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The ‘Failure of the State’ of Cameroon: Between Sociopolitical Critique and Critical Social Science

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Abstract

Some discourses on the state of Cameroon have for some time been replete with critiques that oscillate between the political, the popular and the scientific. All are interwoven to produce a consensual mix between science, common sense and ideological statements. For the most part forecasting disaster, these discourses derive their sources from the mission reports of Bretton Woods institutions, powerful NGOs, opposition parties and intellectuals. Taking the talk on corruption and the management of public affairs (emblematic issues with which the country has been tagged) as a case in point, the article argues that the confusion between social categories of perception and scientific postures obscures the debate on this country by way of borrowings, intrusions and interferences. An exercise in the sociology of knowledge, the study examines the place of social knowledge in intellectual stand points and explores the conditions of social scientific statements.

Résumé

Certains discours sur l’Etat du Cameroun sont depuis quelques temps empreints de critiques qui oscillent entre le politique, le populaire et le scientifique. Tous sont entrelacés pour produire un cocktail consensuel entre la science, le bon sens et les déclarations idéologiques. Prédissant pour la plupart des scénarios catastrophes, ces discours trouvent leurs sources dans les rapports de mission des institutions de Bretton Woods, de puissantes ONG, et des partis politiques et intellectuels de l’opposition. En prenant pour exemple les discours sur la corruption et la gestion des affaires publiques (questions emblématiques sur lesquelles le pays a été étiqueté), l’article soutient que la confusion entre les catégories sociales de perception et les postures scientifiques obscurcissent le débat sur ce pays par voie d’emprunts, d’intrusions et

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d'interférences. En tant qu'exercice dans la sociologie de la connaissance, cette étude analyse la place des savoirs collectifs dans les prises de position intellectuelles et les conditions sociales de production en sciences sociales.

Introduction

The State of Cameroon is the archetype of shipwrecked State ... presumably; Cameroon is not far off from widespread institutional collapse ... in a way, a socio-political context of widespread institutional debacle does not bode a better future for our country (*Germinal* No. 064, 15 September 2010).¹

This quotation from a newspaper article is typical of recent discourses and commentaries about the State of Cameroon. These discourses are at times political and, at others, part of popular discussions. They even find their way into writings which claim to be scientific. In this way, they represent a mix of science, popular perceptions and political statements. These perceptions are based, very often, on the reports of 'experts' of Bretton Woods institutions (which have become, for some time now, dominant centres of research on the economics and politics of countries in the South), 'international' non-governmental organizations, political parties and writings by some intellectuals (in this case social scientists and media practitioners). This paper intends to examine the various types of discourses through a study of two topical issues, namely corruption and the management of public affairs.

The management of public affairs in Cameroon has been the object of diverse forms of criticism from donor organizations, firstly as part of the conditionalities within the Structural Adjustment Programme that the country has been undergoing since the second half of the 1980s and, then, as part of the new preoccupation with good governance and New Public Management (NPM) that now occupies centre stage in international circles. The criticism was also picked up by opposition politicians as they sought to take over power although this was not an independent preoccupation as they echoed the discourses of the Washington-based institutions and trends mentioned above. Social scientists have also joined the bandwagon in the name of intellectual appraisal. However, what one observes is the recurrence of the same facts, arguments and conclusions in the same language (diction, imagery, concepts).

This is also true of the discourses on corruption which appeared for the first time as a preoccupation within the mission reports of country social scientists (economists for the most part) of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank as one of the targets of reform in public finance. It was not until the 1996 publication of Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) that discourses about corruption became a

controversial/polemical public talk. Stereotypes equally abound in this domain as there is a convergence of preoccupations in discourses.

This paper argues that the confusion between social categories of perception and the scientific point of view, what Bourdieu terms *allodoxia*, is an obstacle in understanding the real issues at stake. As an exercise in the sociology of knowledge, the aim will be to evaluate the intricate relationship between social knowledge and intellectual discussions by examining borrowings, intrusions and interferences. Discourses will also be judged against practices to determine deviations between commitments by politicians and what is actually done. The aim here is to demonstrate how discourses achieve independence in the way Marx observed of ideology. A particular case will be made of the uses and abuses of the exigencies of the New Public Management (NPM) fashion by politicians. In the final analysis, the paper hopes to throw light on how scientific knowledge about certain realities with an ideological charge can be studied without falling prey to the temptation of reproducing current discourses that have developed into what Bourdieu called *doxa*. The important question that arises is that of making a distinction between the two types of discourses. More specifically, how can we arrive at a critical sociology of the state which distances itself from discourses that are grounded in social categories of perception especially those that are generated by the powerful?

False-Start and History of the Critique of the State

The critique of the Cameroonian state is as old as the state itself whether one is dealing with a purely socio-political dimension or with the social sciences (political sociology, political science). The earliest political critiques of the state of Cameroon were for a long time exiled militants of the Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC) whose discourses were more of regime-based criticisms. Another set of discourses that targeted the state came from disenchanted anglophones who felt betrayed by the unfulfilled promises of the union with the former territory of French Cameroons. These streams of collective thought were marginal and driven underground or only directed from outside the country. These were, so to say, alienated discourses or discourses from the alienated that, in essence, reflected the cleavage between pro- and anti-regime politics characteristic of the successive governments that have been at the helm of state since independence. To the exiled militants of the UPC, the state of Cameroon could be likened to a failed state because of the result of a false start. The regime controlling it was described as neo-colonial, dictatorial and a puppet. One of the difficulties in this discourse finding full expression as an important stream of social criticism was the fact that, operating from exile, its proponents could not openly express themselves because that party had been outlawed, its local base destroyed

through a violent campaign that lasted for eleven years after independence and its principal leaders eliminated or kept out of the way by the secret service through politically motivated prison sentences.

In the wake of the political clampdown, the remaining UPC militants were cautious to adopt a clandestine posture. Operating mainly from abroad – and principally from France – the most caustic criticisms coming from these militants were, for the most part, contained in a clandestine newsletter *La Voix du Kamerun* that could not have an echo in the general population back at home. The containment of this discourse was concomitant with the success of the Ahidjo government in eliminating all forms of political opposition through repression, debauchery and terror. In this regard, the regime had achieved what Gramsci called hegemony even if only at the level of superstructure and discourses. Only one set of discourses could be heard, expressed and propagated: there was nothing wrong with the state-in-the-making except economic underdevelopment and threats to national unity from both internal and external enemies. At this point we can talk of monolithic discourses which were dominant but which were themselves checked by an overbearing state secret service. The consciousness of the dominant presence of the state in the manner of an Orwellian Big Brother was, however, a fact among the politically conscious who were either careful not to involve themselves in any critique that could land them into trouble with a naked repressive apparatus that had the upper hand in the construction of the state or were coerced into submission by that very apparatus. This was reflected in the mass of social science literature from scholars within the country that had elected to become either actors at the service of the state ready to elaborate on state policy (Bourdieu's '*agents d'explicitation*') or invest itself in less harmful discourses about the state.

It is precisely at this same moment that one can situate the emergence of a critical social science about the state of Cameroon among 'Africanist' scholars of European and North American origins. The earliest and most prominent are Victor T. Levine, Richard Joseph, Willard Johnson, Rubin, Gardinier and Bayart, the last having persisted for sometime in his investigations of the Cameroonian State and by extension, other states in Africa. The questions raised by these authors are less governance-centred critiques than the difficulties in setting up a state within a fragmentary ethnic context except for Bayart's specific pre-occupation with the state itself (*L'État au Cameroun*). While political scientists were almost silent about the state, other scholars of the social sciences (sociologists, anthropologists, economists) and the humanities (historians) invested themselves in rather quasi-philosophical investigations into possibilities of the state without a proper critique of its foundation, its dynamics and its direction. A timid questioning

of the state was increasingly being developed by some anglophone scholars and others of non-Cameroonian origin, that is, twenty years after independence (Kofele-Kale 1980; Benjamin 1972). Even then this was only a reflection of the difficulties that the union between the former territories of British Cameroons and French Cameroons have resulted in.

The state itself was the object of a rather disproportionate appraisal from western countries which treated it as an 'island of peace and prosperity' within an unstable African context marked by military take-overs and armed civil conflicts. International organisations of the Bretton Woods framework and the United Nations system even went ahead to classify Cameroon within the middle-income group of countries with a very high per capita income. This gave the impression of a state with little to reproach itself for, this encouraging Cameroon's leaders to maintain a stiff control over critical scientific thought through official censorship of scholarship (accreditation of programmes), self-censorship by scholars and the banning of materials (books, periodicals) that challenged the state dynamics. One has to note that the Cold War context was favourable to a situation where social science discourses other than the dominant western liberal frame (see Ake 1989) were treated as an echo of Marxist-Leninist thinking or even consciously aligned themselves to the really-existing socialism of the time. It is against this background of intellectual suspicion that a critical social science of the state in Cameroon was unable to develop. New discourses of a neo-liberal nature would radically change this but equally become the source of an epistemic confusion.

When Ahidjo occasionally denounced corruption he did not make allusion to the impunity, favouritism, nepotism and naked repression of his regime that were so much common place practice that it had become accepted and institutionalised. In fact, the basis for an ethno-regional exercise of power as well as its transfer had been laid when Ahidjo suddenly handed over power to a Southerner Bulu, Mr Paul Biya, in what has become known as a North-South Alliance linking elites of the former Northern Province (of the pre-1983 demarcation of new administrative units) and the former Centre-South Province (broken up into two after the aforementioned exercise). As such, the biased rule at the basis of the state became sanctioned in the way in which power was transferred between Ahidjo and Paul Biya in 1982. This was in stark contrast to the overbearing discourses on national unity and the regime of impunity and corruption that could not simply be eliminated overnight by a seemingly novel slogan of 'rigour and moralisation' produced and propagated by the new regime.

This background is important in understanding the regime's practical difficulties in meeting the moral demands of the state and hence its discourses on and commitments to an anti-corruption campaign. The expectations generated by a new regime which had argued that it was perfectly possible to use 'old wine skins for new wine' were going to be the source of disillusion in what was to become an announced collapse or failure of the state. One has to bear in mind that the crisis to develop was the result of institutionalised wrong practice and an artificial propping of the economy to give the semblance of peace and prosperity. These practices were denounced by surviving influential figures of the radical UPC tradition namely Abel Eyinga (1984), Woungli Massaga (1984), and Mongo Beti (1986, 1993, 2003) with antecedents and parallels in academic research predominantly by non-Cameroonian scholars (Joseph 1978; Gabriel 1999) but this had little echo in a context in which the Ahidjo-occasioned state structure had become both normalised and entrenched.

These developments explain why the diagnosis of the performance of state and economy by the Bretton Woods institutions by the mid-1980s came as a bomb-shell and hard reality to the Biya regime. The verdict was that the state had become insolvent and could not still operate according to its former logic. It was the President himself who admitted this in an end of year address to the people in 1987.

The Mid-1980s and the 'Failure of the State': The Verdict of the Washington Consensus and Conflicting Interpretations

The handwriting was already on the wall when the president, in a televised speech, declared that Cameroon will not resort to the IMF for a structural adjustment programme to restructure its public spending practices and reorient the economy within the neo-liberal frame. In fact the president was affirming his commitment to an outmoded style of public management which treated the country as self-sufficient, Cameroon's version of what was fashionably called self-reliant development in the 1970s and early 1980s. This explains the regime's own attribution of the causes of the insolvency exclusively to external factors, namely the fall in commodity prices at the level of the world market that was at the basis of the fall in balance of payments and a drop in state revenue. Such explanations were also expected to account for the inability to balance public spending. The diagnosis of the Bretton Woods institutions that was replicated by both Cameroonians and non-Cameroonians scholars pointed to poor management of public funds, embezzlement by public officials, investment in inefficient parastatal companies, wasteful spending, siphoning of reserve funds/revenue and even a lavish social policy.

Part of these identified causes pointed to the corruption that had been part of a style of government right from independence.

These divergent diagnoses explain the differences in attitudes and solutions proposed to the crisis. The government initially attempted its own packages of self-imposed measures or Economic Stabilization Plan that consisted essentially of cuts in public spending while refusing to withdraw from the parastatal sector, to reduce the state's wage bill and to openly engage in a campaign against economic crimes within the public sector. In the latter regard, the president even refrained from making a public commitment to fight corruption in the public service when he insinuated that there were no proofs ('Où sont les preuves?'). These half-hearted and selective measures meant to downsize public spending did not have any significant impact necessitating recourse to the IMF and World Bank in a long-drawn structural adjustment process (not to be confused with programmes) that has now lasted for more than two decades. The Bretton Woods package of measures, principally geared at the onset at reducing public spending and restructuring the economy away from the public sector were accompanied by conditionality measures of a political and ethical nature.

The discourses about relations between these institutions and the regime have been the source of varying appreciations between the two parties with a conflicting impact at the level of political formations, the media and academia. The diagnosis of the IMF and World Bank initially meant to be a prospective prelude to reform proposals and strategies have become canonical and paradigmatic by the very status of the institutions in question. Its methodology as well as theoretical and conceptual frameworks have continued to be the dominant reference in certain social sciences with a direct bearing on the economic and political situation (Cf. Gosovic 2000; Yenshu Vubo 2009, 2007). While the World Bank reports were widely quoted in a religious manner, the academics that have made a stopover in these two institutions tended to adopt their approaches to the study of Africa, in general, and Cameroon in particular. A statistic of World Bank or a fact from its reports became canonical in the 1990s and for sometime in the years 2000. In the same way, the independent media tended to highlight the managerial failures of the regime as contained in the IMF mission reports as a political (even moral indictment) and not a judgement of fact. This attitude was equally true of opposition political parties in the 1990s. The diagnosis of public mismanagement was the major argument brandished by the political formations that had emerged, with the concern with democratisation, as were, paradoxically, the measures taken under the IMF/World Bank structural adjustment (lay offs from public service and parastatal companies leading to unemployment, state withdrawal

of subsidies to the agricultural sector and reduction of spending on social policy welfare sector).

In this way, the diagnosis of the state provided by these institutions was the source of attack on the state as were the recipes they proposed. The only difference was that these discourses attributed the blame rather to the state that was more visible to the political actors. It is worthy to note that one of the peculiarities of the Cameroon political context is the low-level of visibility of the activities of these institutions and their impact, invariably attributed by the local public to the regime. That is the illusion of the actors believing they are autonomous and acting without the influence of external factors or forces. This is also true of the regime which, although under pressure to adopt certain measures of what has been referred to as the Washington Consensus, adopts the posture of acting independently and in all independence. The discourses rather reflect the paternalism of the Ahidjo years in a tradition of continuity.

What is observed is a replication of the discourses of the IMF and World Bank as a reflection of the global intellectual hegemony that has been going on for sometime now. There is also an alliance between certain social scientists, public intellectuals and these institutions through the role they play in informing public policy (economists, political scientists), involvement in consultancy and the role they have played in managing the social side of the crisis and the impact of the adjustment (sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists). As such, poverty reduction or alleviation was not only a new state concern as inspired by the Bretton Woods institutions with Cameroon having developed its own policy paper in association with them, it has also been the subject of political discourses (campaign slogans) and media reports. Above all, it has become a novel domain of social studies tending to replace development studies (Mestrum 2002). Social sciences on Cameroon have undergone profound changes as themes such as economic adjustment, governance, poverty etc have become habitual concepts in the literature.

For instance, the domain of the *social* has become increasingly transformed from an irrelevant sector within neo-liberalism or an undesirable social dimension of the structural adjustment into a revived concern linked to poverty within the HIPC initiative. The latter concern is rather a sort of social policy without social policy (Yenshu Vubo *et al.* 2009) as outlined in the New Public Management strategy of 'economic liberalism combined with a minimal welfare policy' (Friedman 2007:446). As such, erstwhile social engineering domains such as Community Development that were eclipsed are finding their way back into normal jargon without institutional revival as community-driven development. In the domain of politics, there is

a recession and decline in the concern with democracy in favour of the new fad, good governance.

At the level of the state there is an adjustment to the shifts in the dominant, externally driven strategies through public pronouncements that declare commitment and the creation of commissions that are meant to show the world that actions are being taken (good governance commission, anti-corruption commission, human rights and freedoms commission) while no changes are observed. The reality is the maintenance of entrenched regime practices and adjustment at the level of discourses alone to the demands of NPM. The discourses about corruption are a clear reflection of this trend.

Corruption: The Discourses, the Reality and the Campaigns

The President's Double-speak

Corruption is one of the most pronounced items of regular discussions, public pronouncements, newspaper reports, editorials and commentaries, political accusations and criticisms and claims about a public morality cleansing campaign by the regime in place. We have mentioned before how the first president of Cameroon, Mr. Ahmadou Ahidjo, occasionally went out of his way to denounce corruption even when it was common knowledge that his regime was founded on impunity that sustained corruption. It was in obvious reference to this corruption and other forms of impropriety that the new regime of Mr. Biya started off with a campaign of rigour and moralization.

Subsequent declarations by the head of state reflected either hesitation, a lack of commitment, or an inability to tackle the problem. In a span of three decades, his declarations over the media were rather vague or opaque to the extent that one cannot decipher his real position. In 1988, at the onset of the Structural Adjustment Programme, he declared in a television interview that there were no proofs to indict and prosecute persons suspected of corruption (see above). Ten years after, in an end-of-the-year address on 31 December 1998, he confessed that there was corruption among public officials and made a commitment to tackle it vigorously (*'lutte arcanée'*). One had to note that this was coming after a very vocal government rebuttal against Transparency International's publication of its 1997 annual Corruption Perception Index (CPI) that ranked Cameroon top on the list of countries examined. We will come back to the controversy sparked off by this publication but suffice it to note that this development was not unconnected to the publication. It is also important to point that, by this time, corruption had become an international concern in the same way as human rights and was already the object of pressure to reform from western governments and certain multilateral organisations (UN system, World Bank, IMF, WTO, OECD)

as well as activism by international civil society (NGOs, intellectuals, media). Long after an anti-corruption campaign had been launched, the president, in a media outing with the French TV channel, *France 24*, in October 2007, declared that, although there were cases of corruption and numerous reports had been made to him, he could not prosecute everybody or else prisons would be packed to the full. This could explain his belated and timid prosecution of public officials in a campaign code-named *Operation Epervier* (Operation Sparrow Hawk). By this time, the anti-corruption campaign had become an affair of the state. Before examining this development we may need to return to the controversy over Transparency International's 1997 publication.

The TI Affair: Controversy over a Rating²

In 1997 the media took the Cameroon public by storm when it revealed that Cameroon had been rated as 'the most corrupt country in the world'. This media version of the Transparency International's report differed considerably from the original in that it was not about the substantive fact of corruption that had been measured. It was rather the perceptions that had been measured. From the point of view of methods, the TI's sample was restricted and involved only one indicator, namely bribe taking by public officials in these countries. What is of interest to us here is the fact that the media highlighted one single item of the study namely the rating to the exclusion of all other complementary ratings. The details might have inspired different reactions as the complementary ratings would have led to more balanced judgements and less political manipulations than the reports had generated. In fact, the TI's CPI has continued to be published regularly and treated as a barometer of *really-existing corruption* even despite the NGO's own word of caution against taking the ratings as gospel truth. Reacting to its 1996 rating of Nigeria as top on the CPI of that year, the NGO indicated that:

No! Nigeria is perceived by business people to be the most corrupt country, which has been on our list. Keep in mind that some countries not included here are likely to score worse than Nigeria. Also, *the perception of corruption must not necessarily reflect the real level of corruption* (TI Bulletin 1997:5; emphasis in mine).

Moreover, the complementary Bribe Payers Index that is published by the same organisation receives relatively less attention by the press or does not even have an echo in Cameroon. Taking the TI rating as reported by the press for real public reactions were split along pro and anti-regime positions (Talla 1999). In the same way as they had treated the diagnosis of the regime's public management by the Washington-based institutions, opposition parties and civil organisations critical of the regime took the report as supplementary

proof of the latter's failure and lack of credibility. This was evidently the position of the media and intellectuals apprehensive of the regime. In fact, it has become habitual for intellectuals to quote the TI's report quoted by the press as proof of the failure of the state of Cameroon without an indication that this was a ranking according to perceptions. Reactions by state officials bordered on indignation accusing the NGO of incompetence and bias while highlighting the regime's position. It even went ahead to treat the report as libellous qualifying it as 'une manoeuvre politique malsaine et une operation publicitaire de dénigrement systématique de notre pays visant à tenir son image' (Press release by Ephraïm Inoni, Assistant Secretary General at the Presidency quoted in Talla *ibid.*:239). The president's end-of-year speech, while acknowledging the existence of corruption, minimized the TI report as excessive because, according to him it is common knowledge that a neighbouring country is more corrupt than Cameroon. As Talla (*ibid.*:224) has indicated, the regime's reaction is one of self-defence. It is also one of self-justification. This incident, however, was a bombshell in the political class with consequences unforeseen. Henceforth, the critique of corruption would be part of state discourses and constitute the basis of half-measures as well as commitment without action to the extent that one can classify it as pure discourse, rhetoric or ideology: '...le gouvernement camerounais, sans se départir des archaïsmes hérités de la période du parti unique, a fait de la lutte contre la corruption son cheval de Troie' (*ibid.*:254).

The Anti-corruption Campaign: A State Affair

One can notice that although a reform of public morality targeting corruption was part of the conditionality measures of the Structural Adjustment Programme, the regime had paid little attention to it as reflected in the president's 1988 interview and 1998 end-of-year address preoccupied as he was, according to his own declarations, with other pressing issues. Another measure associated with the public morality option was the institution of democratic institutions which appears to have been progressively abandoned in the mid-1990s in most African countries in favour of 'good governance' as envisioned by the World Bank and United Nations in the late 1980s (Pagden 1998:8) in the 'quest for a new idiom with which to characterize the new international relations' (*ibid.*:14) in the post-Cold War period. One of the requirements of this new dispensation is a 'corruption-free bureaucracy' (Shihata 1991:85). This development is part of the mode of public administration referred to as New Public Management which shoves aside the democratic imperative in favour of managerial techniques as can be found in the private sector with the overall

objective being efficiency. This means that democracy as choice of alternative and competence is replaced by the democratisation of persons.

It is now people that are democratic or not, rather than the political arenas within which they operate. This embodiment-reconfiguration of the term is a significant aspect of the transformation of the political sphere. The process also entails the moralisation of the political (Friedman op. cit.:448; cf. also Kazancigil 1998:71-72).

The preoccupation with corruption is part of this moralisation of the political that had become an international imperative by the 1990s. This explains the timid launching of an anti-corruption drive by the Musonge government in March 1998 and the president's end-of-year declaration that was geared at placating an international community that was visibly embarrassed by the regime's failures in public morality. This was followed by the creation of a Good Governance Commission and an Anti-Corruption Commission which play to international organisations, foreign investors and foreign governments through piecemeal actions (meetings, public declarations, creation of ineffective structures in public offices) meant more for press reports displaying proof of action rather than achievement through concrete actions. The concern therefore is to create a semblance of conforming to the tenets and exigencies of New Public Management and gaining the approval of the international community. That is why any positive pronouncement by foreign officials about 'government efforts in curbing corruption' are amplified by government media while corruption is business as usual as reported by the same media. The targeting of some state officials some of whom have been arrested and imprisoned in an irregular manner is rather too little too late. Moreover the media debates about the authenticity of the accusations, the outcome of the prosecutions and the political motivations of the on-going Operation Sparrow Hawk casts a lot of doubt on the anti-corruption campaign itself.

Whither Discourses inspired by New Public Management and 'Governance'

One has to note that although New Public Management (NPM) and Governance recipes find their way as independent imperatives into post-colonial Africa, they are essentially split in nature and not presented as a single package. Although split, they are both persuasive and pervasive and are present in diverse domains as varied and as far apart as economics, public administration, politics, culture, higher education and scientific research. In politics, they sideline political preoccupations with the choice of government (democracy) in favour of managerial efficiency. Public administration is even simply replaced by NPM as private sector recipes and tenets make their way into the public service sphere. In the educational sector

there is an increasing talk of governance as it relates to management of the education system. The economy is raised up as the quintessential reality on which all other spheres depend while economic management is projected as the management approach per excellence. Even governance and its principles become part of economic management and private sector concerns. Governance issues have also become part of civil society concerns. All NGOs, civil organisations, CBOs etc are expected to manage according to private sector management techniques by submitting to demands of efficiency, output (goal achievement), accountability and agent-based morality especially as funding is subjected to big capital. Research funding and spending is also subjected to such governance rules with little regard for quality of research results. The end result of research is not the production of quality knowledge as it is compromised by pressures to conform to management stringency. Management has become an end in itself.

In this way, there is a drift towards the politics of management or the NPM that does not express itself clearly. There are international as well as local dimensions as reflected in value judgements that transpire in the mission reports of multilateral organisations, the rhetoric of political formations in competition within the country and evaluation of local practices by international NGOs which have become standard bearers of the NPM morality. This is the basis of the new rhetoric of failure or crisis states that has been unsuspectingly adopted in some local circles with conceptual corruptions. For example, Mr. Fru Ndi, leader of Cameroon's leading opposition political, the Social Democratic Front, regularly makes reference to the 'bad governance' of the regime. Antecedents of such perceptions of Africa are Rene Dumont's idea of false start (witness the title of his immediate post-independence book, *L'Afrique est mal partie*) or afro-pessimism of the 1990s. This is not to absolve the African state from its failings. What one is pointing to here is the fact that value-laden criteria introduced at every conjuncture may always lead to the same conclusion about a syndrome of failure. This was true about public administration when the Washington-based institutions came into the scene in the 1980s. It is the case with the conditionality of democratisation in the 1990s as it is with the intrusion of NPM and governance-centred criteria into discourses which has not come as an integrated package. That is why it is easy to echo the judgmental evaluation of the state when it is said that the state has managed the economy badly, the state is corrupt or governs badly without critically examining the basis of the state that is being evaluated. In this process, terminologies become automatically recited in the manner of what Bourdieu calls 'automatismes verbaux et mentaux/verbal and mental categories repeated in an automatic manner' (Bourdieu 2000:30).

The hermeneutic tradition in social science has followed other traditions of exegesis in highlighting the gap between discourse (what is said) and practice (action) to see whether what is said is done. However, this level of analysis is shallow because it takes the discourses as given. There is a need to critically examine the logical basis and the intrinsic value of the object of the discourse whose aim is 'to promote the Euro-American system of politics... [by encouraging] people to think of how to reform authority structures, but never to question the fundamental basis of the structures themselves' (Nnoli 1998:17). That is what this paper has attempted to achieve.

The new trend inaugurated by a NPM evaluative scheme tends to eclipse a critical science of the state in Africa and provokes a discontinuity with critical social science that was observable in the two decades following independence. As such, it is more familiar to come across literature about the state of Cameroon that echoes the preoccupations of the Washington institutions (e.g. poverty, adjustment, economic performance, budgetary equilibrium) and NPM (governance) than the works that are in the traditions initiated by Bayart's *L'Etat en Afrique*. Even a critical stance by scholars such as Mbembe stops short of identifying the real roots of the drift by resorting like other fashions to epithets which obscure rather than clarify the subject. This is the origin of what Zeleza qualifies as scholarship-by-epithets which owe their success to the elaboration of purely negative qualifiers about Third World and African realities (Zeleza 1997). Okwuduba Nnoli has identified a variety of these qualifiers which are replete with value judgments and a usage of language full of metaphors and anecdotes, a practice that largely falls short of scientific canons (Nnoli op. cit.:16). One need not forget that this was not specific to Africa but that it was a global phenomenon that witnessed the global consecration of americano-centric social science (cf. Ake 1979; Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant 1998; Nnoli op. cit.).

The drift in this case is identified but the origins with NPM and the Washington institutions are overlooked (Mbembe 1993, 1999, 2001) with the consequence that the scholar is an unconscious participant in the deconstruction of the state that is under attack and targeted for reform (a form of deconstruction and reconstruction) according to a policy agenda and specific canons that are not scientifically neutral. In this way one may unwittingly join in a neo-liberal assault whose other aim is 'whittling down of the state' (Nnoli op. cit.:19) in favour of the market and its forces. The fallacy is to assume that the African state is an autonomous entity: it is not because it was historically constituted as a dependent state on the international scene in relations to their former colonial powers and the new emerging superpowers of the inter-state system at the time (USA, USSR). An objective

social science must go to the basis of the state itself neither to contribute to its construction (Bourdieu 1994:105) nor its deconstruction because that is not its function.

From a policy perspective the new trends render a reform of the state extremely difficult. An autonomous objective reform of the state is only likely to be successful through an objective examination of its basis and a critique of its functioning. A critique of discourses that obscure the realities through idealised concepts is central in this process. In that process, the humility of the scientific enterprise requires that the scholar does not seek to indicate what has to be done but rather what can be done (Max Weber 1965:125). The new discourses seem to point rather to an opposite direction. More specifically concerning the two themes under discussion, it is necessary and even possible to go beyond the moralising stance introduced by NPM and governance-centred critiques. The aim should be balanced empirical and theoretical investigations which do not only hope to achieve value-neutrality but also arrive at scientifically valid discussions. This will avoid the propensity to evaluate for correctness that current intellectual fashions of the global intellectual hegemony usher in (cf. Gosovic op. cit.). Even if there is going to be a retooling of the sciences in their need to grapple with the realities this should come from within science itself. This implies a complex of epistemological, methodological and theoretical issues to be tackled. In this regard, there is a need to re-examine the nature of the objects (issues) under study, the subject-object relations in the study situation (who is studying what?), replication of studies, techniques of data gathering and analysis, interpretation and generalisations. One would thus be expected to go beyond the qualitative dimensions of perception studies to understand the volume of corruption (how much financial value is involved) and the relations (structures) involved (local, national, international). It would also be of heuristic value to examine the implications at global level of the discourses generated by NPM and governance-centred critiques.

Concerning the international context of corruption and managerial failures by states in the South, George Corm (1993:13) argued that the upsurge in corruption both in the North and the South is just one of the indicators of dysfunction in the international economic system (alongside a growing drug economy, new perverse North-South relations, pollution, growing misery in vast regions of Africa, Asia, Latin America, failure of liberal economic models in the Maghreb, deepening debt burden, scientific and technological stagnation in the South, generalised unemployment of the youth, etc.) which neoliberalism controls absolutely since really-existing socialism collapsed. That is just part of the problem because corruption has always been part of the impunity that

went with how states were constituted or how sovereignty was transferred in Africa in the name of independence. It was also a corollary of the absolutism and autocratic rule which emerged within a Cold War context which overlooked abuses by states that were aligned to either of the camps in the international competition between the capitalist block and really-existing socialism. The so-called transition that took place in the 1990s in the aftermath of the end of this international context (symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall) was the fertile ground for breeding corruption in itself. In fact, the scandal of corruption was rife in former socialist countries (especially post-Soviet Russia) that converted into the market economy as a form of transition. The new discourses about state failure in the South have been observed to have the effect of 'rendering developing countries more pliable, and less able to resist or to take independent initiatives in national affairs, much less internationally' (Gosovic *ibid.*:449). Concept such as 'governance, transparency, and corruption ... have emerged as key concepts not only to keep developing countries off balance and in the dock of the accused, but also to remove the international spot-light from the developed countries, responsibilities and issues of key concern to the South' (Gosovic *ibid.*: 451). As we have seen with Cameroon, this has resulted in a hesitant commitment on the part of the state to adhere to the new ethical canons, a development which borders on lip-service and transforms the reform imperative into mere rhetoric.

In order to please and to be seen to be in line, such politically fashionable and correct phrases are now frequently used in political discourse throughout the South, often, however, without an adequate grasp of their deeper meaning or of their implications in the context of North-South relations and global politics (*ibid.*).

This does not absolve from the substantive issues of the states in the South such as Cameroon that classical social science has always grappled with. The works of Bayart (1979, 1989), Mbembe (*op. cit.*, 1992, 2001) and Takougang and Krieger (1996) are pointers in a critical direction. Bayart's concern with corruption (*Politics of the Belly*) predates the new discourses and throws light on how independent social science can tackle the issues right from the foundation of the states but stops short of deconstructing this state from a theoretical standpoint. Mbembe's version of post-colonial studies suffers from the tendency to award an autonomy and agency to the state that it does not possess. Its merit is in identifying the perversity that it has generated. This is its essential contribution to studies of failures in these states in the domains of management and corruption. The model of state-

society relations and the evaluation of reform by Takougang and Krieger are also of heuristic value in understanding these phenomena.

To conclude, scientific discourses are narratives in the same way as other social narratives and are in competition with other discourses over the interpretation of reality.

In the cognitive domain as in others, there is competition among groups or collectivities to capture what Heidegger called the 'public interpretation of reality'. With varying degrees of intent, groups in conflict want to make their interpretation the prevailing one of how things were and are and will be' (Merton 1973:110-111 in Bourdieu 1994:91).

One thing that has been most often forgotten, is that whoever speaks about the social world must reckon with the fact that in the social world we speak of the social world to have the last word on this world; that the social world is the site of a struggle for the truth about the social world (Bourdieu 1987:14)

This is where social science discourses run the risk of being dominated, encapsulated or eliminated by competing discourses which hold sway simply because they are on the side of the powerful (Bourdieu 1998). Science hopes to abstract itself from these discourses to construct autonomous interpretations that do not derive their legitimacy from its competitors but are the result of detachment and commitment to the search for validity or what Norbert Elias has referred to as reality congruence (Elias 1956, 1978). Value-neutrality taken as objectivity is a cardinal value in this respect. Neoliberal thinking and its emerging corollaries such as NPM or governance critiques rather provide essentially value-laden evaluative frameworks by being tied to political programmes. The Idiographic School was the forerunner in warning against the question of intrusions from other discourses and then cautioned vigilance on the part of the social sciences. Bourdieu took this further to warn against taking for granted assumptions that come from socially instituted establishments especially those that are powerful. He even strongly cautioned against the institution of this *doxa* by way of uncritical scholastic discourses or a scholastic point of view (Bourdieu 1994:213-230) or a theoretical or intellectual bias (Bourdieu 1987:113) which is oblivious to the fact that the academic interpretations of facts are theoretically inscribed.

Le biais qu'on peut appeler théoricien ou intellectualiste consiste à oublier d'inscrire, dans la théorie que l'on fait du monde social, le fait qu'elle est le produit d'un regard théorique.

In an attempt to understand public management and corruption there is a need to follow Bourdieu's model of the emergence of the state which aims at understanding the historical logic of the processes at the end of which a

state takes a certain form because, as he argues, the processes inaugurate and establish certain social and mental structures adapted to them in a manner that some of the things acquire a natural character (Bourdieu 1994:105; 125-126). This is where a critical reflexive sociology of knowledge has its starting point.

Notes

1. L'État du Cameroun est l'archétype d'État naufragé ... vraisemblablement, le Cameroun n'est pas loin d'une débâcle institutionnelle généralisée ... en quelque sorte, un contexte sociopolitique de débâcle institutionnelle généralisée qui n'augure pas des lendemains meilleurs pour notre pays (*Germinal* No. 064, 15 septembre 2010).
2. For more on this see Talla (1999).

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