and binding power seems to exist in all societies. It is certainly not an invention of the West neither in the sense of ethical nor enforceable authority. This phenomenon is also present in the relatively anarchic and decentralized Bantu culture and in the strongly hierarchical structures of the ancient Chinese empires.

Western political systems have developed particular forms of authority. In a highly differentiated society characterized by an advanced division of labour, political structures are also divided or pluralistic. Concepts like the ‘separation of powers’ or ‘responsible government’ are indeed Western notions. Let us next take a closer look at such governmental structures.

### C. State Failure and the Cycle of Politics

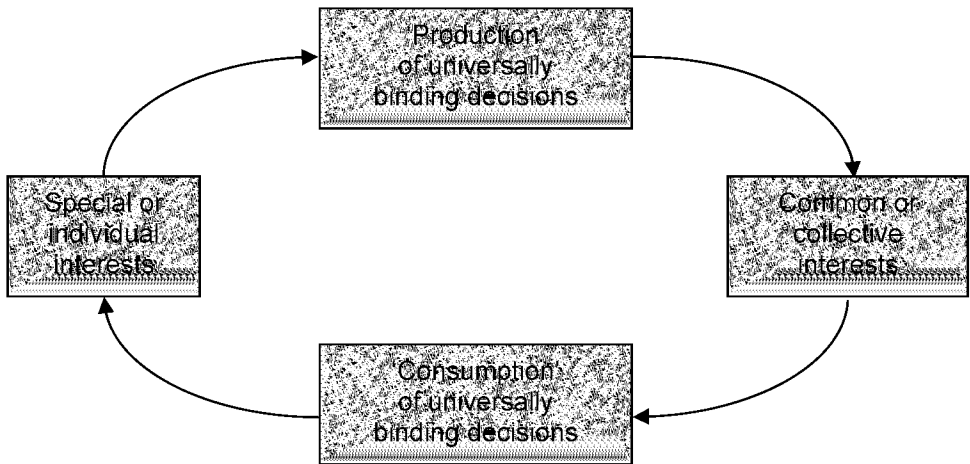
The tensions between the four tendencies mentioned above are present in the process of decision-making, both during *policy-formulation* and in its subsequent *enforcement*. In the formulation phase the interests of various groups and individuals is first articulated and then aggregated into a common interest. *Interest articulation* and *interest aggregation* belong to the *input* side of the political system. On the *output* side, the newly formulated common interest must be implemented and enforced which is also associated with *interest allocation*.

Politics, therefore, resembles a cycle with the decision-makers at the centre. The political machinery takes the inputs, processes them ideally into binding common interests, and produces outputs. In the language of economics this process would be described as a ‘production’ and ‘consumption’ of authoritative (or universally binding) decisions (see Figure 2).

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<sup>4</sup> I purposely do not differentiate between interests and values because they are ultimately inseparable.

Figure 2 – The Cycle of Politics



In modern societies characterized by an intensive division of labour there are many types of political decision-makers. They include individual citizens (when voting and electing), parliamentarians, ministers, administrators and judges. All of them take part in the ‘production’ of the *bonum commune*.

If authoritative decisions manage to reduce the various and divergent interests of a society to a common denominator then politics has succeeded. This is, however, not always the case. Just as the economy can experience market failure, *state failure* is also a possibility. This is not a new phenomenon. The fall of the Roman Empire was a form of state failure and the same is true for the collapse of the former Soviet Union. These political systems were no longer in a position to regulate the problems confronting them, which is synonymous with a collapse of public authority. In Africa, the collapse of whole states is a frequent occurrence. The most dramatic examples are Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly called Zaire), Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Liberia. All of these countries were marked by periods when there was no functioning government. The Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) and Burundi are currently unstable and thus under constant threat of state collapse.<sup>5</sup>

The causes of state failure can be found at both the *input* and the *output* side. If the causes are input-driven political differences prevail over commonalities.

<sup>5</sup> On total state collapse, see I. W. Zartman (Ed.), *Collapsed States: the Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority* (1995). State collapse in Africa often leads to a Hobbesian state of anarchy, which is extremely difficult to overcome. For a general treatment of this issue, see J. M. Gabriel, *Die Überwindung des Kriegszustandes: Ein Streitgespräch unter Liberalen*, 54 (1) *Außenwirtschaft* 107-140 (1999).

Thus, collective interest aggregation does not succeed and the result is an input jam. In such cases governmental decision-making does not succeed in taking adequately into consideration the interests of various societal groupings. If state failure is an output problem the cause lies mainly with the executive branch, the public administration and the courts. In these cases we speak of *enforcement failure* or *poor governance*. In such situations the decisions taken by government administrations or the judiciary are not implemented properly – they are not binding and authoritative. It is therefore not the ‘production’ of public goods that fails but rather their allocation and ‘consumption’. This will be set out in the next paragraph which shows that the output problem in Africa is particularly acute.

#### D. Cameroon’s *Bonum Commune* Dilemma

Europeans are tempted to use the same yardstick to assess all the political systems south of the Sahara. This is an inadmissible simplification because the 47 Sub-Saharan states have developed in different directions since independence. Whether their political institutions were inherited originally from England, France, or Portugal no longer really matters. As Jackson and Rosberg demonstrate, Africa is politically diverse,<sup>6</sup> yet there are still some similarities. Collapsing states, for example, occur frequently in this part of the world. But the phenomenon of general state failure and poor governance is even more widespread in Africa.

The collapse of Rwanda accompanied by the genocide of the Tutsis was both an input and output failure. On the one hand the government did not succeed to aggregate Tutsi and Hutu interests. On the other hand there was a serious lack of enforcement as well-led troops could have prevented the worst of the massacres. In Rwanda the *bonum commune* in the sense of making and enforcing authoritative decisions was neither developed nor put into play. Of course, colonial legacy plays a substantial role in this conflict. Colonialism left deep marks on Africa and it is the basis of many of its current problems. Nevertheless, to regard colonialism as the main factor in every conflict is superficial. The wars in Sierra Leone or the problems in the Central African Republic are not primarily repercussions of the colonial era. The Biafra War in Nigeria too had only marginal connections to colonialism. The origins of that war lie, among other things, in oil resources and problems of its distribution.<sup>7</sup>

Thus the greater majority of African states suffer from crass output insufficiency which stem from a lack of good governance.<sup>8</sup> Many countries in Africa

<sup>6</sup> R. H. Jackson & C. G. Rosberg, *Personal Rule in Black Africa: Prince, Autocrat, Prophet, Tyrant* (1982)

<sup>7</sup> R. Joseph, *Autocracy, Violence, and Ethnomilitary Rule in Nigeria*, in R. Joseph (Ed.), *State, Conflict, and Democracy in Africa* 359-373 (1999).

<sup>8</sup> T. Fuster, *Die Good Governance*, in *Diskussion der Jahre, 1989 bis 1994* (1997); United Nations, *Building Partnerships for Good Governance: The Spirit and the Reality of South-South*

have a problem with administration and enforcement that is far graver than those in comparable states in other regions. Compared to Africa, Singapore and Malaysia have an amazingly efficient administrative structure, despite former colonization. In contrast, Zaire is probably the most well known case of total state failure. In this large country, the government machinery already disappeared during Mobutu's days if it ever existed.

But the situation is less dramatic in other countries such as Cameroon which is a paragon of African stability. This is astonishing because it is very heterogeneous and its enormous diversity is in part the result of arbitrary decisions by the colonial powers. Cameroon was 'ceded' to Germany in 1885 but as a result of the First World War it became a League of Nations mandate administered by France and the United Kingdom. Still today, there is a western region in Cameroon with English as its official language. There is also an eastern and a northern part where the official language is French.<sup>9</sup>

Cameroon is a highly artificial and arbitrary entity. Due to its geographical position at the 'knee' of West Africa it has a great diversity of ethnic groups – various Bantu people in the south and east coexist with Semi-Bantus in the west and Nilotic groups in the north (Fulbe and Kirdi). As a consequence of Christian and Muslim missionary efforts, the north is mainly Muslim, while the south and west are mostly Christianized. In addition there are considerable numbers of animists in the west and north. While Cameroon uses French and English as its official languages, local languages are used when conducting local politics. Along the Atlantic coast but also in inland places like Pidgin, English serves as the *lingua franca*. Cameroon is unquestionably the most ethnically diverse country in Africa and yet it is stable. This runs counter to common European expectations. Contrary to neighbouring Nigeria, Cameroon has not experienced alternating military and civilian regimes. Since independence in 1960 there have been only two civilian presidents. Ahmadou Ahidjo, a Muslim from the north, was president from 1960 to 1982.<sup>10</sup> In a constitutional transition of power he was succeeded by Paul Biya, a Bantu from the southeastern part of the state. Under Ahidjo, Cameroon had a one-party system and censorship of the press. Today Cameroon is a multiparty state with a relatively free press. Similar to other West African countries these changes are connected with the end of the Cold War.<sup>11</sup>

Cameroon has three large parties and a number of smaller parties. The Rassemblement Démocratique du Peuple Camerounais (RDPC), which is President

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Cooperation (2000); S. Agere, *Promoting Good Governance: Principles, Practices and Perspectives* (2000).

<sup>9</sup> R. P. Engelbert Mveng & D. Beling-Nkouma, *Manuel d'histoire du Cameroun* (1974); V. G. Fanso, *Cameroon History For Secondary Schools and Colleges*, Vol. 1 (1989).

<sup>10</sup> M. Prouzet, *Le Cameroun* (1974); J.-F. Bayard, *L'Etat au Cameroun* (1985).

<sup>11</sup> For a brief outline of Cameroon's history, see J. M. Gabriel, *Cameroon's Neopatrimonial Dilemma*, 17 (2) *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 173-196 (1999). For detailed discussions, see V. Ndi Mbarga, *Ruptures et continuités au Cameroun* (1993); S. Eboua, *D'Ahidjo à Biya, Le changement au Cameroun* (1996); C.G. Mbock, *Cameroon, Le défi libéral* (1990); J. Takougang & M. Krieger, *African State and Society in the 1990s: Cameroon's Political Crossroads* (1998).

Biya's party, is the direct descendant of the former unified party and is the dominant political power. The second most important party, the opposition Social Democratic Front (SDF), is strongest in the English-speaking west but it is also represented in the coastal region of Douala. The third party shares its power in the north. It is called the Union Nationale pour la Démocratie et le Progrès (UNDP). At the local and national levels, parliamentary and presidential elections are held every five years and depending on the circumstances they are more or less free from tampering of any kind. However, the all-determining presidential elections are allegedly manipulated and to this day no international election monitors have been allowed to observe these elections. All in all some liberalization has occurred. It would, however, be a mistake to speak of true democratization.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, every minority has a share of power in some form or other in Cameroon – there is no *input failure*. The politics of both presidents has always been strongly integrative in nature. Under Ahidjo the single party served as the vehicle for interest aggregation; today cooptation of a significant portion of the opposition in governmental responsibility is used. The country is always divided during an election but President Biya has made a continuous effort to distribute ministerial positions to members of the opposition.<sup>13</sup>

Cameroonian politics is committed to inclusion instead of exclusion. Reaching national consensus is a permanent ritual. Every opportunity is taken to pledge allegiance to unity and integration. In contrast to neighbouring states such as Nigeria, Chad, the Central African Republic and Congo (Brazzaville), this strategy has been largely successful.<sup>14</sup>

This situation of integrative politics is reminiscent of Switzerland which has a heterogeneous population as well as an assimilating political system, where all important groups have a share of power, identified as 'concordance'.<sup>15</sup> Cameroon's political institutions are, of course, different from the Swiss ones. Instead of a collegial executive (Federal Council) Cameroon has a president with practically unchecked authority. The president is chosen, as in France, in a separate public election. Nevertheless, there is a form of power sharing in the executive as the prime minister's post rotates and is not filled by a member of the same ethnic group as the president's. Similarly to France, this could result in a kind of

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<sup>12</sup> For this reason, Cameroon is not classified as a political transition country. On general issues of democratization, see S. P. Huntington, *The Third Wave, Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (1991). On Cameroon, see F. Eboussi Boulaga, *La démocratie de transit au Cameroun* (1997); M. Banock, *Le processus de démocratisation en Afrique, Le cas camerounais* (1992); H. F. Onana, *Les transitions démocratiques en Afrique: Le cas du Cameroun* (1994); A. Mehler, *Cameroun: Une transition qui n'a pas eu lieu*, in J.-P. Daloz & P. Quantin (Eds.), *Transitions démocratiques africaines* (1997); M. Bratton & N. van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa, Regime Transition in Comparative Perspective* (1997).

<sup>13</sup> P. Flambeau Ngayap, *Cameroun: Qui gouverne* (1983).

<sup>14</sup> Only Gabon shows comparable stability but under different circumstances. Gabon's ethnic composition is very homogeneous; Gabon has a large oil sector and close ties to Paris.

<sup>15</sup> W. Linder, *Schweizerische Demokratie, Institutionen, Prozesse, Perspektiven* (1999); H. Kriesi, *Le système politique suisse* (1995); U. Klöti *et al.*, *Handbuch der Schweizer Politik* (1999).



cohabitation. Also, Cameroon is not a federal state and direct democratic mechanisms are unknown. It is a centralist political system with authoritarian features.

As François Médard already pointed out in the 1970s, authoritarian centralism cannot be equated with an *'état fort'*. The opposite is the case here, as in many ways Cameroon is an *'état mou'*, which brings us to the central problem of this article.<sup>16</sup> Although Cameroon succeeds in maintaining law and order its performance in the economic and social areas is weak. Five features are typical of the country's ailing economy.

First, Cameroon suffers from *marginalization*. The country hardly benefits from the international division of labour and the much-touted globalization.<sup>17</sup> Foreign direct investment is sparse and the modern economic sector is small. Even though there are some successful and modern entrepreneurs, poor management of the financial sector frustrates many initiatives. Cameroon has by no means the status of a threshold country.<sup>18</sup>

A second and closely connected feature is a large *premodern* economic sector. Most activities in this sector are not regulated and cannot be monitored or guided by the state. Economists call this the *informal* economy.<sup>19</sup> The countless one-man photocopy outfits at the edges of universities or the many motorcycle taxis come to mind.

The gaping divide between the formal and informal sector points to a third feature, the *internal marginalization* of large segments of the population. A small number of the wealthy population leads a modern life whereas most people in Cameroon merely survive from day-to-day at the margins of modernity. It is a kind of *modern subsistence economy* where a poor existence is tied to an ever growing agglomeration of poverty.

The fourth feature is an *inefficient public sector*. The city buses of Yaoundé have not run for years and few of the numerous semi-public enterprises – witnesses to an unsuccessful industrialization policy – have ever functioned at all. Under international pressure many were closed down or have been privatized. Still, the public sector continues to be a burden on the economy as a whole.<sup>20</sup>

This brings us to the fifth and last feature of Cameroon's economy: the country was and continues to be dependent upon development aid. Today, most of

<sup>16</sup> J.-F. Médard, *L'état sous-développé au Cameroun*, in *L'année Africaine* 35-84 (1977).

<sup>17</sup> J. M. Gabriel, *'Uneven Globalization' und der Wettbewerb der politischen Systeme*, in D. Ruloff (Ed.), *Globalisierung: Eine Standortbestimmung* 135-155 (1998); H.-H. Holm & G. Sorensen, *Whose World Order? Uneven Globalization and the End of the Cold War* (1995).

<sup>18</sup> D. Rettinger, *Die Wirtschaftsprobleme Kameruns* (1998); J. Sachs *et al.*, *The Africa Competitiveness Report 1998* (1998); Ch. Clapham, *Africa and the International System: The Politics of State Survival* (1996).

<sup>19</sup> H. De Soto, *Marktwirtschaft von unten – Die unsichtbare Revolution in Entwicklungsländern* (1992).

<sup>20</sup> J.-C. Willame, *The Practice of a Liberal Political Economy: Import and Export Substitution in Cameroon 1975-1981*, in M. Schatzberg & I. W. Zartmann (Eds.), *The Political Economy of Cameroon 111-132* (1986); P. J. M. Tedga, *Entreprises publiques, état et crise au Cameroun, faille d'un système* (1990).

the financial aid no longer flows into semi-public enterprises and import substitution industries, but rather into construction (and reconstruction) of the infrastructure. This is how Cameroon acquired new airports, harbour facilities and roads, which give the impression of modernity in this state. However, these projects have not provided a real stimulus to the economy. Instead they only increase Cameroon's one-sided dependency on international sponsors and lead to the inevitable debt-rescheduling meetings in Paris, Washington, or London.<sup>21</sup>

For the overwhelming majority of Cameroonians few changes, either economically or socially, have occurred. Although most people now live in urban areas and in proximity to water, electricity and modern transportation, the standard of living is stagnating. While a small social stratum has managed to raise its *bonum individuale*, there has been hardly any increase in the *bonum commune* despite internal peace and stability. This phenomenon requires an explanation.

## E. Causes

The study to determine the root causes of underdevelopment is not new. For more than fifty years scientific research has been conducted in this field and a number of diverse explanatory theories exist. It is impossible to cover the entire spectrum of these explanations in this article. I will restrict my discussion to two opposite approaches. The first method is the *neo-Marxist dependency theory* which found many apologists in the 1970s. It emphasizes exogenous factors to explain underdevelopment. The other theory is *neo-patrimonialism* which prevails today, at least among the political scientists. *Neo-patrimonialism* locates the main cause of underdevelopment in endogenous structural problems, or 'poor governance'.

From the neo-Marxist perspective the political world is divided into the centre and its periphery. This division exists both within a country and among countries. At the national level it divides employers and employees, that is, owners of the means of production and wage earners. The same division can be found at the international level where there are centre as well as peripheral countries. The centre is identified as the First and the Second World while the periphery is associated with the Third World. Neo-Marxist theory sees the relationship between these two sides as based on an 'unequal exchange' which aggravates exploitation and the intensification of social disparities. While there is a kind of harmony of interests among the exploited peripheral countries, their relations with the centre countries are marked by disharmony and conflict. For

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<sup>21</sup> C. Roe Goddard & M. H. Birch, *The International Monetary Fund*, in C. Roe Goddard et al., *International Political Economy, State-Market Relations in the Changing Global Order* (1996); World Bank, *The State in a Changing World, World Development Report 1997* (1997).

theorists like Johan Galtung or Dieter Senghaas, the differences lie in the expression 'structural power' of neo-colonialism or neo-imperialism.<sup>22</sup>

The causes of these conditions mentioned above are *exogenous*. From the neo-Marxist perspective, underdevelopment begins with the owners of the means of production inside the centre states. Here lies the source of the slave trade, of colonialism, and – since independence – of neo-colonialism. Neo-Marxists are not surprised by Africa's persisting poverty; they predicted it.<sup>23</sup>

For Neo-Marxist theorists, the solution lies in *dissociation*, in a decoupling of power from the centre while practicing self-reliance tied to socialist societal and political structures. In the 1960s and 1970s, Mao was the pioneer of these ideas; in Africa great hopes were placed in Julius Nyerere. His Ujaama system was seen as exemplary to neo-Marxists: Tanzania seemed to be on a promising route towards the realization of its political, economic and social *bonum commune*.<sup>24</sup> However, the Maoist model failed as did Nyerere's development strategy. In contrast, the Chinese economy has been astonishingly dynamic, while Tanzania continues to stagnate and is caught in marginalization. This same is true of most of the other African countries.<sup>25</sup> What is the reason for Africa's failure to develop?

This question brings us to the alternative view. Many Europeans, entrepreneurs and scientists native to Africa have long believed that the main causes of underdevelopment are *endogenous*. According to them, the hindrance does not lie so much in the material realm but rather in the immaterial, the social and in particular the political resources of the country.<sup>26</sup>

The economists and political scientists of today agree with the theory set out above. A majority of them have rediscovered the importance of the state for economic development. There has been a return to a position well known in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – the notion that without the parallel development of an institutional and political framework, economic development is inconceivable.<sup>27</sup>

This has been demonstrated by the experience in other continents. The state played a decisive role in the rapid economic development of the 'Asian Tigers'. This same interplay can be observed in those Eastern European countries that

<sup>22</sup> J. Galtung, *Eine strukturelle Theorie des Imperialismus*, in D. Senghaas (Ed.), *Imperialismus und strukturelle Gewalt, Analysen über abhängige Reproduktion*, Frankfurt am Main 29-104 (1978).

<sup>23</sup> W. Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972); A. Meister, *L'Afrique peut-elle partir?* (1966); E. Eppler, *Wenig Zeit für die Dritte Welt* (1971).

<sup>24</sup> J. K. Nyerere, *Freedom and Unity, Uhuru na Umoja* (1966); J. K. Nyerere, *Freedom and Socialism, Uhuru na Ujamaa* (1968); K. E. Svendsen & M. Teisen (Eds.), *Self-Reliant Tanzania* (1969); F. Kürschner, *Wie sozialistisch ist Tansania?* (1977).

<sup>25</sup> The argument can be made, of course, that China never experienced colonialism. However, that is not the case for other countries in the region, such as Malaysia and Singapore.

<sup>26</sup> R. Tetzlaff, *Die Staaten Afrikas zwischen demokratischer Konsolidierung und Staatszerfall*, in *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 3-6 (2002).

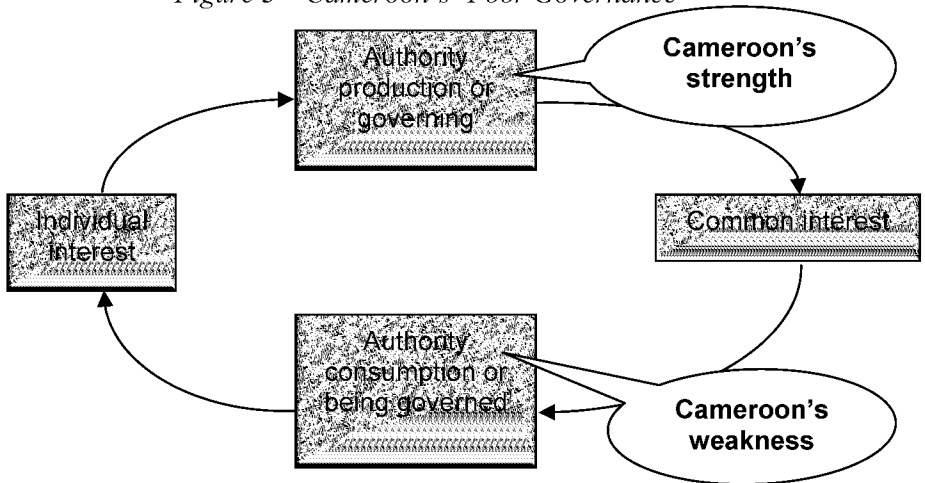
<sup>27</sup> R. Kappel & O. Landmann, *Die Schweiz im Globalen Wandel, Aussenwirtschaftliche und entwicklungspolitische* 405 (1997); S. Borner *et al.*, *Political Credibility and Economic Development* (1994).

qualify as true transformation economies. Without drastic political reforms, economic development could not have been achieved in Poland, Hungary, or Czech Republic. Parallel political and economic development is also typical of the Western European states. The Industrial Revolution in Great Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries developed hand-in-hand with political reforms; the same pattern is found in Switzerland after 1848.<sup>28</sup>

Cameroon strove for such parallel development. Following the French model, President Ahidjo wanted to build a strong and modern government. In his public appearances, the president consciously attempted to promote an image of a strict patriarch who demanded discipline and order. When it came to economics Ahidjo spoke of '*liberalisme planifié*' by which he meant a market economy guided by the state. The intention was that the state and the economy would develop together.

Cameroon's government regularly drew up Five-Year-Plans and the realization of large and small projects, industrial as well as commercial was placed in the hands of civil servants. Today we know that this was a mistake for neither reworking of the state apparatus nor state promotion of the economy brought the desired results. The weaknesses of the bureaucracy and the mismanagement of the public sector were obvious, although this was not acknowledged for a long time (see Figure 3).<sup>29</sup>

Figure 3 – Cameroon's 'Poor Governance'



Times have changed for Cameroon. A lack of good governance is openly discussed now. Cameroonians themselves are conscious of the fact that the country

<sup>28</sup> See S. P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* 1-8 (1968).

<sup>29</sup> A few authors at the time, however, did speak (euphemistically) of the lack of "absorption capacity" of the African developing countries.

has an output problem.<sup>30</sup> From the political science perspective, it can be traced to the existence of pre-modern structures and to a form of politics that today we refer to as *neo-patrimonialism*. This phenomenon requires some further examination.

## F. Neo-Patrimonialism

Max Weber described *traditional* patrimonialism as a pre-modern form of government in which authority is regarded as the ruler's personal possession and is exercised through clientelistic networks.<sup>31</sup> Today's form of patrimonialism rests on the same foundation but is accompanied by modern institutions and is therefore called 'neo-patrimonialism'. The *personification of public power* is the kernel of both forms of rule.<sup>32</sup>

*Patronage* is a typical feature of personification. Because power is the personal possession of a patriarch he can delegate it in the form of *sinecures*. This is a temporary loan of office meant to serve the material (or financial) needs of both the ruler and the office holder, of the patron and his client. A tax collector or customs official, for instance, collects revenues that flow into his own pocket and into that of his patron.<sup>33</sup> Given the complexity of modern government this system today exists at many levels, thereby constituting a *clientelistic network*.<sup>34</sup>

Obviously, such networks do not function according to the efficiency principle of modern administrations. Instead, efforts are directed toward *maintaining personal bonds*. As a result administrative procedures are unduly long and have a tendency to resemble *permanent negotiations*. Everything seems to be negotiable which makes the state apparatus resemble a giant bazaar.<sup>35</sup> It follows from the principle that universally binding authority is rare because nothing seems to be either universal or binding. With each question being regulated individually 'public authority' in the strict sense of the word is unknown. Thus, the differentiation between the private and the public, the *bonum individuale* and the *bonum commune*, melts away.

It is clear that the solution negotiated by the patron and his/her client carries a *price*. It can take the form of a gift, a service, or a monetary payment. It is quite normal, for instance, for the director of a public primary school to accept a

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<sup>30</sup> A. A. Goldsmith, *Africa's Overgrown State Reconsidered: Bureaucracy and Economic Growth*, 51 (4) World Politics 520-546 (1999).

<sup>31</sup> M. Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft, Grundrisse der verstehenden Soziologie* 580-598 (1980).

<sup>32</sup> H. Wimmer, *Die Modernisierung politischer Systeme* 109-162 (2000); N. van de Walle, *African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis, 1979-1999* (2001); R. Tangri, *The Politics of Patronage in Africa* (1999); P. Chabal & J.-P. Daloz, *Africa Works, Disorder as Political Instrument* 1-16 (1999).

<sup>33</sup> Weber, *supra* note 31, at 17.

<sup>34</sup> The 'highest patron' or head of state is also a client in that he is dependent upon his internal and external (international) sources of funds.

<sup>35</sup> Chabal & Daloz, *supra* note 32, at 103-104.

pupil to the school on the basis of an informal ‘fee’. As part of their sinecure all civil servants – including the courts – have a small sphere of authority that they can use for personal purposes. It is no accident that Transparency International classifies Cameroon as one of the most corrupt nations in the world.<sup>36</sup>

Obviously, under these circumstances the public treasury serves other purposes than the financing of the *bonum commune*. In fact, public funds are part of a massive and inefficient *redistribution* scheme. Like all forms of corruption, up to a certain point, they can ‘grease’ the wheels of the ruling administration. In Cameroon, however, that threshold has been far exceeded. Redistribution is a legitimate concern of the state but it must be reconcilable with the *bonum commune* and, most importantly, must not block the generation of private economic resources.<sup>37</sup>

Neo-patrimonialism facilitates not only inefficiency but also *injustice* because it privileges those in authoritative positions and possession of sinecures. The supply side of the ‘political market’ is controlled by the holders of public office and the demand side by the clients dependant on them. The particular interests of those who can pay or have a special relation to the office holder are satisfied, but the *bonum commune* is not fulfilled. When everything has a price and can be bought, it is impossible to speak of democracy, the rule of law or social justice.<sup>38</sup>

In a neo-patrimonial system the *proportions* of the authoritative allocation of values mentioned above are not balanced. Some particular interests dominate the collective interests and the involuntary and enforceable components of authority prevail over the ethical and voluntary components. In such a system, authority is exercised to the advantage of those who have the coercive power of the state ‘on their side’ (see Figure 4).

To sum up Cameroonian politics is successful on the input side. Widespread and permanent give-and-take has integrative and stabilizing effects. However, the same culture of negotiating also has negative repercussions on the output

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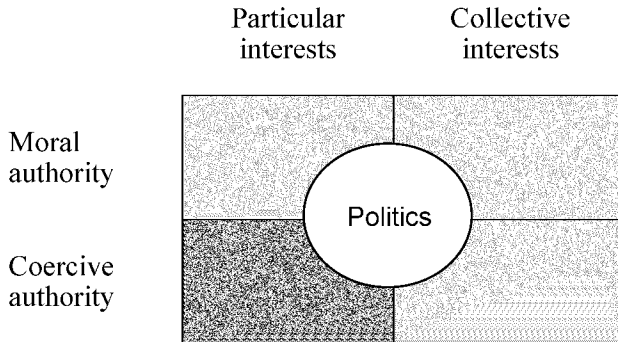
<sup>36</sup> Transparency International publishes an annual report ranking nations by the corruption perceived there (Corruption Perception Index). In 2001 Cameroon took fourth place together with Bolivia, Azerbaijan, and Kenya; see 2001 Corruption Perceptions Index, available on the Internet at [www.transparency.org/cpi/2001/cpi2001.html](http://www.transparency.org/cpi/2001/cpi2001.html). See also P. Titi Nwel (Ed.), *De la corruption au Cameroun* (1999); Ch.M. Fombad, *Endemic Corruption in Cameroon: Insights on Consequences and Control*, in K.R. Hope & B.C. Chikulo (Eds.), *Corruption and Development in Africa, Lessons from Country Case-Studies* 234-260 (2000); S. Andreski, *Kleptocracy as a System of Government in Africa*, in A.J. Heidenheimer (Ed.), *Political Corruption, Readings in Contemporary Analysis* 346-357 (1970).

<sup>37</sup> R. Sandbrook, *The Politics of Africa's Economic Stagnation* (1985); L. A. Villalon & P. A. Huxtable (Eds.), *The African State at a Critical Juncture, Between Disintegration and Reconfiguration* (1998); Chabal & Daloz, *supra* note 32, at 95-109; J.-F. Bayart *et al.*, *The Criminalization of the State in Africa* (1999); W. Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (1998).

<sup>38</sup> J.-F. Médard, *Corruption in the Neo-Patrimonial States of Sub-Saharan Africa*, in A.J. Heidenheimer & M. Johnston (Eds.), *Political Corruption, Concepts and Contexts* 379-402 (2002).

side as it blocks the binding authoritative allocation of values.<sup>39</sup> Those who are weaker economically come to feel the associated injustices and those who are stronger suffer under the unpredictability and inefficiency. The state is arbitrary and inefficient and this makes it difficult even for domestic and international entrepreneurs that can pay the price demanded.

Figure 4 – Neo-Patrimonial Disproportionality



As a consequence of unpredictability, inefficiency and injustice, many people remain in the informal economic sector or focus on making a ‘fast buck’ with the exploitation of raw materials. Both these consequences are detrimental to growth-stimulating investment and hinder the development of a modern economic sector.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, Cameroon finds itself in a *dilemma*. Neo-patrimonialism, although stabilizing, thwarts economic development.<sup>41</sup> This tension holds no promise for the future, because in the long term the people of Cameroon will not be satisfied with a stagnated economy. At some point, serious efforts will have to be made towards establishing a different form of governance.

<sup>39</sup> F. P. Fonge, *Modernization without Development in Africa, Patterns of Change and Continuity in Post-Independence Cameroonian Public Service* (1997); P.-J. M. Tedga, *Entreprises publiques, Etat et crise au Cameroun, Faillite d’un système* (1990).

<sup>40</sup> D. Rettinger, *Die Wirtschaftsprobleme Kameruns, Eine Untersuchung der Bedeutung von Institutionen für den Entwicklungsprozess* (1998); E. J. Manga, *The African Economic Dilemma, The Case of Cameroon* (1998); A. Mehler, *Politische Hindernisse der Strukturanpassung in Kamerun*, in J. Beth (Ed.), *Politische Restriktionen der Strukturanpassung in Entwicklungsländern*, Deutsches Übersee-Institut (1995); J. Takougang, *Cameroon: Biya and Incremental Reform*, in J. F. Clark & D. E. Gardinier (Eds.), *Political Reform in Francophone Africa* 162-181 (1997).

<sup>41</sup> J. M. Gabriel, *Cameroon’s Neopatrimonial Dilemma*, 17 (2) *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 173-196 (1999).

## G. Conclusions

This critical evaluation of neo-patrimonialism is shared by many experts but not all. For Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz neo-patrimonialism is a working form of government. In *Africa Works*, published in 1999, they find that neo-patrimonialism is a perfectly rational form of politics that fails to spur economic development but still allows general enrichment:

... it is possible for a country's economy to fall into ruin, for development to be insignificant, while at the same time the members of a large number of (informal) networks continue substantially to enrich themselves.<sup>42</sup>

Widespread enrichment without development – how can this be explained? Chabal and Daloz believe the cause lies in the clientelistic networks of Africa, as these are anchored both nationally *and* internationally. Nationally, large sections of the population are tied into this system, but the external links are just as tight, mainly relying on the flow of development assistance and the legal or illegal export of raw materials. According to Chabal and Daloz one-sided international dependence forms the main pillar of the system; African elites have skillfully learned to exploit the 'bounties of dependence'. Thus, for the two authors the external dimension of neo-patrimonialism is a form of international *freeloading*.<sup>43</sup>

Although Chabal and Daloz present a realistic picture of political and material conditions in Sub-Saharan Africa, it is difficult to argue that such a system 'works'. It is cynical to assert that the common good is realized when an entire continent is experiencing great difficulties. Vast rural regions are vacated and the swelling urban centers are plagued by disintegrating family bonds, increasing criminality, a dwindling nutritional basis, and catastrophic health problems.<sup>44</sup>

The existence of these problems urgently call for a more efficient form of public authority. Experts, however, do not agree on the shape of such authority. Jeffrey Herbst pleads for a fundamental restructuring of many African states.<sup>45</sup> In states such as Sudan or Somalia, Herbst thinks that the entire state should be reorganized along ethnic lines; in other cases, such as in the Democratic Republic of Congo or Sierra Leone, Herbst calls for a complete dissolution and building of purely functional authorities that – in close cooperation with UN organs – should focus on specific tasks.<sup>46</sup> For Herbst the impetus for such a restructuring must come from the outside, either from the United Nations or the

<sup>42</sup> Chabal & Daloz, *supra* note 32, at 132-33, and at 19.

<sup>43</sup> *Id.*, at 110-123, and at 17.

<sup>44</sup> Nigerian cities provide an example of a typical output problem. The police functions so poorly that the citizens have had to take recourse to self-help measures like the 'Bakassi Boys', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 9 (2001).

<sup>45</sup> J. Herbst, *Responding to State Failure in Africa*, 21 (3) *International Security* 120-144 (1996/97); R. Joseph, *Correspondence: Responding to State Failure in Africa*, 22 (2) *International Security* 175-184 (1997).

<sup>46</sup> Herbst, *supra* note 45, at 132-144.



Bretton Woods institutions, because the sovereignty of African states has always been an external one. Internally, only few of these states mentioned above have any real authority. It is for this reason that Robert Jackson speaks of *quasi-states*.<sup>47</sup>

Critics like Jeffrey Herbst fear that a strategy of fundamental state restructuring could trigger a round of secessions that would worsen instead of improve the situation for most African people. For a country like Cameroon, the formation of a new state would bring no noticeable advantages. There is no pressing need to redraw the ethnic lines and the new authorities would face the same implementation and enforcement problems. As shown above, Cameroon suffers from an output problem, which takes us back to the central weakness of African politics and the classical demand for good governance.

In order to improve the common welfare in Sub-Saharan Africa, administrative reform is indispensable. It is a process that the countries of Europe also had to undergo. The machinery of the British government in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was inefficient and corrupt; a factor which played a role in the American Revolution which should not be underestimated. Not only in Great Britain but also in other European countries good governance emerged gradually in the face of resistance from established circles. Experience shows that reform is a possibility.<sup>48</sup>

Evolution is necessary because the abrupt dissolution of clientelistic networks is neither possible nor desirable. In a country like Cameroon dramatic change could have destabilizing consequences. Let us not forget that it is the distributive effect of patronage that integrates the many Cameroonian minorities. Drastic output reforms can lead to input crises. For this reason, the process will be long and tedious, as it would have to be accomplished by African citizens themselves. It would be a grave mistake to once again overemphasize external intervention. If there is no local will for state reform, outside assistance will be ineffective. Africans must finally take their political fate into their own hands. India was also colonized and the damage was considerable. But rather than waiting for foreign inducement Indians are reforming their institutions themselves.

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<sup>47</sup> R. H. Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World* (1990).

<sup>48</sup> A. J. Heidenheimer (Ed.), *Political Corruption, Readings in Comparative Analysis* (1970).