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# The State and Economic Stagnation in Tropical Africa

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**Summary** — Politics, while only one strand in the explanation of Africa's massive economic problems, is nonetheless a significant factor. A central conundrum facing postcolonial political leaders is how to govern and hold together unintegrated peasant societies in the absence of legitimacy. "Personal rule," a particular mode of patrimonial governance, provides an answer, permitting regime survival and the advancement of political insiders. But personal rule has an economically destructive tendency that only shrewd political leadership and propitious world economic conditions can check. If uncontrolled, certain political practices corrode bureaucratic and legal rationality and promote the misallocation of scarce public resources. The result can be a downward spiral of interrelated political and economic decline that is increasingly difficult to reverse.

While the state has been a crucial element in the success of Japan and the Newly Industrializing Countries (NICs), it is part of the problem of economic stagnation in much of Sub-Saharan Africa. How and why is this so?

Today, economic development places an even more onerous burden on political institutions than in the past. The challenge involves not only a government's selection of the most efficacious bundle of economic policies. It is a difficult enough task to decide upon effective pricing policies, the appropriate degree of export orientation, the pros and cons of concentration on small-scale peasant agriculture, the proper extent of reliance on direct foreign investment, and so on; but there is also a more fundamental question: how conducive is the political and administrative framework to economic development irrespective of particular policies?

Although one could explore this question in relation to countries of both capitalist and socialist orientation, I focus upon the former. There is some convergence in the politics of stagnation in both cases, in that both strategies rely heavily on the state. To the extent that the governmental apparatus is an unreliable instrument, political weaknesses bedevil both approaches. Beyond this, however, lie a number of divergent possibilities and problems that I have not the space to examine. The political constraints to socialism are even more exigent in Sub-Saharan Africa than those that face capitalist experiments.[1]

Market-oriented approaches are certainly resurgent in Sub-Saharan Africa. A few regimes among the 47 countries proclaim a commitment to Marxism–Leninism: Angola, Benin, Congo, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Somalia. Ideological pronouncements notwithstanding, such regimes as Benin and Congo practice capitalism, albeit with a large public sector. And even formerly stalwart Marxist–Leninist Angola, Mozambique, and Somalia grew increasingly disillusioned with a collectivist strategy and/or Soviet tutelage in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Seeking a rapprochement with Western governments and investors, they all to a greater or lesser degree opened their economies to market forces. Certain other regimes characterize themselves as socialist, though with a greater or lesser degree of militance and unanimity. The Cape Verde Islands, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Mauritius inject a collectivist element into development plans while allowing considerable latitude for free enterprise.

Whatever the merits of capitalism versus socialism, world recession and African economic crisis clearly exert a firm pressure on governments to free market forces and rely on private investment. All of them desperately need to obtain loans, aid, and investment from inter-

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national organizations — especially the IMF and the World Bank, bilateral agencies, and private banks and transnational corporations — that favor such policies. Thus, even socialist-oriented regimes are inexorably pushed in a capitalist direction as they seek a workable economic path in the midst of chaos. Capitalism's potential in Sub-Saharan Africa remains a crucial issue.

One way to uncover the political conditions that favor capitalist development is to draw lessons from the experience of such successful late developers as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Brazil. The recent literature emphasizes the central role of a strong interventionist state in these cases.[2] Its main contributions I would summarize as follows. First, capitalist development requires, as a precondition, that the state foster a general sociopolitical and legal framework conducive to market relationships. An environment of security of property and predictability is basic to encourage investment; in turn, this requires political stability and a minimum degree of social harmony. Otherwise, investors cannot calculate that an investment today will bear fruit tomorrow. A legal code that protects the prerogatives of the owners and is officially respected (and hence calculable) is another element. Such a code must, of course, create and protect a unified national market by limiting or eliminating the taxation power of local authorities. And it should foster a stable and rational taxation system that encourages investment. Also vital is the protection of the institution of private property through such steps as: limiting the claims and power of employees, abolishing traditional land tenure, safeguarding the sanctity of contracts, and guaranteeing full compensation in the event of nationalization.

The developmental state must create and maintain a range of economic conditions as well. One of these is services that directly facilitate production — especially roads, railways, ports, airports, electricity, water, and telecommunications. Essential public services that indirectly assist production as they promote a skilled, healthy, motivated labor force are also important; these include schools, technical education, public housing, sanitation, and facilities for sports and health. And, as the experience of the NICs shows, the public sector must also intervene directly through subsidy or investment in industries that appear essential to expansion of complementary industries but are too risky to attract private investors without such public participation. Publicly subsidized petrochemicals or transport or steel may sometimes play a significant economic role even if they are not profitable in and of themselves.

Also, the developmentally oriented state must regulate foreign economic relations to maximize the local benefits. This is clearly a delicate task requiring great skill. On the one hand, the government is striving to attract foreign investment to particular industries and negotiate favorable trading arrangements with industrial countries. If the conditions already sketched are met, transnationals will probably be drawn to invest — provided some local economic potential such as a scarce mineral resource, a large domestic market or a skilled, cheap, and docile labor force exists. On the other hand, the local state must defend the national interest in the local accumulation of capital, foreign exchange, employment, and expertise. This will require stringent regulation of the transnationals' economic activities, for otherwise the latter's global profit considerations will jeopardize the achievement of local economic priorities. To both attract and regulate foreign investment — this is the challenge confronting public officials who wish to push capitalist development in the context of the existing world economy.

If the political factor has been crucial to the experience of the NICs, then the implications for Africa seem clear. Capitalist expansion here, too, will require states to create and maintain the direct and indirect, legal, political, and economic conditions for productive investment. This is especially true in the Sub-Saharan countries where virtually all observers agree that the local business class is exceptionally weak. Who will sponsor capitalist development if not the state?

Yet most African governments are widely thought not to be equal to this task. Sometimes the point is baldly stated, as in the observation by a noted journalist that not only is Africa "back where it was 50 years ago," but "the overwhelming reason for [this] grim failure is that the continent is very badly governed by Africans."[3] The World Bank is more tactful, yet holds a similar view. As its controversial 1981 report on *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa* notes:

> To speed up development and make their economies more "national," the new governments expanded the public sector. It is now widely evident that the public sector is overextended given the scarcities of financial resources, skilled manpower, and organizational capacity. This has resulted in slower growth than might have been achieved with available resources, and accounts in part for the current crisis. Without improved performance of public agencies, stepped-up growth will be difficult to achieve. (p. 1.7)

The Bank has reaffirmed this judgment in its subsequent progress reports. The most recent report (1984), for instance, bluntly observes that "[i]t is hard to escape the conclusion that deteriorating economic management has been a major — in some countries, the major — cause [of declining average returns on investment since the 1960s]."[4]

Let us be clear about the problem posed by the African state. Is it just too much government? Contrary to what many may think, the public sector in the subcontinent is not unusually large. Public expenditure as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product in the Sub-Saharan countries is not significantly different from that proportion for all low- and middle-income countries. This holds true even when one controls for level of economic development. Typically, public spending accounts for about one-quarter of GDP in developing countries, including economic "success" stories. And the allocation of public expenditure among the various budgetary items is roughly equivalent, though the Sub-Saharan countries allocate less to defense and social security and more to administration, education, agriculture, and roads than middle-income countries in other regions. This should have had a salutary impact on economic growth. Moreover, government expenditure in the industrial countries of the West is proportionately twice that found in the developing world, owing primarily to high transfer payments for social security and welfare programs. It is therefore implausible that the size of government *per se* is responsible for Africa's poor economic performance.[5]

The problem is rather that many African states lack the capacity to establish the crucial conditions for capital accumulation and, additionally, act in economically irrational ways. This nondevelopmental or even antidevelopmental thrust is manifest in the mismanagement, inefficiency, and pervasive corruption of the public sector as well as political instability and the inability to prevent widespread evasion of laws and regulations. How then can African states become effective capitalist states? Or, what alternatives present themselves? Imaginative proposals obviously require an understanding of the bases of state behavior that is presently quite imperfect.

I will argue that, in the context of the legitimacy crisis of postcolonial Africa, the political requirements of regime and personal survival take precedence over and can contradict the economic policies and practices needed to promote sustained economic expansion. Decolonization involved the transfer from the metropolises to the African territories of familiar legal–rational political and bureaucratic organizations and rules. The transferred forms of the state had evolved in particular social and material conditions in Europe. But the environments into which they were transplanted were quite different. Unless these institutions were effectively insulated from their societal environment, they were bound to adapt. And adapt they have, though the process is generally far from complete. The provisional outcome is a form of neopatrimonialism best described as "personal rule." It is the response of political leaders to their central conundrum: how to govern and hold together unintegrated peasant societies in the absence of legitimate authority? However, this mode of governance, though permitting regime survival and the advancement of political insiders, has an economically destructive tendency that only enlightened political leadership and propitious world economic conditions can check. Unless carefully controlled, the political practices of personal rule corrode bureaucratic and legal rationality and promote the misallocation of scarce public resources. Such political decay discourages investment and productivity, thereby impeding capitalist development.

Of course, politics is only one strand in the explanation of the massive economic problems that afflict most Sub-Saharan countries. A harsh international economic climate, natural calamities such as drought and desertification, and in many cases the absence of much raw economic potential also push economies into decline.[6] A circular causation operates. By the early 1970s, the self-destructive tendencies of personal rule had already wrought extensive economic damage in some countries, notably Ghana, Zaire, and Uganda. But elsewhere, such as the Ivory Coast, Kenya, and Tanzania, shrewd political leaders kept these tendencies in check, and the public service continued to function competently. Then, the shocks induced in the late 1970s and early 1980s by soaring oil prices, global recession, and drought shattered the more fragile governmental organizations. Few states could cope when foreign debts became unmanageable and foreign exchange shortfalls eliminated essential imports. The result was a downward spiral of economic and political decline that is now so difficult to reverse. Exogenous and endogenous factors are, in most cases, inextricably intertwined.

## 1. THE ORIGINS OF PERSONAL RULE

What are the dynamics of political adaptation? To govern, African rulers have had to motivate bureaucrats to implement laws and policies and citizens to act in accordance with authoritative decisions. They have had to obtain this double compliance in poor, weakly integrated peasant societies that lack a sizeable middle class, a single political tradition, and an instrumental rationality conducive to bureaucratic organization. All these material and social conditions distinguish the African environment from that existing in the European countries that transferred the political and institutional models. Governing in these different circumstances is an awesome challenge.

Strong states are those that are based on willing compliance. All rulers crave legitimacy — the conviction among bureaucrats and citizens that they are under an obligation to obey those occupying certain authority positions. Yet relatively few governments actually achieve a firm moral basis for their rule. If legitimacy is weak, willing compliance must derive from pragmatic considerations. People consent because they believe that a particular government or policy advances their interests. Hence, a political leader surreptitiously favors a strategic region or tribe to gain generalized support among that group, or buys instrumental allegiance from influential individuals and groups through patronage. The greater a regime's dependence upon mercenary support, however, the greater is its vulnerability to disaffection in the event of an economic downturn.

Coerced compliance is the other basis for rule. All governments depend from time to time on some form of coercion; this may fall to the courts, the army, the police, or the prisons. But some governments command so little legitimacy and are so ineffectual at distributing the spoils that they depend heavily on force. This is evidently a very unstable basis for government.

For most African countries, independence precipitated a decomposition of the anticolonial front and an ensuing crisis of legitimacy. Politicians, bureaucrats, and people in general grew preoccupied with private and sectional advantage. To what principle could leaders now appeal for solidarity and sacrifice? Patriotism was unlikely to elicit this in countries where the recency of territorial units and the saliency of ethnic rivalries weakened a sense of national identity. Ideologies that elsewhere facilitate consent — liberalism and socialism — have few roots to sustain them in Africa. The traditional legitimacy of precolonial polities was largely irrelevant in the culturally heterogeneous modern state. The result was the emergence of personal rule based chiefly upon personal loyalty, patron–client linkages, and coercion.

If a substantial African bourgeoisie had emerged, then liberal democracy might have provided a moral basis for governance. A strong middle class might have championed liberty and constitutionalism. A Westminster-style constitution might then have actually mirrored the values of society, or at least a significant portion of it. But this was not to be. Instead, colonial rulers, in partnership with leading politicians, spawned constitutions that had no more basis in local political cultures than the parchment on which they were inscribed. The limitation of governmental powers, the protection of civil liberties, the principles of representative and responsible government — all these found their place; but in country after country, regimes systematically evaded or abolished these safeguards.

Could the story have been different? Certain liberal–democratic values may have existed in traditional societies, but in a much altered guise and more intimate political environment. These new societies' major political traditions were, in fact, derived from the colonial era — an era of autocratic government with a governor at the head of a bureaucratic apparatus. True, decolonization entailed the cautious devolution of power and responsibility to increasingly representative assemblies. But this whole process was brief, rarely lasting longer than 10–15 years and often less. Social values could not make the radical adjustment to constitutionalism in this short time, especially since that historical proponent of liberal democracy, the bourgeoisie, was so weak. Thus, there was little to prevent the dismantling of democratic institutions.

Whatever the specific route, authoritarianism was generally the outcome. Over half of the African regimes in late 1984 were military or quasi-military. In practice, it is difficult to distinguish between these forms as army-supported governments often deck themselves out in civilian garb. Another third or more of the countries had one-party governments or hereditary monarchies. They were not equally autocratic. Real if limited intraparty competition occurs in the Ivory Coast, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, and Zambia. In only five, less than one-eighth, of the Sub-Saharan countries did competitive party politics exist. Even in these cases, the tolerance of the governing élite is either tenuous or untested. It is not cynical to wonder if Senegal's ruling Socialist Party would actually hand over the reins of power if it was constitutionally defeated by a coalition of opposition parties. Following the recent election the survival of Zimbabwe's multiparty system is in doubt, given Prime Minister Mugabe's declared support for a one-party state.

Thus, the regimes which command willing compliance on the grounds that they respect constitutional procedures are few. Insecurity motivates the incumbents to eliminate the opposition. But, on the eve of victory, the new élite finds itself naked, without a moral basis for rule. Some regimes still try to claim the legitimacy that stems from adherence to legal norms. Some of these govern single-party states in which intraparty elections do offer limited participation. But the strongman is always tempted to intervene surreptitiously to eliminate real or imagined opponents, thus vitiating his democratic pretensions.

Revolutionary legitimacy is another potential moral basis for rule. Citizens and bureaucrats will comply with a regime's directives if they identify with the charismatic mission of the ruler. The principal contender for such a mission in Africa is the construction of socialism. However, as mentioned above, only a handful of governments have genuinely committed themselves to a radical socialist project. And all these regimes, with Ethiopia the only exception, have pragmatically adjusted in a capitalist direction since the early 1980s under pressure of economic breakdown. Despite economic failure and famine, however, there appear to be sizeable pockets of popular support for the revolution in at least Angola, Ethiopia, and Mozambique. Socialism, even under the strain of harsh economic conditions and without the benefit of a substantial proletariat and a clearly defined domestic class enemy, still apparently holds the loyalty of many in these countries.

Tradition is an alternative source of legitimacy. Rulers can anticipate willing compliance if they govern in accordance with immemorial prescriptive norms, usually sanctioned by religion. Patriarchalism and patrimonialism, two forms of traditional authority identified by Max Weber,[7] existed in precolonial Africa, but only the latter is relevant to the postcolonial system of nation-states. For Weber, patrimonialism emerged in patriarchal societies akin to those of the Nigerian Ibo with the formation of an administrative staff and military force under the personal control of a chief. Patrimonial regimes could take one of two forms: either centralized as with the emirates of northern Nigeria, or decentralized as among the Oyo Yoruba. The latter arose when subordinate leaders established a hereditary claim on certain administrative offices, similar to feudal societies in which the monarch had to recognize the regional power of the nobles. Those who appropriated offices would support themselves with taxes or booty.

In Africa, postcolonial political adaptation took the form of traditionalist patrimonialism only in those few polities that survived the colonial era intact: Ethiopia before the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie I, Burundi before the 1966 coup, Lesotho, and Swaziland. The bizarre attempt of former Sergeant Jean Bedel Bokassa to establish a patrimonial kingdom in his renamed Central African Empire is worth mention. This "empire" was shortlived, however, ended in 1979 by a coup aided by the French military. Elsewhere, traditional patrimonialism has not emerged, probably because the traditional norms that could sanction it are irrelevant to the large-scale and culturally plural postcolonial state.

Political adaptation has thus taken the form of "sultanism" (as Weber called it) or personal rule in most cases.[8] This form of patrimonialism arises in culturally plural peasant societies where rulers have no constitutional, charismatic–revolutionary, or traditional legitimacy. A chief or strongman emerges and governs on the basis of mercenary incentives and personal control of his administration and armed force. Personal loyalty and fear are the mainstays of a personalistic government untrammeled by traditional or modern constitutional limitations. Strongmen generally concoct a patina of traditional respectability by introducing familiar political symbols and practices, but the efficacy of this strategem is questionable.

More precisely, personal rule, as an ideal type, comprises three interrelated traits. Consider briefly each in turn.

### (a) *The strongman*

Usually a country's president, he occupies the center of political life. He is the centrifugal force around which all else revolves. Not only the ceremonial head of state, the president is also the chief political, military and cultural figure, head of government, commander-in-chief of the armed forces, head of the governing party (if there is one) and even chancellor of the local university. His aim is typically to identify his person with the "nation." His physical self is omnipresent: as in Orwell's *1984*, Big Brother's picture is plastered on public walls, billboards, and even private homes. His portrait also adorns stamps, coins, paper money, and even the T-shirts and buttons often distributed to the party "faithful." Schools, hospitals and stadiums are named after him. The mass media herald his every word and action, no matter how insignificant.

The strongman needs, indeed demands, veneration and obedience. He surrounds himself with followers, who constantly reaffirm their faith in his exceptional wisdom and generosity. All or the bulk of strategic positions in the political, bureaucratic, police, and military hierarchies are filled with personally loyal individuals. These include relatives, especially close ones such as brothers and cousins, friends and classmates, kinsmen and tribesmen. For these and for other followers, the expectation of sharing in the spoils of office reinforces their personal link to the chief.

### (b) *Clientelism*

Patrons at all levels build their followings by providing material benefits and prestigious posts to loyal clients. These mercenary linkages proliferate as the strongman, his lieutenants and, sometimes, competing national leaders recruit clients from among patrons and brokers at the regional or local level and in nominally modern organizations such as bureaucracies and trade unions. Patron–client relationships may interlink, with patrons at one level becoming the clients of those higher up. In this case, these informal networks of personal alliances may stretch from the capital city to the most distant regions. The extent of political participation obviously affects the reach of these networks. Where autocracy reigns, only those who number among the politically important will share in the spoils: top bureaucrats, party officials, local notables, national and regional politicians, and perhaps top military officers.

Spoils come in basically two forms.[9] First, Big Men can provide their followers with access to the state's resources. "Jobs for the boys" in the civil service, government boards, and public corporations can be furnished by legal or illegal means. They can, perhaps legally but certainly unethically, channel low interest loans and contracts from public agencies to their friends and allies. Agricultural development corporations, for instance, may draw their resources from levies on peasant production, yet allocate their loans mainly to the rich and powerful. Some patrons will also supply their clients with opportunities for illegal gain from public office; or, at least, they may allow illicit practices to go unpunished for fear of losing support. Corruption is one such opportunity — accepting or extorting bribes for decisions or actions taken in a public capacity. Others include theft of public property, the illegal appropriation of public revenues (fraud), and nepotism.

Secondly, strongmen and/or other Big Men reward their clients by granting preferential access to resources which, though outside the public sector, are subject to governmental regulation or influence. For example, an aspiring businessman is required to obtain a license to establish a transport company, a taxi service, or a distributorship for a certain commodity. He must have a permit to import various items or get foreign exchange from the central bank. Indeed even to purchase land, he may have to satisfy a land board. All these allocations of nongovernmental benefits can become counters in the absorbing game of factional maneuver.

### (c) *A personally loyal armed force*

This is the other major instrument for establishing and maintaining the strongman's rule. Owing to weak legitimacy and the constriction of the charmed circle with access to the spoils, rulers must increasingly rely upon the threat or use of coercion for their survival. Thus, the distinction between military and civilian regimes is ultimately misleading. On the one hand, we have army leaders who seize power and "civilianize" their regimes; on the other, we find civilian rulers who feel impelled to cultivate and co-opt their military commanders. The distinction, then, is really one between the direct and indirect political influence of the armed forces.

Security organs proliferate in the years following independence. Insecure leaders adopt first one tactic and then another in an endless search for stability and order. Presidents recruit their personal bodyguard or palace guard from among their own tribesmen or from a foreign country to maximize reliability. Secret police agencies, whether civilian or military, may become a principal instrument of rule. They may not only ferret out conspiracies, but punish or eliminate the alleged conspirators and dissidents as well. Control of the armed forces is of prime importance. The political potential of the military is obvious to all, especially to strongmen who have themselves grabbed power via the army. To capture or neutralize the army, the ruler has two options. He can transform it into a force led and, perhaps, manned by his followers, or he can build up a personally loyal counterforce, usually a paramilitary unit. But both options are hazardous. Either route may provoke the officer corps if officers perceive a threat to their personal positions or their professional prestige and autonomy.

## 2. DESTRUCTIVE TENDENCIES IN PERSONAL RULE

Personal rule prevails in most African countries today.[10] The major exceptions are the militantly socialist regimes, such as those already mentioned, whose revolutionary experiences have forged institutions and commitments that transcend mercenary considerations, and the recently independent countries of Southern Africa which are in the early stages of political adaptation. Sultanism flourishes elsewhere under various guises: civilian, quasimilitary or military forms of government, one-party or competitive-party systems, or even under the socialist veneer of Sékou Touré's Guinea, Benin and the Republic of the Congo.

Under whatever guise, personal rule is potentially highly destructive of capitalist development. It requires a highly skilled political leadership to prevent the logic of personal and regime survival from sabotaging hopes of economic prosperity. Unless leaders take precautions, neopatrimonialism saps the capacity of the state and fosters a climate in which public officials make decisions on short-term political or self-aggrandizing grounds and with scant regard to their long-term economic consequences. The economic effect of this mode of governance (and of the social and economic conditions it reflects) is thus to waste public resources, discourage productive investment, and open opportunities for easy profits through political manipulation. This is obviously a recipe for the stagnation of the formal capitalist sector.

A major factor discouraging capital accumulation is political instability; this is endemic to personal rule. The stakes of political competition are high, while the rules of the political game are nebulous and uninstitutionalized in a system characterized by ethnic, regional, or religious schisms and an absence of established political traditions. A strongman must possess superb political skills or strong support from an external power to maintain an orderly political life. And without order, investors will not be forthcoming. Who will invest today if he is unsure of what tomorrow will bring?[11]

If we define as politically unstable those countries that experience two or more episodes of political violence (revolution, rebellion, coup, insurrection) within a decade, then the majority of neopatrimonial countries are unstable. Indeed, by mid-1984, the 46 independent countries of tropical Africa had suffered at least 60 successful coups alone. Ghana and Benin topped the list, each having suffered five successful overthrows. Nigeria experienced four such unconstitutional changes of regime. Uganda's people have been tormented by virtually all forms of political violence since 1972. Even those paragons of political stability, Kenya and Cameroon, had to quash bloody attempted overthrows in August 1982 and April 1984 respectively. Rarely in Africa does one observe peaceful and constitutional successions to the presidency. In the period 1960–82, there were only six instances.[12]

Civil strife, together with famine, has driven millions of Africans into exile. About half of the world's refugee population originates in Sub-Saharan Africa. Countries harboring large refugee populations, especially the Sudan and Somalia, compound their economic problems, even with United Nations' assistance. One country's political violence can indirectly blight its neighbors' economic prospects.

The deterioration of administrative capacity is also a phenomenon closely linked to neopatrimonialism. Max Weber believed that only bureaucracy could provide modern capitalism with what it required — efficient, specialized, rational (i.e., nonarbitrary) administration. However, most African administrations diverge so widely from this model that the application of the term bureaucracy is quite misleading. Why does this deterioration occur? In Western Europe, one must recall, the transition from patrimonial administration to bureaucracy took more than a century. Gradually, administrative offices were separated from the royal households and personal considerations in administration were replaced by impersonal, universalistic criteria. Bureaucracy was an outcome of a larger process of secularization and industrialization. But Africa has not had this opportunity for gradual adaptation. Thus, only a concerted effort on the part of a political leadership to shield the bureaucracy from the corrosive impact of patrimonial practices can safeguard a modicum of bureaucratic rationality.

With independence, weakly institutionalized bureaucratic norms often quickly gave way in the face of political pressures. "Having succeeded in driving away the colonial masters, the victors fell back to distribute their booty."[13] A major aspect of the spoils was employment in the bureaucracy. As patrons maneuvered, ethnic and/or factional affiliation tended to replace technical competence in hiring and promotion, and nepotism and corruption to replace impartiality in the exercise of authority. Although many competent civil servants resist these trends, theirs is a difficult struggle. They can rarely appeal to constitutional restraints upon the rulers' powers, for these are neither recognized nor enforced. Nor is there a local business class with sufficient power and economic independence to force coherence and discipline upon the state apparatus.[14] The incipient bourgeoisie is instead heavily dependent upon government for lucrative opportunities, as we shall soon see. Consequently, the administrative system adapts to the exigencies of neopatrimonial rule at the cost of its bureaucratic characteristics.

The principal danger is that the abuse of office will become uncontrollable. Unrestrained corruption can pervade the civil service, statutory boards, and public corporations; what begins as occasional acts of public misconduct, such as occur in all bureaucracies, spreads like a cancer. The result is a pathological condition of "systemic corruption" — an administration in which "wrong-doing has become the norm," whereas the "notion of public responsibility has become the exception, not the rule." Corruption is then "so regularized and institutionalized that organizational supports back wrong-doing and actually penalize those who live up to the old norms."[15]

So deeply engrained does this pattern become that it is difficult to eradicate. In Ghana, for instance, commissions of inquiry into official wrong-doing have accompanied each new regime (1966, 1972, 1979, 1982) and each set of commissions unearthed, not unexpectedly, massive corruption and waste. Every commission recommended stiffer penalties and/or special police agencies to ferret out these practices. Yet the situation has gone from bad to worse — until, in 1983, Ft.-Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings, the new ruler, took the drastic step of shooting people found guilty of major acts of corruption.

Consider some of the economic irrationalities that bureaucratic decline and the political requirements of personal rule typically introduce. One relates to the operation of the tax system. To succeed, a capitalist state must match its fiscal policy to the requirements of economic growth. Only a rising output will open up new sources of revenue. Taxes that are too heavy will deter production, blocking the expansion of a government's fiscal base. This is what commonly happens in tropical Africa. Massive tax evasion by the rich and the desperate efforts of patrons to maintain or expand public revenues produce counterproductive policies that place an inordinate tax burden on smallholders. Monopsonistic marketing boards are a favored means of extracting revenues from peasants. The ostensible aim is to stabilize the price paid to cash-crop producers and eliminate exploitative middlemen. In principle, these boards should accumulate surpluses when world prices are high to subsidize producers when prices fall. But practice has told a different story. The boards have tended to use their monopoly to keep producer prices artificially low and thereby generate government revenues. This has discouraged agricultural production, with detrimental consequences both for the economy and the state budget.

Of course, if the resources extracted from the peasants and other producers were productively expanded, there might be some justification for squeezing the agricultural sector. But the expansion of the public sector, propelled partly by the imperatives of patrimonialism, tends instead to multiply economic irrationalities. Rarely does this process create more effective economic regulation, delivery of essential services, or public investment programs.

For instance, parastatal organizations have proliferated since independence. In many countries, parastatals tripled in the first decade or so after independence; even such market-oriented countries as Kenya and the Ivory Coast participated in this trend. (The public share of Ivorian manufacturing investment, for example, rose dramatically from nil in 1960 to 53% in 1980.) Statutory boards and corporations in all countries run public utilities and social services. There are usually also public enterprises involved in commerce, mining, and/or manufacturing, often in the form of joint ventures with private capital.

It is widely accepted that the record of these parastatals in most countries has been disastrous. Public utilities and departments of the civil service have been unable to deliver essential services in many countries. Roads, railways, and ports are often in considerable disrepair. Electricity and water are periodically interrupted. Telephone systems operate haphazardly. Trash removal degenerates, save in the wealthy neighborhoods. At public schools, students go without supplies and at universities and technical institutes, facilities deteriorate. Hospitals and clinics try to operate without crucial medicines and equipment. All this creates havoc for the production plans of business, not to mention the quality of life and productivity of ordinary people.

The record of public enterprises in the productive sector is also generally poor. The measured words of the World Bank's *Accelerated Development* report of 1981 provides a temperate account of a common criticism:

> They do not pay taxes. Most of their investment costs are covered by transfers (from government budgets, the banks or marketing organization surpluses); in some cases their cash surplus is less than their depreciation; and in a few instances cash flow does not even cover running costs. A number of the

> manufacturing parastatals — the mixed public-private enterprises — are moderately profitable. But this is usually because they enjoy very high levels of protection from the world market. (p. 4.15)

Of course, the picture is not uniformly gloomy. The Ivory Coast, for example, has been praised for efficient administration. But even here many *sociétés d'état* had fallen into disrepute by the mid-1970s; waste and arbitrary and incompetent management were widely alleged. In 1977, Houphouet-Böigny tackled the problem, appointing a cabinet minister specifically to remedy the situation — apparently with some success.[16]

It is not difficult to account for the shortcomings of the public sector. One factor is clearly the world economic recession. The consequent shortage of foreign exchange means that neither public utilities nor state-controlled enterprises can purchase the imports of equipment, spare parts, and materials they need. Severe climatic conditions also created problems for some parastatals, for instance electricity boards. But beyond these environmental factors lies the mismanagement that is so intimately connected to the dynamics of neopatrimonial politics.

A well-placed Nigerian administrator has vividly identified the connections between personal rule and public maladministration. One complaint is the politicians' penchant for placing their followers in public bodies. Recruitment on a patronage basis allegedly occurs even when the Statutory Corporations Service Commission in Nigeria was formally responsible for selecting personnel. Thus, unsuitable political insiders fill top positions. "[T]hese organizations are . . . overstaffed with redundant personnel who have no other reason for being there than they must be maintained by someone at the expense of these public enterprises." A second shortcoming is the granting of special consideration to certain clients: "[T]he strong grip of favoritism . . . allows practically all the staff of these enterprises, who have control over the revenue generating sources . . . to grossly undercharge their friends and relations who use the services." As this theft occurs with respect to electricity, railways, ports, and airways, the state loses millions of naira each day. Thirdly, financial control in many public corporations is so tenuous that "unscrupulous staff members have diverted assets . . . to their private use without being found out." Because of these practices, the accounts of many boards and public enterprises cannot be reconciled, year after year.[17]

Examples and testimony could be multiplied, but the point is clear. The politics of personal rule can erode bureaucratic norms and practices and introduce massive waste and indiscipline into the public sector. Governmental incapacity to fulfill the role of the modern capitalist (or, for that matter, socialist) state stunts development.

## 3. VARIATION IN STATE CAPACITY

But let us not commit the error of assuming too high a degree of uniformity in Africa. There is indeed variation in the degree of state capacity. Some governments achieve some success in creating the necessary conditions for capital accumulation whereas others fail abysmally.

At one extreme is a handful of fictitious states.[18] These states exist in the minimal sense that other governments recognize a regime's claim to territorial sovereignty. But they fail to comply with the Weberian definition of a modern state — a hierarchical system of authority relations ultimately maintained by a monopoly of legitimate coercion. Instead, such countries as Chad, Ghana, Uganda, Equatorial Guinea, and Zaire are "run" by strongmen or groups of armed men without the benefit of functioning state structures. In these countries, it is misleading to talk of a developmental orientation or strategy; the aim of most public officials (except during periodic clean-up campaigns) is simply personal survival or aggrandizement. Such weak states are usually clients of major powers. Transnational corporations exploit opportunities for profit in collaboration with the local political élite. Foreign governments, especially the French, Belgian, American, and Libyan, act as external protectors of friendly regimes for strategic and/or economic reasons. Meanwhile, the common people and their concerns receive short shrift.

At the other extreme is another handful of strong states. Botswana, the Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Kenya, Malawi, and Senegal are capable of maintaining social order and devising and implementing diverse policies. However, the designation "strong" is relative in the African context. Attempted coups, localized insurrection, and bureaucratic ineffectiveness and corruption are not strangers even in these countries. Their governments cannot always overcome resistance to unpopular edicts by peripheral communities. Nonetheless, each has executed programs of social change, and a few have shown themselves adept at coming to terms with the challenges posed by the international economy.

The majority of states fall somewhere between these two ends of the spectrum. That is, they possess at least a limited capacity to create order, formulate, and implement policy, and manage public boards and corporations.[19]

What accounts for this variance? One factor is obviously the differences in the social and material conditions that are present in the various countries. These can be more or less conducive to the successful operation of Western-derived political and administrative institutions. Some countries are more highly endowed with natural and human resources than others; the world recession and periodic droughts afflict some countries more than others, and so on. The other factor is the variation in the skills and commitments of political leaders. A leader with exceptional political skills and a long-sighted strategy can contain the destructive aspects of neopatrimonialism. The Ivory Coast is a case in point.

The Ivorian civil service remains an effective institution and this is because *le vieux*, President Félix Houphouet-Böigny, has shielded it from the corrosive effects of personal rule. True, the President and his lieutenants distribute patronage to maintain political loyalties. Personal followers are rewarded with jobs in parastatals, land on which to build a house in the cities, and the registration of children in élite schools.[20] Some resources have, therefore, been wasted. Official corruption is not unheard of in the Ivory Coast, though this is an occasional, not a universal phenomenon. The ruling élite has, to this extent, responded to the political exigencies of their society in a familiar manner.

Yet the system is firmly within its creator's control. Despite periodic complaints about the management of public corporations and public utilities, the bureaucracy is relatively competent. This may be partly attributed to Houphouet-Böigny's apparent conviction that bureaucracies, as foreign imports, are best operated by the foreigners, or by Ivorians who have served a lengthy apprenticeship. Until late in the day, the President overrode pressures for a speedy Africanization of the private and public sectors. And even after the promulgation of an Ivorianization policy in 1977, Africanization was slow. In 1980, fully 20 years after independence, only 13% of the directors and one-third of the executives in private companies were Ivorian. Many top positions were, until retrenchment in 1985, still filled with the 40,000 French residents who also were employed in the upper reaches of the civil service and parastatals.[21] Thus, the President was insistent that (nonpatronage) employees must prove their competence before they can be promoted. The bureaucracy has been insulated to some extent from the game of factional maneuver.

But the Ivorian experience is not the norm. Elsewhere, the decay of inherited political and administrative institutions exists, a process accelerated by natural calamities and a severe international economic environment. This means that neopatrimonial states become less and less capable of maintaining the political, legal, and economic conditions that a flourishing capitalism requires. In extreme cases, the modern economy moves close to collapse.

## 4. THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL

Although opportunities for profit still exist in these circumstances, they mainly involve either the manipulation of the state to obtain special advantages or involvement in the black market. Neither of these responses sustains healthy economic growth. The problem with the first option is that it diverts enterpreneurial activity into largely unproductive, if personally lucrative, economic activities. The second option further corrodes the state's capacity by shrinking the tax base and promoting corrupt practices. Eventually, a downward spiral of state decay and economic decline generates widespread shortages and shrinking real incomes.

In the formal sector, large firms will invest only if they can exploit a state-supported monopoly position or an accessible and valued natural resource. The manufacturing sector is usually dominated by the branches of transnational corporations or joint ventures involving the latter. As transnationals demand tariff protection and other privileges before sinking capital into manufacturing enterprises, branch plants or joint ventures have no incentive to raise their productivity; they simply pass higher costs on to the consumer. Nor is there any incentive to push exports as their products are not competitive outside protected markets. Because the exchange rate is often overvalued, the beneficial impact of manufacturing firms is further lessened. If they can obtain it, foreign exchange is cheap. This encourages firms to import equipment and intermediate products and discourages them from developing local linkages to ancillary industries. This is not the basis for dynamic capitalist development.

In the resource sector, joint ventures can continue to operate profitably when world prices are high. But the ruling élite must establish protected and well-serviced enclaves. In Zaire, for example, cooperation among the government, transnational mining corporations, and foreign governments (French, Belgian, American) allows the functioning of export-oriented mineral enclaves despite economic collapse and political disorder. The state maintains the needed services and security in the enclaves, while foreign governments provide aid and troops to reimpose order when President Mobutu's army loses control. Outside these enclaves, economic life languishes; services deteriorate, peasants retreat to subsistence agriculture, and the parallel or black market thrives. Happily, the situation elsewhere is generally not so horrendous, though Zaire must constitute a warning of the depths to which a downward spiral may descend.

Political insiders monopolize a third set of opportunities for profit in the formal sector. Lush state contracts, monopolies in trade and transport, and graft channel scarce resources into a few hands. In principle, this process could promote primitive accumulation by indigenous enterpreneurs. Graft, after all, can fuel capitalism just as well as the self-denying savings of the puritan. But in practice, a good share of the spoils of office are wasted on such things as conspicuous consumption, real estate speculation and foreign holdings. The considerable number of Mercedes-Benz and other luxury vehicles in most African cities attests to the élite's opulent lifestyle. In East Africa, the wealthy class is popularly called *wabenzi* for good reason. Foreign bank deposits and investments are also popular with the wealthy leaders. Even Houphouet-Böigny has admitted stashing billions of francs CFA in Switzerland on the grounds that "any intelligent politician does so."[22] The élites' propensity for export of earnings and unproductive speculation are reported by commissions of inquiry in several countries.[23]

Other economic opportunities exist outside the modern sector. *Magendo* in East Africa, *kalabule* in Ghana — the black market has various labels. But the activities to which the name refers are remarkably similar from country to country. They all involve economic transactions that escape enumeration and taxation and operate in contravention of governmental regulations. One is the hoarding and exchange of goods above the official or justified market price. The more scarce a particular commodity, the more the black market thrives. With a constant demand meeting a reduced supply, the stage is set for middlemen to corner the market and gouge the consumer. Smuggling is another prominent activity: precious metals, lucrative cash crops, archeological treasures and manufactured goods are the most popular items. Illegal foreign currency deals are also significant in countries with overvalued exchange rates and/or exchange controls. Businessmen who feel threatened find a way to liquidate their assets and export their funds to a safe country, regardless of local currency regulations.

Certain illegal practices are also essential to the operation of the clandestine economy. One of these is bribery and corruption. The black market could not exist without the collusion of public officials. Bribes are forthcoming to those who issue import licenses and foreign exchange permits, administer price controls, enforce customs regulations, and investigate corrupt practices. Also intimately linked with *magendo* is tax evasion. Bribes and illegal commissions are certainly not reported as taxable income; most money made in the black market is unrecorded and thus untaxed. Clearly, the government loses considerable revenue in this manner.

Failure to arrest the downward spiral will mean an increasingly complex, organized, and widespread informal economy of which the black market is a major component. As in Uganda in 1980, this informal economy can equal in value as much as two-thirds or more of the monetary Gross Domestic Product.[24] As the population is drawn into its activities, almost everyone becomes a speculator and many, technically, are lawbreakers. But participants have a different perspective. They regard themselves as carrying on commerce despite the obstructions of a parasitical state apparatus. They feel their evasions of regulations are necessary because officials instituted these only to enrich themselves through bribes.

The cases of Zaire and Ghana as well as Uganda graphically illustrate the perils of the downward spiral.[25] As the formal economy and state capacity deteriorate, people scramble for ways to deal with falling living standards and shortages. The result is the expansion of the informal economy in general and the black market in particular. But this trend simply accelerates economic and political decay. As the black market feeds upon resources from the formal economy and undercuts prices by means of smuggling and tax evasion, economic problems worsen. Political life also suffers. State decay is a necessary condition for the emergence of *kalabule* and *magendo*. The clandestine economy cannot thrive without the evasion of regulations and taxes by the bribing of officials. However, the black market contributes in turn to the debility of the government; it not only deepens systemic corruption, but also shrinks the state's fiscal basis.

## 5. RESPONSES TO CRISIS

How can this downward spiral be checked and reversed? Many economists today advocate the release of market forces by trimming the bureaucracy, reducing administrative bottlenecks, realigning currency exchange rates, restricting public subsidies, and relying more on private enterpreneurs and less on public corporations. This approach seems plausible. It appears that any practical program of reform must come to terms with reality by recognizing the prevalence of informal economic activities and conceiving of the state's role as complementing these. This may require that it focuses solely on the reconstruction of roads, ports, railways, telephone systems, schools, hospitals, and sanitation, the fixing of higher producer prices for agricultural exports, and the reestablishment of law and order.

However, the ahistorical and apolitical thrust of the neoclassical economic prescription provides some grounds for skepticism. It is ahistorical in that it refuses to accept the central role played everywhere today by governments in directing capitalist development. As mentioned above, there is nothing unusual about the weight of the public sector in Sub-Saharan countries. The problem rather lies in the fact that the political exigencies and opportunities of personal rule can subvert a capitalist economic rationality. It is not the size of the public sector or even the extent of its economic intervention that are at fault. It is the economically destructive yet individually and politically rational calculations that shape the decisions of politicians and administrators. Thus, current policy and "mismanagement" actually have a *raison d'être* within neopatrimonial systems.

This brings us to the apolitical cast of "free market" proposals. Rarely is much attention given to the impediments to, or undesirable side-effects of, such reform. Nonetheless, the political obstacles are major because the suggested changes would undercut the power and/or wealth of political insiders. The fundamental problem is therefore a political one — where is the will to free markets and shrink the state? But even if the leverage wielded by the IMF, World Bank, and Western aid agencies and banks is sufficient to move African governments in the direction of conservative economic policies, another problem emerges. Personal rule is a mode of government which, for all its shortcomings, is a response to the pre-eminent problem of how to rule unintegrated peasant societies. What will hold these societies together when the rulers have little in the way of patronage to distribute? If the survival of African countries as juridical nation-states is a valuable achievement, what mechanisms, other than coercion, can achieve this as the contraction of the public sector deprives political machines of their material resources?

It is just possible that, for the people of countries caught in a devastating downward spiral, their best hope lies in building upon the very survival mechanisms that the current crisis has called forth. For countries in which state capacity remains more or less intact, a range of widely debated policy reforms are still a practical option. But elsewhere the outlook is grimmer. People fall back on local self-reliance as a prime means of survival in the context of economic deterioration and a corrupt and incapacitated state. Local communities in Zaire, Chad, Ghana, Uganda, Equatorial Guinea, and the Sudan, for example, cannot expect to build a better life through assistance from central authorities and planning agencies. They must, to a considerable extent, fend for themselves. This usually entails efforts to improve their informal economies so that many of their basic needs can be satisfied locally or through trade with nearby communities. Thus, the emphasis in village economies shifts from cash-crop production to foodstuffs. Farmers market their produce through their own channels, disregarding political boundaries, marketing boards and official prices. Villagers substitute local products for commodities formerly purchased from stores. As tools are now also largely unavailable from the towns, people substitute local cutlasses. There is a return to the practice of building one's own house with local materials. All this requires the resuscitation of crafts that have fallen into disuse — those of the potter, the tinker, and the blacksmith. A territory-wide extension of these activities means an expansion of the parallel economy, to the point that the term becomes wholly misleading.[26]

This recourse to self-reliance is certainly a creative adaptation to a difficult situation. Many communities have, by withdrawing from the formal economy and the state, lessened the decline of their living standards. In so doing, perhaps the people have unwittingly demonstrated the practicability of a utopian strand in development theory. This regards small-scale community solutions as preferable under *any* circumstances. According to this "development as liberation" school, grassroots self-reliance can prove liberating in two senses.[27] Not only can it free communities from the rigours of material deprivation, it can also permit villagers, by defining their own needs, designing and implementing their own projects, to educate themselves in organizational dynamics and self-government. In time, this local capacity for organization and confidence may increase popular pressure for change at the territorial level. Or so goes the theory.

Is it wholly unrealistic to hope that, out of systemic crisis and popular disillusion and withdrawal, can emerge the self-reliant and communitarian basis for the construction of more organic and satisfactory economic and political structures? Or are statist, top–down forms of capitalism and socialism the only practicable frameworks for economic development today?

## NOTES

1. Sandbrook (1981).

2. See Cumings (1984); Johnson (1982); Leudde-Neurath (1984); Amsden (1979); and Evans (1979).

3. Smiley (1982), pp. 70, 72.

4. World Bank (1984), p. 24.

5. Colclough (1983), pp. 24–25.

6. See World Bank (1984), Chaps. 1–3; Wheeler (1984).

7. See Weber (1947), pp. 347–357.

8. Weber (1947), p. 347; and Roth (1968).

9. Cf. Szeftel (1982), p. 5.

10. Jackson and Rosberg (1982); Sandbrook (1985), Chap. 5.

11. Wheeler (1984) uses an econometric analysis to establish that political violence is one of the "environmental" variables associated with Africa's stagnation (p. 14).

12. LeVine (1983), p. 25.

13. Okoli (1980), p. 11.

14. For this thesis, see Hyden (1983).

15. Caiden and Caiden (1977), p. 306.

16. Fauré (1982), p. 55.

17. Mbafeno (1975).

18. Lemarchand (1983).

19. Sandbrook (1985), Chaps. 5 and 6.

20. Médard (1982), pp. 76–77.

21. *Africa Confidential* (22 September 1982), pp. 1, 4.

22. The President mentioned this in a speech to his party's Political Bureau, the text of which appeared in the official daily, *Fraternité-Matin*. See *Africa Confidential* (11 May 1983), p. 8.

23. See, for example, Werlin (1973), pp. 73–75; and Kwitny (1984).

24. Green (1981), p. 5.

25. See MacGaffey (1983); Igué (1983); and Chazan (1983), Chap. 6.

26. See Chazan (1983), pp. 198–199; and (on Zaire) Shoumatoff (1984).

27. Some articulate proponents are Goulet (1979); Max-Neef (1982); and Gran (1983).

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*Africa Confidential*, Vol. 24, No. 10 (11 May 1983).

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