

Doing for Political Science What Darwin Did for Biology

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This essay begins with a comparison of Mumbai and Shanghai, using the recent 2012 book on slum conditions in Mumbai by Katherine Boo, but suggesting that an analysis of public administration (PA) in essential in this regard. Unfortunately, PA is a neglected field in the social sciences. Partly this may be due to doubts about the usefulness of PA, along the lines suggested by a 2004 book by Francis Fukuyama: why, for example, what works in one place and time does not work in another. Political Elasticity (PE) theory is put forward as a way of overcoming these doubts. In so doing, the author attempts to do for the political science what Darwin did for the biology. Case studies (e.g., solid waste management failure in Lagos, as against achievement in Tokyo; the inability of Ghana to improve agricultural outputs, despite its progressive and democratic government) are used to illustrate PE theory. At the conclusion, the importance of motivation is emphasized, using Vietnam (in comparison to Bangladesh) as an example of a country that has been able to link PA to economic development.

Keywords: Darwin; Nairobi; Mumbai; Political Elasticity Theory; Public Administration; Shanghai

Introduction

We owe a debt of gratitude to Katherine Boo (a staff writer at the *New Yorker* and winner of the Pulitzer Prize) for her beautifully written and well-researched Random House (2012) book, *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity* (now a New York Times “Best Seller”). In the process of following a family in the small slum of Anawadi near the international airport, she makes clear the following points about Mumbai: 1) that you cannot distinguish police from criminals; 2) that torture is “standard operating procedure” in the legal system; and 3) that official corruption is a “fact of life.” What she doesn’t do (and cannot be blamed for) is to go deeply into the underlying problems of public administration here. This is where the following comparison of Mumbai and Shanghai might be useful.

Mumbai and Shanghai

The 2008 Academy Award for best film, *Slumdog Millionaire*, suggests an interesting comparison of Mumbai (the focus of the film) and Shanghai, each with more than 20 million, depending upon where one draws the boundaries. Using this comparison, it may be possible to better understand why India’s economic success has not led to the higher standard of living achieved by China.

Despite environmental problems in both cities, it is clear that living conditions are far worse in Mumbai than in Shanghai. A 2005 World Bank report indicates that most of Mumbai’s population live in slums characterized by illegal occupation and the absence of water, sanitation, electricity and other basic civic amenities. The several million “street people” are without any access to latrines. Suketu Mehta, in his vivid 2004 study of Mumbai (*Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found*), notes that, even in areas not considered slums, it is rare to find well-functioning infrastructure. Each year, he points out (p. 117), the deficit

of houses grows by more than 40,000, with officials barely able to rehabilitate 1000 of the 20,000 buildings officially classified as “dilapidated”. In Shanghai, in contrast, more than 50,000 households have been annually housed since the beginning of the 1990s so that, as of 2000, over half the dwelling units were owner-occupied and had private kitchens and toilets. While illegal residents (mostly, unauthorized rural migrants) live under miserable conditions, most have access to tap water and communal latrines. The capacity of the Shanghai government to improve infrastructure was commented upon in 2003 by a member of a visiting Seattle delegation, noting that, while Seattle had been struggling to expand its airport since the early 1990s, Shanghai had built a new airport, miles of elevated expressways, three subway lines, and 1500 high rise buildings, among other developments.

In Bombay, Mehta points out, local politics is not about issues but about loyalty to community bosses. It is also about the struggle for protection: “Since the police have failed so miserably at curbing extortion, the public might as well elect the extortionist himself to guarantee protection.” Mehta goes on to note that, while forty thousand new cases are filed annually in Bombay, the conviction rate for criminal offenses is less than five percent and the handling of evidence in a civil case averages five years: “This means that every year the Bombay High Court adds as many new cases to the backlog as it resolves.” This may explain why no one has yet been brought to justice for a 2002 pogrom here (apparently depicted in *Slumdog Millionaire*) in which perhaps 2000 Muslims perished.

A 2005 Carnegie Endowment report on governance in Shanghai suggests that, while the judicial system is quite imperfect, there is greater respect for law here than elsewhere because of “the city’s success in recruiting better-qualified officials as well as improving them with training and law enforcement advice” (Hung, 2005: p. 7). This report also points out (p. 19) that judges, officials, and police are reasonably well paid and supervised, including “participation from experts and

the general public.” Shanghai has a low crime rate, particularly for a mega-metropolis, with a police station or post in every neighborhood. While mayors are chosen by the Central Government, several of them (President Jiang Zemin and Premier Zhu Rongji) who eventually became national leaders, emphasized the need to develop Shanghai into a world-class city, able to attract half of the world’s top multinational corporations as well as 50 universities and colleges and at least 260 independent research institutes. Its highly educated and resourceful workforce has meant that unemployment continues to be low despite the economic difficulties of the last few years (see Gechlik, 2005).

The dismal situation in Mumbai is typical of urban India, according to a 2006 study partly sponsored by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and other international organizations, for various reasons including: weak municipal governments, inadequate local government resources, uncertain financial transfers from state and national sources, poor intergovernmental relations, a fragmentation of service delivery institutions, improper handling of funds, very little accountability, and a culture of patronage. Summing up the situation, one of the writers of this report points out that municipalities “are unable to deliver services for reasons that are traceable to their narrow revenue base, institutional and procedural deficiencies, and limited staff capabilities” (Mathur 2006, 95). Consequently, for example, cities in India can treat only about 15% of sewage because of shortages of power, water, and expertise in their sewage plants, causing more than 1,000 children to die each day of diarrhoeal sickness (*The Economist*, July 10, 2008, 45 - 46).

A Theory of Public Administration

Francis Fukuyama, in his 2004 book, *State Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century*, recognizes the impact of inadequate public administration in weak or failed states. For example, in regard to helping HIV/AIDS victims, the “public health infrastructure may be nonexistent, incompetent, or highly corrupt; medicines will be stolen, records will not be kept, and donor funds will end up in the hands of bureaucrats rather than going to the patients that they are meant to serve (pp. 40-41).” The weaker the state, the less likely it is to be able to “monitor tax compliance and enforce tax laws (p. 20).”

Yet, Fukuyama insists “that the field of public administration is necessarily more of an art than a science” because “there are no globally valid rules for organizational design (p. 43).” Part of the problem has to do with the difficulty of measuring public sector outputs, particularly public services. “If the latter cannot be measured accurately, there can ultimately be no formal mechanism for delivering transparency and accountability (p. 55).” A second problem has to do with the fact that “best practices” in one country or situation may not be so in another country or situation. “Good solutions to public administration problems have to be, in some sense, local, which requires a very different relationship between government in developing countries their outside donors and advisors (p. 55).” These problems are connected to a final problem, having to do with appropriate forms and levels of decentralization. In this regard, “there is simply no theory that can provide generalized guidelines for an appropriate level of discretion in public administration (p. 74).”

I have struggled over many years to link public administration to political science, economic development, and comparative politics. My development of Political Elasticity (PE) theory, which won the 2010 Fred Riggs Award given by the American Society of Public Administration’s Section on International and Comparative Administration, emerged from my work with Dwight Waldo and Sheldon Wolin (the great political philosophy professor) during my Berkeley graduate school days in the early 1960s. As explained in my 2001 *Public Administration Quarterly* “Essay in Memory of Dwight Waldo,” I wandered into Waldo’s administrative theory seminar, having taught public administration at Texas Tech, using Leonard White’s 1955 textbook (Werlin, 2001). While I found the seminar interesting, I did not know how to use what I was learning for African studies, which was my reason for being at Berkeley. Moreover, questions raised by Waldo and Sheldon Wolin having to do with the need to reconcile politics and administration, bureaucracy and democracy, scientific management and humanistic management, among others, intensified my confusion. As I explain in my 2001 essay, various experiences facilitated my efforts to deal with these questions:

My Study of the Nairobi City Council.

For my Ph.D. dissertation under Carl Rosberg (completed in 1966 and published in 1974), I did a study of the Nairobi City Council as it shifted from British colonial rule to African control. What I found was that organizational relationships were breaking down because of the growing practice of giving jobs, contracts, and favors on the basis of tribe, friendship, and linkages to powerful families. Officials no longer trusted one-another, with the result that they were uncertain what they were supposed to be doing. Authority within the bureaucracy and between the Central Government and the City Council could no longer be delegated with any expectation of implementation. I described this situation as “inelasticity of control.” In other words, the “rubber band” characteristics of political power, which we take for granted in an ordinary bureaucracy, were no longer functioning in any effective way. Political power could be exercised for purposes of repression or corruption but not for providing public services or carrying out development.

About sixty percent of Nairobi’s three million population live in slum conditions without basic services. To help these people, international organizations have sponsored “site and service” projects, under which plots of land are distributed to residents and infrastructure is provided, allowing residents to build their own houses, with extra rooms to be rented for income-earning. However, when it was reported during the 1980s that rich people (the so-called “*bwana kubwa*”) were avoiding paying property taxes and service charges because of corruption and mismanagement, the residents of the projects (the “*bwana kidogo*”—little people) rioted in protest against these taxes and charges, thereby undermining future projects.

My Years (1977-84) as Editor of the Urban Edge (A World Bank Newsletter).

From 1977 to almost 1984, I edited a newsletter for the World Bank. When this job ended, I went back to the academic world and to my work on administrative theory. Perhaps recognizing the defects of my “elasticity of control” theory, Waldo (with whom I corresponded until a month before his death in

2000) suggested during the mid-1980s that I take a look at “contingency theory”—the theory that there is “no best way” and that “what works, works.” This seemed to be a common viewpoint among World Bank staff but was also a source of confusion because they were expected to find and promote “best practices”.

I eventually decided that we needed a theory of leadership that could account for the fact that, for every success story in public administration, there seems to be an equal and opposite failure story, and that different evaluations of the same approach (be it public housing or school vouchers or whatever) are irreconcilable. I therefore came to the conclusion that governance (the capacity “to guide or steer” in its original Latin meaning) should be analyzed on the basis of two dimensions: “political hardware” (referring to rules, procedures, technology, organizational arrangements, methods, etc.) and “political software” (referring to the quality of relationships between leaders and followers essential for the effectiveness of political hardware).

Whereas political hardware can be written down or promulgated (takes an objective form, in other words), political software is *subjective*, (within the minds or spirit of participants), manifesting itself in productive or counterproductive attitudes, prejudices, emotions, teamwork, and morale. I concluded that there are “iron laws of bureaucracy:” but these depend, not on particular Weberian requirements (hierarchy, rules, procedures, rights, contractual duties, specialized positions or roles, etc.), but on the commonsensical steps required for political software development: establishing acceptable goals, hiring qualified personnel, encouraging training, delegating responsibility, stimulating motivation and competition, paying attention to morale, expanding two-way flows of communication, promoting legitimacy, maintaining supervision, cultivating contractors, protecting independent spheres of authority, and developing conflict-resolution procedures. Inasmuch as any of these steps are neglected or mismanaged, all reform efforts in both micro-and macro-administration are going to be difficult, if not impossible.

My Use of the Ordinary Language Approach.

I have also used “the ordinary language” approach taught at Oxford during my years there (the mid-1950s) to clarify such words as politics, political power, corruption, and democracy - all of which are sources of confusion in public administration, as here indicated:

Politics. If administrators see politics only as “partisanship” (the struggle for competitive advantage), they obviously want to avoid it. However, if they view it as “statesmanship” (the struggle for consensus), they may recognize it as essential for effective administration and the transformation of political power into “social energy.”

Democracy. Whereas liberal democracy has to do with partisanship (elections, multi-party systems, and majority rule), classical democracy refers to the Athenian conception of community or polis: consensus-building. Without statesmanship (including a legitimate legal system), elections can be meaningless or counterproductive.

Corruption. Primary corruption is my term for excessive partisanship or greed; secondary corruption indicates a governmental inability to control or mitigate this situation. As an analogy, we might think of basketball fouling under two situa-

tions: one in which there is normal refereeing, so that fouling is meaningful, punishable, and tolerable; the other in which refereeing is corrupt, causing fouling to be pervasive, essential, and stigmatized. While primary corruption does not necessarily prevent development, secondary corruption has a corrosive effect on the requirements for development. This is because secondary corruption stems from as well as contributes to weak political software. In so doing, it causes and intensifies political inelasticity.

Decentralization. I argue that in most wealthy countries, centralization and decentralization tend to merge. This is so because of the high quality of political software that exists in these countries. In poor countries, on the other hand, local governments, businesses, and non-governmental organizations are denied much authority or assistance. They are also inadequately controlled, so that forms of both centralization and decentralization appear to be ineffective.

Political power. Instead of the coercive view of political power prevalent in political science literature (“A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something B would not otherwise do,” to quote Robert Dahl’s 1964 book, *Modern Political Analysis*, p. 50.), it has to become more persuasive for political development to take place, recognizing that, while A can force B to surrender resources, he/she cannot force B to productively invest them. This requires an “enabling environment,” which must be fostered, rather than overtly imposed.

Because PE theory is essential to our effort to better understand public administration, its five propositions are presented here:

1) The more governments or those in authority can integrate and alternate soft forms of political power (linking incentives to persuasion) with hard forms of political power (including disincentives and coercion), the more effective they will be.

2) As leaders integrate and alternate soft and hard forms of power, their political power takes on “rubber band” and “balloon” characteristics, allowing them to (a) decentralize or delegate power by various methods without losing control and (b) expand their influence in ways that predictably affect the behavior of wider circles of citizens, participants, and subordinates. As such, it becomes a form of social energy.

3) Political elasticity depends partly on the selection of appropriate political hardware (including “objective” forms of organization, regulation, procedure, and technology) but mostly on the enhancement of political software (i.e., policies and practices that foster respectful relations between leaders and followers).

4) The effectiveness of political software is directly proportional to governmental success in establishing acceptable goals, hiring qualified personnel, encouraging training, delegating responsibility, stimulating motivation and competition, paying attention to morale, expanding two-way flows of communication, promoting legitimacy, maintaining supervision, cultivating contractors, protecting independent spheres of authority, and developing conflict resolution procedures. Inasmuch as a government fails to do any of these commonsensical requirements (with appropriate variations), its efforts to reform both micro-and macro-administration are going to be problematic. Yet, progress can be measured on the basis of steps taken to improve any aspect of these requirements.

5) Enhancing political software requires a balancing of two forms of struggle—for competitive advantage and for consensus—suggested by the various meanings of politics found in

Wolin's 1960 (revised, 2004: pp. 10, 11, 434) study of political thought. Within the framework of his overarching definition of politics (the relationship of leadership to followership for the purpose of governance), measures taken to increase advantage may be considered "primary politics" (*i.e.*, partisanship) and measures taken to build consensus may be considered "secondary politics" (*i.e.*, statesmanship).

PE theory is no different than other theories in political science which, according to Wolin, "may be likened to a net that is cast out to capture political phenomena, which are then drawn in and sorted in a way that seems meaningful and relevant to the particular thinker (p. 21)." Yet, PE theory is subject to the criticisms that it is "untestable" and "tautological." Based upon proposition 4, it is clear that the theory is built upon commonsensical assertions, each of which is also "untestable" and "tautological." However, to deny them is also to deny commonsense, which seems to be *perplexing*, to say the least. For example, while the importance of hiring qualified people may appear obvious, it cannot be used to explain the success of a business without encountering "circular reasoning." Moreover, what may be "obvious" to a businessman would not be so to most leaders in poor countries who are more concerned with "loyalty" than with qualifications.

Nevertheless, organizational analysis, business administration, and public administration are all based upon these assertions. Yet, I feel the need to emphasize this point to avoid scholarly rejection of PE theory as a result of these criticisms. In this regard, I have been influenced by Welden's 1953 analysis of political vocabulary, in which he shows that political words are imprecise, subjective, and appraisive (ascriptive as well as descriptive), thereby making controlled experimentation (required for testability) impossible. This means that we need to give priority to understanding the *quality* of political power rather than *to attempting its measurement*, despite the belief of many political scientists that "there can be no science without measurement." There is always a danger in using political theory of "seeing what you want to see". The only escape from this dilemma is to view political reality from many viewpoints which is what is here attempted.

My Use of a Case Study Approach.

The justification for PE theory is simply that it is more enlightening than other theories in regard to the most interesting questions in the literature having to do with the poverty and wealth of nations:

- 1) Why is it that rich countries are both more centralized and more decentralized than poor countries?
- 2) Why is it that rich countries are more successful than poor countries in permanently changing their culture?
- 3) Why is it that classical democracy is more essential than liberal democracy for economic development?
- 4) Why is it that corruption is devastating for poor countries but not for rich countries?
- 5) Why is it that globalization will benefit some countries far more than others?

The case studies below are intended to illustrate the usefulness of PE Theory. In so doing, readers are invited to respond to the bold assertion that PE Theory attempts to do for political science what Darwin did for biology. For me, the following comparative case study is as illustrative of PE theory as was Darwin's observations on the Galapagos Islands having to do

with variations in the shape of the beaks of finches based upon the nuts they consumed. It should be noted in this regard that Darwin's observations have never been substantiated by controlled experimentation (see Gould, 1977: p. 270). So, I need not apologize for the fact that my theory also suffers in this way.

Solid Waste Management: Lagos and Tokyo

Lagos is the largest city in Africa, with between twelve and eighteen million people. In the 1983 *Guinness Book of Records*, it was described as "the dirtiest city in the world because at that time, only one-half of its domestic refuse generated daily was being collected and at least one-third of the population received no refuse collection service whatsoever (Walling et al., 2007). This situation continues, despite the fact that between twenty and twenty-five percent of Lagos's budget is allocated to waste management (Western Africa Department, 1994: p. 11). In many areas, refuse has not been collected for years. There is no effective public garbage collection system; and most of the garbage and sewage collected by private operators ends up in the lagoons and creeks, resulting in extreme health and environmental problems. The consequences include, not only a threat to human life, but also, prevention of agricultural and recreational use, destruction of biotic life, and poisoning of the natural ecosystems.

In 1986, the World Bank loaned Nigeria US \$164.3 million for improving all aspects of solid waste management in Lagos. By 1994, this project was considered a failure "inasmuch as only one-third of the city's daily refuse output could be collected (Peil, 1996: pp. 133-139)." The country's political software was too weak to handle this project. Complicating this situation was tension among the various levels of government, preventing any form of contractual obligation and joint venture activities among the 15 local councils then existing in Lagos.

Nigerian officials relied heavily on coercion. In 1984 they declared a "War Against Indiscipline," requiring civil servants to spend Saturdays cleaning the streets and citizens, the last Saturday morning of each month, to clean up their environment. Mobile courts were set up to enforce the regulations emerging from this "War Against Filth."

While this program had temporary and limited success in Lagos, it proved unsustainable. The Waste Disposal Board seldom supplied garbage bins or emptied the "refuse houses" that were constructed. It could not maintain its vehicles and other equipment. Although sanitary inspectors were supposed to educate people about cleanliness and punish the uncooperative, their reputation as bribe-takers undermined their authority. Since industrial firms continued to dump their wastes wherever it was convenient, ordinary citizens were reluctant to take environmental cleanliness very seriously. Aina, Etta, and Obi (1984: pp. 202-216) wrote in this regard: "The disposal of refuse is hardly ever done correctly, with garbage being dumped in valleys or swamps, and untreated industrial liquid being pumped into public drains and surface water bodies."

In 2006, the World Bank's Board of Executive Directors approved a new effort to improve solid waste management in Lagos "by segregating collection, transfer and disposal of solid waste and initiating private sector participation in solid waste transfer and disposal (World Bank Press Release, 2007/3 AFR)." This project, which includes a number of other components, amounted to an almost interest-free (International De-

velopment Association) loan of \$200 million. However, according to a 2007 Cornell University study, “there is no system of accountability and oversight which impels the sector to work efficiently (Walling et al., 2007: p. 12).” Civil servants are frequently unpaid and have little incentive to carry out their responsibilities. Much of the work is left to scavengers, who are often exploited and forced to work under extremely hazardous conditions. This study (p. 18) concludes that the barriers here to effective solid waste management “are not simply lack of policies but lack of infrastructure, education, social awareness of problems and solution, and of institutions promoting sustainable actions.” In regard to Lagos’s infrastructure, almost no part of the city “gets electricity all day, and vast tracks ... never get power at all (Ayitteh, 2008: p. 170).” What is necessary, Adelegan (2007: p. 15) suggests is the substitution of a “market-based” approach for the existing “command and control” approach, but this requires inputs not yet available in Nigeria: “an accurate monitoring network, transparency, a working legal system and realistic incentives to trade.”

Daniel Jordan Smith, in his 2007 anthropological study of Nigerian corruption, points out (p. 226) that ordinary people hate corruption but that they are caught in webs of it, forcing them to live with it. In other words, while “ties of kinship, obligations of patronage, and duties to the community and groups to which an individual belongs” (p. 226) are explanatory factors, they are intensified by institutional characteristics: the fact that Nigerian civil servants are poorly and belatedly paid; the unprofessional conduct of the police; the lack of faith in the judicial system; the dysfunctional nature of local government; and the use of violence by officials at all levels of government. Because corruption “is widely believed to have infected every sector of social, economic and political life” (p. 87), people turn to vigilante violence, but this further undermines the effectiveness of the government. While these groups tend to “exacerbate already powerful cleavages in the Nigerian polity,” government officials cannot easily ban them without increasing “the very ethnic and regional polarization they hoped to avoid” (p. 184).

The high quality of political software in Tokyo facilitates one of the world’s best solid waste management programs, with a different type of trash being pick up each day of the week, most of it intended for recycling or conversion into energy (see Hershkowitz & Salerni, 1987). Every Japanese citizen and industry participates in some way, including the handicapped, who are employed to use compost to make botanical arrangements for sale or support their activities. While soft forms of power are primarily used, the police do inspect garbage, with uncooperative or uninformed citizens reprimanded and fined. Those failing to separate their garbage correctly may have to put their names on their garbage so that it can be returned to them for better handling.

The Japanese administration is sometimes presented as “overbearing,” with corruption and favoritism, arbitrary and secretive authority, suppression of individuality and conflict, Excessive promotion of obedience and passivity, intimidation of minorities and women, and disregard of the public (see van Wolferen, 1989). While both Japan and Nigeria suffer from pervasive corruption, it is somewhat controlled in Japan, not in Nigeria. Consequently, using the terminology presented earlier, corruption in Japan takes the form of “primary corruption,” whereas, in Nigeria, “secondary corruption.”

The evidence in regard to solid waste management suggests that Japanese officials are just as concerned about public opin-

ion as those in other MDCs and perhaps go to greater lengths to satisfy the public. After all, there were, as of 1991, an estimated 20,000 environment related Japanese groups, and these have found various ways of trying to “maintain a vigilant watch over politicians, bureaucrats and companies (Crump, 1996: p. 121).”

Because of the concern of the Japanese about accidents, garbage truck traffic, air pollution, and lowering of property values, many communities oppose incinerators. In Tokyo, officials had to learn the hard way during the early 1970s to respect public opinion in the handling of solid waste. During this “garbage war,” housewives and other concerned citizens sat down in front of garbage trucks and bulldozers until officials responded constructively to their protests. While “the Japanese people have great trust in the Japanese state and government,” arbitrary governmental actions are likely to “meet with a firestorm of disapproval (MacDougall, 1980: p. 140).”

To mollify neighborhoods willing to accept incinerators, they are often equipped with heated swimming pools, recreation facilities, greenhouses, workshops, and other amenities desired by the public. Some also provide energy to sewage treatment plants, homes for the aged, schools, public buildings, and car wash or snow melting machinery. To alleviate citizens’ concerns about emissions, data recorded by the plants are displayed on outside billboards. Thus, despite citizen opposition during the 1980s, there were 13 incinerators operating in Tokyo, as against only two in New York where there was far more justifiable concern about air pollution.

Feeding Africa’s Urban Population

A 2011 article in *The Economist* (p. 47) points out that, with the rise of maize and wheat prices by 30 percent that year, the urban poor often end up spending half their income on food, leading, not only to food demonstrations and riots in many countries, but also problems of prostitution, crime, education, sanitation, and health. A variety of reasons for this situation are here presented: inefficient farming, the high cost of fuel, inadequate property rights, the poor quality of roads and transportation facilities (causing an estimate loss of 40 percent of produce), the lack of agricultural assistance and credit, etc. Yet, all these problems eventually come back to the weakness of public administration, as we can see from this case study of Ghana:

Ghana is dependent on agriculture for nearly half of GDP and export earnings and 70 percent of employment. While agricultural output has risen in recent years at an average rate of about five percent, nearly forty percent of the rural population continues to be below the poverty line, with poverty deepest among food crop farmers, women and the savannah regions of the north. Despite a nearly 25 percent reduction in rural poverty since the 1990s, a 2006 African Development Bank report (p. 7) continues to find Ghanaian agricultural outputs low relative to their potential because of the failure to modernize farming practices, limited irrigation, diseases, weak extension services, land tenure problems, lack of credit, inadequate storage and processing facilities, and poor road infrastructure. “Less than 18 percent of the country’s roads are paved and their condition has deteriorated over recent years, while the country’s railway network is almost non-functional (Brooks, Croppenstedt, & Aggrey-Flynn, 2007: p. 111).”

These factors are linked. For example, because much of the land is held by traditional authority and is without clear

boundaries, the court system is unable to deal with land disputes or the practice of selling the same parcel of land to multiple owners/users. This accounts for the unwillingness of banks to lend to farmers. While more than 60 percent of land in Ghana is considered “agricultural land,” less than one-third of it is currently under cultivation. More than two-thirds of the land area is affected by moderate or very severe soil degradation, causing an annual GDP loss of nearly ten percent (World Bank, 2007: p. 111). Gold mining has been especially detrimental in this regard.

The Mo Ibrahim Foundation ranked Ghana in 2007 fifth among all low-income countries in regard to developmental progress, second in Sub-Saharan Africa, and above a number of middle-income countries. This suggests a “paradox” to the University of Ghana’s Nicholas Amponsah (2007: p. 125), the inability to translate its “outward and cosmetic manifestations of the liberal state” into “economic diversification and growth.” The answer, he suggests, has to do with persistent governmental weaknesses “especially in relation to property and land title rights, efficiency and credibility of public bureaucratic institutions, the legislature and the judiciary and a demonstrable commitment on the part of the state to honor contractual obligations.” Although President Kufour declared “zero tolerance for corruption,” Transparency International evaluations have not as yet indicated much progress. Part of the difficulty, Ayee (2007: p. 172) suggests, is that rulers continue to depend “heavily on the ethnic groups that brought them to power.” This may explain why even the simplest reform (getting rid of “ghost workers”- fictitious names on the payroll) remains so difficult. In 2003, Ghana’s Ministry of Education was reported to have lost \$1.2 million a month in salaries because of these “ghost workers. (Ninsin, 2007: p. 100).”

While more responsibilities continue to be transferred to district assemblies, additional authority cannot be exercised because they “are financially and institutionally too feeble to discharge these responsibilities effectively. (Gyan-Baffour, 2003: p. 6).” Efforts of the National Development Planning Commission to provide district assemblies with trained staff failed in recent years because of inadequate technical and logistical support, unattractive conditions of service, and undue delay in salary payments (Tsikata, 2007: p. 76). These district assemblies are also unable to keep the teachers and medical personnel essential to improve educational and medical conditions in rural areas, where two-thirds of Ghanaians still live. Between 1995 and 2002, about 500 doctors and 1,500 nurses left the country (World Bank, 2007: p. 111). At least ten agencies are to some extent responsible for land management and administration in the country, but it is difficult to determine what they actually do or are supposed to do and their mandates are often conflicting. Moreover, some of these agencies are either dormant or not functioning because of insufficient resources.

Conclusion: the Importance of Motivation

Success stories in Malawi and Peru show that progress can be made even under authoritarian and corrupt leaders based upon the implementation of political software requisites (see Werlin, 1998/2001). Under President Banda in Malawi (1961-1994), road repair was made a national priority. A management system was installed, using micro-computers to provide needed information at various levels of organization. Workshops were also established to set objectives for the implementation of all

repair activities. In addition, there was a comparison of work performance between districts, creating a spirit of competition and an incentive for supervisors to perform to the limits of their potential. Consequently, as of 1990, only 6 percent of Malawi’s paved roads and 16 percent of its unpaved roads were in bad shape, compared to an estimated one-quarter of paved roads and 40 percent of unpaved roads being in a similar dismal shape in Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole. In Peru, the percentage of the Gross Domestic Product collected in taxes nearly tripled during the early 1990s (from less than 5 percent to nearly 15 percent) when the tax collecting agency (Sunat) was professionalized.

Vietnam is an interesting example of the importance of political motivation in linking improved public administration to economic development. A comparison of Bangladesh and Vietnam is suggested by Yunus (the Nobel Prize winner for his micro-credit innovations), noting (p. 12) that Vietnam’s success in reducing its poverty rate to 20 percent (as against more than 50 percent in Bangladesh) is partly linked to its greater success in attracting Foreign Direct Investment (\$20 billion in 2006, as against only \$700 million for Bangladesh, with twice Vietnam’s population). In 1999, Bangladesh and Vietnam had exactly the same GNP per capita (\$370), using World Bank (2000/2001: pp. 274-275) data; but Vietnam has clearly done better than Bangladesh in recent years in improving economic and social conditions. According to *The Economist* (April 26, 2008: p. 3), average annual growth over the past decade has been 7.5 per cent; and, not only has it become a big exporter of clothes, shoes, and furniture, but also “one of the world’s main providers of farm produce.” More than 90 percent of households have electricity. Even in rural areas, most have stoves, television, and mobile phones. Less than 10 percent of the population is illiterate, and higher education is being emphasized, with rich countries being invited to set up universities and training facilities. World Bank sources indicate that extreme poverty (less than \$1 a day) has declined from about 58% in 1993 to about 25%. Purchasing Power Parity figures suggest that the ordinary Vietnamese citizen at \$2310 was in 2006 about twice as wealthy as his Bangladeshi counterpart (at \$1230).

Explaining Vietnam’s economic and social progress is difficult, considering that it remains an authoritarian country, with a weak judicial system, limited press freedom, and a bloated bureaucracy. The 2008 Danish Global Advice Network (Denmark, 2008: p. 1) suggests that corruption costs the country 3% - 4% of its GDP annually, with more than two-thirds of companies and citizens reporting “informal payments” in order “to get things done.” Starting a business, registering property, and paying taxes seem to be far more time-consuming than the average for East Asia. Moreover, businesses have to waste a great deal of time “trying to follow, evade, or adjudicate complex or unclear legal regulations that even judges and lawyers often do not understand (*The Economist*, April 26, 2008: p. 3).”

Using an interesting 2004 comparison of Tanzania and Vietnam (Van Arkadie, Dinh, 2004: p. 27), we are left with the simple explanation that Vietnam has taken development more seriously than equally impoverished countries in recent years: “Vietnam has replicated what could be seen as an East Asian model of the development state, which is both flexible in the use of market instruments, but pragmatic about the requirements for active State intervention when required to implement national development goals.” In doing so, it has exercised “so-

cial energy,” not only actively investing its own resources in infrastructure and human resource development, but also retaining an active State Enterprise sector and providing strong planning and policy guidance regarding medium-term growth goals (Van Arkadie & Dinh, 2004, p. 27).” While Vietnam remains formally undemocratic, it has been cautious and pragmatic in its approach to economic reform, emphasizing consensus-building and learning-by-doing. This conclusion is supported by a 2001 World Bank evaluation report (2001: p. 3) having to do with Vietnam resettlement projects, in which it is noted that Vietnam has demonstrated a willingness to revise its policies out of “a concern for equity and for alleviating poverty.” Land reform has been also been equitably undertaken, with farmers given long leases. Consequently, there is no evidence of the rural or urban misery found in so many other developing countries, nor is there evidence of political unrest except possibly in remote areas where there are concentrations of ethnic minorities.

Elastic decentralization is evident in Vietnam. On the one hand, Vietnam remains a one-party centralized system, with the central government collecting all nontrade revenue, approving new taxes, and setting the rates for existing taxes (Smoke, 2005: pp. 25-52; Joint Donor Report, 2005: p. 24). On the other hand, nearly half of total expenditures are undertaken by sub-national entities using several types of intergovernmental transfers or block grants, based upon negotiations among various levels of government, together with consideration of local circumstances and priorities (White, Smoke, 2005: p. 2). According to a 2005 report of various donor organizations (2005: p. 24), Vietnam has had a very successful program to reach the poorest households and communities with social and health services, relying on “targeted programs to ensure that national goals are met in spite of the increasing extent of decentralization.” The fact that civil servants are carefully selected and well compensated apparently contributes to Vietnam’s outstanding performance and its ability to keep corruption roughly comparable to “what could be expected given the country’s current development level (Joint Donor Group, 2005: p. 24).”

Final Thoughts

Dwight Waldo (who died in October, 2000, to the dismay of his students, including myself) never lost his mixed feelings about administration. He argued (Waldo, 1980: p. 30) that the “enterprises of civilization and administration have from the beginning been intimately joined, each sustaining and stimulating the other.” However, as did Max Weber, Waldo feared what he believed to be the inevitable triumph of bureaucracy. He frequently quoted Weber’s famous threat: “The bureaucratic organization is, together with lifeless machinery, about to produce the iron cage of future serfdom in which men will have to live helplessly like the fellahin in Egypt... (Waldo, 1980: p. 139). “Yet, a successful democracy requires an efficient and effective bureaucracy.

However, there has also been an evolution of the concept of political power in regard to bureaucracy. According to Kenney and Florida (1993), the Japanese model has been successful *because of* its non-Weberian characteristics: self-managing work teams, job-rotation, overlapping functions, flexible and limited job classifications and specialization, close alignment between work and home life, social control rather than control from above, use of persuasion rather than commands, white

collar/blue collar overlap, welfare corporatism, labor-management cooperation, quality circles, innovation from below, and continual training. The “entrepreneurial government” advocated by Osborne and Gaebler (1992)—decentralized, problem-solving, innovative, responsive to consumer concerns, and both cooperative and competitive with the private sector—also suggests the need to reexamine the Weberian model and the traditional concept of political power.

Baldwin (1989) spends an entire chapter discussing the difficulties of determining the costs of political power. These difficulties, as I see them, stem from the fact that, they are not really monetary but have to do with the requisites for political software development presented in the fourth proposition of PE theory. This can perhaps be seen in a comparison of South Korea and Ghana in the introduction of a Value Added Tax (VAT).

When South Korea introduced a VAT in 1977, the government took two years to prepare for its implementation (Choi, 1991: pp. 286-340). Nationwide tryout exercises were carried out on three separate occasions before the changeover to the VAT. Along with a consultation and information program, it expanded and retrained its tax administration staff. A staff handbook was prepared in anticipation of questions by staff and taxpayers. While difficulties and criticisms remain, the VAT is considered relatively successful and an improvement over the indirect taxes it replaced

Ghana, on the other hand, carelessly introduced a high VAT (set at 17 percent of the price of many commodities and services) in February, 1995, without proper consultation with business and community groups (Berry, 1995: p. xxxiv). It led on May 11, 1995 to the largest protest demonstrations in Accra during the Rawlings administration. Eventually (June, 1995), the government was forced to return to a national sales tax before some years later and more carefully reintroducing the VAT.

Finally, the reason why political power must be considered a “relationship,” as well as a resource is well explained in a 2004 World Bank publication, *Doing Business in 2004*. Businesses in poor countries face three times the administrative costs and nearly twice as many bureaucratic procedures (causing long delays) as in wealthy countries. Consequently, in poor countries, 40% of the economy is informal, with businesses lacking access to credit or legal protection. Moreover, property owners in poor countries are accorded less than half the protections of their counterparts in rich countries. This means that governments in poor countries are unable to either induce or persuade businesses to take advantage of economic opportunities, even when they are genuinely interested in expanding their businesses. In Kenya, for example, between 1999 and 2002, nearly 150 foreign investors left Nairobi, citing corruption, poor infrastructure, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and increased crime rates (Katumana & Cliffe, 2005; USAID, 2005). These problems, according to the World Bank (2004), meant that the economy as a whole was growing at only about one-third of its potential.

We might end this essay with the point made by John Rapley in his 2006 *Foreign Affairs* article, “The New Middle Ages (p. 95),” that in much of the developing world, “groups ranging from criminal gangs to Islamist civil-society networks have assumed many of the functions that states have abandoned, funding their operations through informal taxes as well as with proceeds from the drug trade, human trafficking, and money laundering”. People under these circumstances are not so much

concerned about democracy as they are about security and services. Consequently, they support “political machines” (similar to those found a century ago in many American cities), with votes being “sold” to those who offer jobs, safety, and the necessities of life. As a result, partisanship prevails over statesmanship, underscoring the inadequacy of political software as the primary reason for the poverty of nations. For this to change, political leaders are going to have to see political power as a “form of social energy,” rather than as “a form of coercion,” with an “all or nothing” connotation. Without an “enabling environment,” economic development will remain impossible.

The weakness of so many impoverished countries may simply be due to the unwillingness of their leaders to undertake reform. In other words, as pointed out in a recent (2012) book (*Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Power* by Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson), poor countries are poor because leaders purposely make them so. The reasons have to do with fear of losing power, the desire for personal wealth, ideological considerations, and the need for powerful allies. Examples include: the destruction of a railroad to the affluent south in Sierra Leone; the giving of land to political supporters without land rights security in Zimbabwe; the prevention of capitalism in the Soviet Union; and the misuse of marketing boards in Africa to impoverish farmers. Unless these reasons are addressed, foreign aid tends to be useless.

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