

**Traditions in Transition: How Colonial Legacies are reshaping
Cultural Practices and Societal Structures in Post-Independence
Comoros**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the intersection between Western-style democratic governance systems and traditional pre-colonial governance structures in Comoros, examining how their interaction has influenced political stability in the post-independence Comoros. Utilising a thematic analysis of interviews, this study investigates the persistence of traditional systems such as matrilineal inheritance and the “Grand Marriage” ceremony, which continues to hold significant socio-political influence despite the dominance of Western democratic models. The findings reveal that the imposition of Western systems has led to political instability, social inequality, and governance failures, exacerbated by external neo-colonial influences, particularly from France. The thesis argues that this clash between governance structures has undermined the effectiveness of modern political institutions and contributed to widespread corruption, social marginalisation, and the disconnection between the state and its citizens. The study concludes by suggesting that the integration of traditional governance practices into modern political frameworks may offer a potential path toward political stability and national cohesion in Comoros.

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1) Introduction

The Union of Comoros is an archipelago situated in the Indian Ocean, between the coasts of Africa and Madagascar. The country consists of four islands: Grand Comore (Ngazidja), Anjouan (Ndzuwani), Moheli (Mwali), and Mayotte (Maore). Its strategic position along the historic trade routes connecting Africa, the Middle East, and Asia has contributed to its rich and complex history, which is reflected in its cultural and societal structures. These structures have throughout history been shaped by a mix of African, Arab, and Persian cultures. However, during the 19th century, the islands were colonised by France, which significantly transformed its governance, economy, and societal structures. In 1975, Comoros declared independence, yet the colonial legacy continues to influence its contemporary political landscape (Walker, 2004). Only three of the four Islands gained their independence, and Mayotte the fourth island remained a French overseas territory, till this day.

Today, 49 years post-independence, the small island state is still struggling to develop and establish a strong and united nation, as the country is plagued by corruption, capital-centric governance, and economic deficiency (Hassan, 2009). This has resulted in the marginalization of rural populations, a lack of trust in the government, and a state that fails to address the basic needs of its citizens, exemplified by the deterioration of the healthcare and education systems.

Despite these significant challenges in institutional governance, another layer of socio-political life continues to thrive alongside these shortcomings: the traditional governance systems. These practices, which have persisted over time, include important cultural ceremonies such as the "Grand Marriage," which ties together traditional structures like the age system and matrilineal inheritance systems and remains highly valued (Blanchy, 2013). In this way, traditional governance coexists with the formal Western-style democratic system introduced after independence. The interaction between these two systems, which are fundamentally different in structure and ideology, raises intriguing questions about how they function together in post-independence Comoros.

This question forms the foundation of the research, which will explore the postcolonial implications of adopting a Western-style democratic governance system in a country

struggling with nation-building and maintaining pre-colonial traditional governance structures. What are the implications of this dual system, and how do these governance frameworks clash? Could this tension be contributing to the ongoing political instability in the Comoros? These are the key themes that this research will address.

1.1 Problem Statement

The Union of Comoros is a former French colony, which gained their independence in 1975, post independence the country experienced great political instability, and have been through several coups d'état, this have resulted in social inequality, bad infrastructure, Capital Centric governance and a lack of political awareness.

This study aims to contribute to the understanding of post-colonialism and how it has impacted the societal structures of the country, post independence, while also examining how such changes have clashed with the pre colonial cultures and traditions of the country.

1.2 Research question

In what ways has the interaction between Western-style democratic systems and traditional pre-colonial governance structures influenced political stability in Comoros post-independence.

1.3 Objectives:

Examine the Impact of Colonial Governance Structures on Comoros' Post-Independence Political Stability

- Focus on how the governance structures introduced during colonisation continue to shape political outcomes.

Analyse the Influence of Traditional Pre-Colonial Governance Systems in Contemporary Comoros

- Explore how traditional social and governance structures, such as community based leadership and matrilineal systems, persist and affect modern governance.

Assess the Interaction Between Western Democratic Systems and Traditional Governance Structures

- Investigate how these two systems coexist, clash, or influence each other, and their impact on political stability.

Identify the Role of External Actors in Shaping Governance and Stability in Comoros

- Analyse the ongoing influence of external forces (such as France) and their role in the political instability of the nation.

1.4 Significance of Study:

This study seeks to expand the scope of well-established postcolonial concepts by focusing on a less-explored geographical area. While most research on postcolonial legacies centers on mainland Africa, examining smaller nations like the Comoros offers a fresh perspective and amplifies voices often overlooked in broader African postcolonial studies. Such research is crucial for understanding global postcolonial governance dynamics. Although the findings of this study are not meant to be universally generalized, they can provide insights into the experiences of small island states, whose colonial histories and legacies differ from those of mainland African nations. The unique context of the Comoros, with its distinct blend of cultural, religious, and governance practices, underscores the importance of a focused case-studies taking into consideration local contexts.

2) Historical context

2.1 Pre-Colonial Comoros: Society, Governance, and Trade

2.1.1 Matrilineal Society and Clan Governance

Before French colonisation, the Comorian social structure was characterised by a matrilineal system, where inheritance and lineage were traced through women. This practice played a critical role in governance, as clan leadership was determined by maternal descent. Women were central to the preservation of family wealth and status, as land ownership was passed through female heirs. Particularly in Grande Comore (Ngazidja), political authority was closely linked to maternal lineage. Governance in the pre-colonial period was decentralised, with each island governed independently by local sultans. The influence of Islam, introduced to the islands by Arab traders between the 10th and 15th centuries, also significantly shaped the political and social values of the Comorian people, with religious leaders, known as sharifs, holding considerable political authority (Mansour, 1982).

2.1.2 Inter-Island Relations and Regional Trade Networks

Economically, pre-colonial Comoros was largely dependent on subsistence farming and its role in the Indian Ocean trade network. The islands were a hub for merchants travelling between the Swahili Coast, the Arabian Peninsula, and South Asia. Goods like ivory, slaves, and spices were traded through Comorian ports, and in exchange, the islands imported textiles, ceramics, and luxury goods. These trade relationships contributed to the islands' wealth and facilitated cultural exchange, notably the spread of Islam. Inter-island relations were a mix of cooperation and rivalry, as the different sultanates vied for control over trade routes and resources. This was especially true between the sultanates of Grande Comore and Anjouan, where competition for regional dominance was common (Alpers, 1975).

2.2 The Arrival of French Colonialism

2.2.1 Motivations and Colonisation Process

French interest in the Comoros heightened in the mid-19th century, driven by economic and strategic motivations. The islands' location was deemed essential for controlling trade in the Indian Ocean. In 1841, France established formal control over Mayotte after the island's sultan ceded sovereignty in exchange for French protection. Over the next several decades, France expanded its control over the rest of the Comorian archipelago through treaties, diplomacy, and military intervention (Bertile, 2003). By the end of the 19th century, France had established full colonial authority over Comoros, replacing the autonomy of local sultans with a centralised administration under French oversight (Martin, 1983).

2.2.2 Impact on Local Governance

French colonial rule fundamentally altered the governance of the islands. Where there had once been decentralised governance under local sultans, a centralised French administration took over. Local leaders were either stripped of their power or reduced to symbolic figures, while French officials assumed decision-making authority in areas such as taxation, law enforcement, and economic policy (Bertile, 2003). Furthermore, French legal codes replaced traditional Islamic law in civil matters, and the French language became the dominant language of administration and education, deepening the linguistic and social divide between the French-educated elite and the broader population (Mansour, 1982).

2.3 Colonial Economy: Cash Crop Production

2.3.1 Agriculture and Export Crops

The French colonial administration shifted the Comorian economy from subsistence farming to cash crop production. Vanilla, cloves, and ylang-ylang were introduced as export crops, which were cultivated extensively for European markets (Martin, 1983). The prioritisation of these crops came at the expense of local food production, leading to food shortages and a growing dependence on imported goods. Forced labour systems were implemented, requiring locals to work on plantations, further disrupting the traditional livelihoods of the Comorian people (Bertile, 2003).

2.3.2 Economic Dependency

The colonial economic system made Comoros vulnerable to fluctuations in global commodity markets. As demand for the islands' key exports fluctuated, the local economy experienced periods of hardship. Even after independence, the Comorian economy remained largely dependent on cash crops, which left the country vulnerable to market forces and global price shifts (Walker, 2004). This dependency was further entrenched by the use of the French franc and later the CFA franc, which limited Comoros' economic sovereignty (Amin, 1973).

2.4 Post-Independence Governance

2.4.1 Independence and Political Challenges

Comoros gained independence from France in 1975, but the transition was marked by political instability. The country endured a series of coups and internal conflicts, exacerbated by Mayotte's decision to remain under French control following a contentious referendum (Walker, 2004). The centralised governance model inherited from the colonial period proved incompatible with the decentralised, clan-based systems that had characterised pre-colonial governance, further destabilising the new nation-state (Amin, 1973). Tensions between Grande Comore and Anjouan also persisted, particularly as Anjouan made attempts to secede from the union in the late 1990s (Walker, 2004).

2.4.2 Neo Colonial Economic Ties

Despite achieving political independence, Comoros remained economically reliant on France. The country continued to use the CFA franc, and French foreign aid and investment were critical to sustaining the economy (Amin, 1973). Additionally, the economic situation led many Comorians to migrate to France, creating a large diaspora community whose remittances became an essential source of income for the islands (Walker, 2004).

The history of Comoros, from its pre-colonial period to the post-independence era, reveals a complex interaction between traditional governance structures, colonial transformations, and lingering economic dependencies. The once-decentralised matrilineal governance system was replaced by a centralised French colonial administration that prioritised cash crop production over local food security. Despite gaining independence, the legacy of colonial rule continues to shape Comoros' political instability and economic dependency, with deep-rooted effects on its modern governance and development (Walker, 2004; Amin, 1973).

3) Literature Review

This chapter provides a review of the existing scholarly literature on the enduring political, economic, and cultural legacies of colonialism in Africa, and the current scholarship dedicated to examining the social structures of the Union of Comoros. Through this review, the chapter will highlight the areas where current scholarship falls short, particularly in addressing the unique experiences of smaller African states like Comoros. By identifying these gaps, this literature review will establish the foundation for the present research, which

aims to contribute a nuanced analysis of how colonial legacies continue to shape political and social structures in the Union of Comoros, an area that has been largely overlooked in existing studies.

3.1 The economic, political and cultural legacies of colonialism on the African continent

A vast body of research has been devoted to examining the profound impact of colonialism on African countries, exploring how these legacies have significantly hindered political, economic, and social progress in numerous ways.

Plenty of attention has for example been directed towards the ways in which colonialism reoriented African economies to cater to Western interests, as it sought to transform diverse economies into mono-crop systems centering around the exportation of raw materials. In the paper *'Analysis of Colonialism and Its Impact in Africa'*, Stephen Ocheni and Basil C. Nwankwo critically examines this phenomenon and argue that the primary legacy of colonialism was the economic exploitation of African resources for the benefit of European powers, which left African states dependent on producing raw materials for export while importing manufactured goods. In his paper *'The Impact of Colonialism on African Economic Development'* Joshua Dwayne Settles also notes how colonial powers invested in the building of railways - an act that might appear beneficial for the development of internal infrastructure, but which was actually designed with resource extraction in mind as its primary purpose was to facilitate the exportation of raw goods to Europe. This point is also emphasised by Leander Heldring and James A. Robinson in their paper *'Colonialism and Economic Development in Africa'*, which argues that colonial powers refocused African economies to centralise raw material extraction and exports, which vastly limited Africa's economic diversification and industrial development. In his paper, Joshua Dwayne Settle furthermore highlights how this created an economic dependency as inter-African trade diminished, and economic cooperation was redirected toward European markets - thereby also leaving countries vulnerable to global market fluctuations.

Politically, scholars have been critically examining the ways in which colonialism disrupted traditional governance systems and imposed foreign political structures that were not suited to the local contexts. In the paper *'Post-Colonial Colonialism: An Analysis of International Factors and Actors Marring African Socio-Economic and Political Development'*, Joy

Asongazoh Alemazung emphasizes that these imposed systems often laid the groundwork for authoritarian rule, which continued after independence. This view is also reflected in Bolt, J., Gardner, L., Kohler, J., Paine, J., & Robinson, J. A.'s paper '*African Political Institutions and the Impact of Colonialism*', which examines how colonialism influenced African political institutions, particularly in British-ruled Africa. Here, they argue that colonialism contributed to the rise of authoritarian regimes post-independence by enabling the centralization of power at the national level, rather than through the widespread introduction of authoritarian rulers at the local level. They proceed by stating that the centralization of power combined with the economic systemic shift towards resource extraction, previously alluded to, set the stage for postcolonial authoritarianism in many African states.

Socially, scholars like Swati Parashar and Michael Schulz argue in their paper '*colonial Legacies, Postcolonial Selfhood, and the (Un)doing of Africa*' that the arbitrary borders drawn by colonial powers, with little regard for ethnic and cultural differences, have led to persistent ethnic conflicts and civil wars in many African nations. They state that these divisions were often exacerbated by colonial policies of divide and rule, which pitted different ethnic groups against each other to maintain control. Culturally, Pascal Blanchard and his co-authors highlight in their paper '*Colonial Culture in France since the Revolution*' how colonial education systems ingrained ideas of African inferiority, which not only damaged African self-perception but also stunted the development of local institutions and governance structures. However in '*The Cultural and Historical Heritage of Colonialism: Interrogating the Postcolony*,' Kenneth Usongo uses Homi Bhabba's concept of hybridity to explain how the merging of native and colonial cultures would result in the development of new mixed identities that neither fully belonged to the pre-colonial past nor the imposed colonial present. He argues that the creation of this hybrid space allowed colonised people to resist complete assimilation while finding ways to navigate the realities of colonial rule.

3.2 Traditional Social Structures and Political Life in Comorian society

One of the leading scholars working within the geographical area of the Comoros is the French anthropologist Sophie Blanchy, whose work examines the Comorian culture and traditional social structures. In her work "*Le partage des bœufs dans le mariage coutumier de la Grande Comore*" (Blanchy, 1996), she mainly focuses on the social and cultural importance of the specific wedding ceremony called "*Grand Marriage*", focusing her study

in Grand Comoros (Ngazidja), a wedding ceremony involving different rituals and which plays a central role in Comorian society. Blanchy highlights how these types of weddings are just as much about solidifying social hierarchies, as men, in particular, gain a higher social status upon completing the ceremony. Moreover, it reinforces the communal and matrilineal systems of inheritance and family structures (Blanchy, 1996).

Additionally, in her work *“Seul ou tous ensemble? Dynamique des classes d'âge dans les cités de l'île de Ngazidja, Comores”* (Blanchy, 2003), she further examines the specific concept of age-class systems, which offers additional insight into the traditional social hierarchies of the Comoros. These systems work in combination with other social structures such as matrilineal inheritance, *Grand Marriage*, and Islamic traditions to organize and maintain social hierarchy (Blanchy, 2003).

Lastly, Blanchy's work *“Beyond 'Great Marriage': Collective involvement, personal achievement and social change in Ngazidja (Comoros)”* (Blanchy, 2013), is another important article, emphasising the importance of the tradition of the *“Grand Marriage”* despite its high costs. The ceremony still plays a central part in shaping Comorian society and has adapted to modern challenges without losing its social importance, balancing achievement with collective involvement (Blanchy, 2013).

Blanchy's work provides an in-depth look at Comorian social structures, but it tends to focus on cultural practices such as the Grand Marriage, without fully exploring how these traditional systems interact with or resist the central government. While the Grand Marriage and age-class systems are central to Comorian social life, there is limited analysis of how these structures either stabilise or destabilise political life in the face of external pressures and central governance reforms. This lack of focus on the political implications of traditional structures leaves a gap in the literature, especially when considering the broader impact of governance challenges (Blanchy, 1996; 2003; 2013).

Summarisation

As such scholars have afforded plenty of attention to the ways in which colonialism has hindered the development of African countries by creating economic dependency, fostering political instability, and disrupting social cohesion, thereby shaping the challenges African nations face today. However, when considering colonial legacies, most literature

predominantly focuses on larger mainland African nations, meanwhile the literature on the Union of Comoros remains sparse, and there is little detailed analysis of how French political and economic interests specifically manifest in the governance structures of Comoros. The lack of research on how these dynamics play out in smaller nations points to a significant gap in the literature. For example, where existing literature has addressed the issue of centralization of power, this project's focus on the Comoros reveals how capital-centric governance might shape inequality between islands.

Furthermore, the project expands on existing discussions of hybridity by closely examining the clash between Western democratic systems and traditional governance structures in the Comoros. While scholars like Usongo have explored hybridity more generally, this project highlights how community-based leadership in Comorian society, such as the Hirimu system¹ and matriarchal traditions are undermined by Western democratic frameworks. This detailed exploration of the tension between traditional and modern governance adds a new layer to the conversation on how colonial legacies disrupt local political systems.

4) Theoretical Framework

This chapter offers an in-depth examination of the theoretical framework that will support the analysis conducted in this research. The selected framework is crucial for structuring the analytical approach and guiding the interpretation of the data gathered. In this thesis, an inductive thematic analysis will be applied, with specific theoretical concepts serving as a basis for identifying and analysing themes relevant to the case study of the Union of Comoros. This approach allows for a fluid application of theory to the empirical data, ensuring that the analysis remains anchored in established theoretical discourse, while also allowing for the inclusion of critical insights into the unique historical and socio-political context of Comoros. The framework will focus on a set of core concepts, each stemming from broader theoretical paradigms that have had a significant influence in the fields of African studies, postcolonial theory, political science, and governance studies. The selection

¹ “*Hirimu system, where community members earn respect through local contributions.*” (Appendix 1)

of these concepts has been made with careful consideration of their relevance to understanding the dynamics of governance, state-building, and cultural identity within postcolonial African states, particularly in the context of the Union of Comoros.

4.1 Post-Colonialism

When working with post-colonialism, it becomes easy to get lost in all the existing literature on the topic; however, for the purpose of this research, it is crucial to specify where within the vast framework of post-colonialism this paper is situated. Therefore, the following will cover specific theoretical frameworks and scholars whose work falls under the scope of post-colonialism, such as Homi K. Bhabha's "Cultural Hybridity" (Bhabha, 1994) and Achille Mbembe's *On the Postcolony* (Mbembe, 2001)—two postcolonial theorists who explore identity and power relations. Additionally, works such as Jeffrey Herbst's *States and Power in Africa* (Herbst, 2000) and Robert H. Bates's *State Failure* (Bates, 2008) offer a comprehensive theoretical framework to understand the political dimensions of post-colonial states, providing insights into state-building and governance in post-colonial Africa.

4.2 Cultural Hybridity

Post-colonial theory holds great importance when trying to understand and examine the enduring effects of colonialism on both cultural identity and political structure. Homi K. Bhabha, a prominent post-colonial theorist, introduced the concept of cultural hybridity, arguing that after colonisation, cultures are no longer pure or separate. He highlights the way in which the culture of the coloniser and the colonised blend together to create a new culture, which belongs to neither (Bhabha, 1994). When the two different cultural groups interact, language, identity, and traditions merge, and this process of blending is what Bhabha calls hybridity—a cultural space where both groups influence each other and reshape their identities. These hybrid spaces might play a role in destabilising colonial authority, but they also encapsulate the conflict of heterogeneous cultural heritage that defines the social realities of post-colonial societies.

In the Comorian context, cultural hybridity is a crucial lens for understanding the complex intersections of French influences that have shaped the islands' history and identity. The Comoros has historically been a crossroads of various cultural, religious, and linguistic traditions, and this hybridity continues to influence its social and political life. Bhabha's theory will be used to explore how cultural hybridity has shaped governance practices and national identity in the Union of Comoros.

4.3 Post-Colonial Governance and State Failure

In contrast to Bhabha's and Mbembe's insights into the cultural and political heritage of colonialism, the contributions of scholars like Jeffrey Herbst and Robert H. Bates add a valuable political dimension to the theoretical framework. Herbst's and Bates's works on state-building and governance in post-colonial Africa help to better understand and address the institutional challenges faced by post-colonial states, including weak governance and state failure.

Achille Mbembe's work on the conceptualization of necropolitics provides a critical framework for understanding the colonial legacies in post-colonial states, particularly in Africa. In *On the Postcolony* (Mbembe, 2001), Mbembe examines the post-colonial African state, focusing on the sovereign right over life and death and dominance by fear. Together, Bhabha and Mbembe reveal the dual legacies of colonialism: the emergence of new cultures alongside the persistence of oppressive political systems. These theories provide valuable insights into the interplay between culture and power in post-colonial states.

Herbst's focus includes the challenges faced by African states in governing territory, given the unique geographical and economic conditions of the continent. He compares African states to European states, arguing that the latter formed through territorial wars and conquests, leading to strong centralised governments, whereas African states are sparsely populated and contain large, hard-to-govern territories (Herbst, 2000). Another key issue Herbst touches on is resource concentration. In many African countries, important resources are often located in specific areas, where governments only need to exert control over these regions, leading to weak governance in rural areas (Herbst, 2000). Furthermore, Herbst

argues that many African countries lack a strong tax system, which forces them to rely on foreign aid to fund critical infrastructure, military efforts, and other nation-state building needs. This reliance weakens the development of self-sufficient, centralised states (Herbst, 2000).

Bates adds to this discussion by focusing on political and economic instability, which often lead to state failure. He argues that state failure occurs when governments can no longer provide basic services like security, education, and healthcare—often due to poor governance, economic shocks, or political instability (Bates, 2008). He elaborates that the result of these shortcomings is elite exploitation of state resources, leading to rebellion and conflict. Bates also highlights that poor governance, combined with economic shocks, such as sudden declines in commodity prices or international market changes, makes post-colonial states vulnerable to collapse (Bates, 2008). The combination of insights from both Herbst and Bates provides a comprehensive understanding of post-colonial state failure in Africa.

4.4 Neo colonialism

Kwame Nkrumah's "Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism" (1965) offers a critical framework for understanding the continued influence of former colonial powers over newly independent states. Nkrumah argues that while countries like Comoros may have gained formal independence, they remain economically and politically dependent on their former colonisers. He emphasises that colonial powers continue to exert control through indirect means, such as economic policies, political interference, and military involvement (Tiger, 1966). This framework is particularly useful for understanding the French influence in Comorian politics.

In summary, the theoretical framework presented in this chapter will serve as the foundation for the thematic analysis conducted in the subsequent chapters. By focusing on these key concepts, this research aims to provide a comprehensive and theoretically informed analysis of the governance challenges and socio-political dynamics in the Union of Comoros

5) Methodology

5.1 Research Design

The objective of this research is to examine the way in which the societal structures of the Union of Comoros have evolved throughout its history and to determine the extent to which the clash between colonial legacies and traditional governance systems has contributed to the political instability that has characterised the post-independence era in Comoros. To achieve this, the methodological framework will be centred on creating context-specific knowledge and will adopt a qualitative research design. The objective is to gain insight into the perceptions of key informants regarding political instability, governance, and cultural dynamics in Comoros. Qualitative methods are particularly well-suited to explore the complex and contextual nature of post-colonial governance structures, providing rich, nuanced insights. The data collection will consist of three semi-structured interviews conducted for the purpose of this paper with three Comorian political profiles. Furthermore, an inductive thematic analysis method will be used to conduct the analysis.

5.2 Case study research

This paper employs a case study approach to examine the challenges of political instability and governance in the Union of the Comoros, particularly following its independence from France. Given the unique context of the Comoros, the case study method is well-suited for exploring these issues in depth, especially considering the country's complex history of colonialism, traditional governance, and external intervention.

Case studies are particularly valuable for exploratory research that seeks to understand specific phenomena within their context, rather than relying on pre-existing theory (Yin, 2013). By focusing on one of Africa's more turbulent political systems, this research examines how governance in the Comoros is shaped by its colonial legacy, social identity, and enduring social hierarchies, alongside the continued influence of parallel socio-political entities. Through the case study, the interaction between these historical and cultural factors and contemporary governance will be explored to understand the roots of political instability. As Yin highlights, one of the strengths of the case study method is its use of multiple sources of evidence. This research draws on semi-structured interviews with key political figures in the Comoros, including a former political activist and a former Speaker of Parliament,

offering real-time insights into the obstacles to governance. In addition, triangulation with historical documents and academic literature on postcolonial governance based on African political theory further grounds the findings. This combination of data sources enhances the depth of the analysis and strengthens the conclusions by providing a comprehensive view of the social and political structures of the Union of the Comoros.

Flyvbjerg (2006) gives a compelling argument for using case studies, especially in the social sciences field where fine-grained context specific data is more valuable than broad generalisations. He questions the widely circulated idea that case studies are not scientifically sound and/or generalizable. For Flyvbjerg, in fact, it is the case study that is essential for understanding the most complex social phenomena, not despite but because of it providing detailed contextual insights left out of a more universal quantitative model. As political instability in a particular context may be significantly linked to historical events and unique cultural practices or external actors, the case of Comoros presents an opportunity for discernment through case study analysis. Naturally, this study does not aim to be generalised as an explanation for post-colonial state failure in all African states. Instead, it seeks to examine what has made the Comorian experience different — how both external (colonial) and internal (traditional) factors have contributed to a specific form of political instability. This is the value of a case study: examining the intricacies of one case. The Comorian case study puts into perspective how Western democratic models have been imposed by foreign governments – and oftentimes without considering the traditional governance systems that already existed.

Context-dependent knowledge, like that produced in case studies, often makes a more meaningful contribution to available evidence than extensive generalisations and can provide very insightful advice for future decision-makers going forward (Flyvbjerg, 2004). The former might yield insights into the role traditional governance has as a source of resilience, whilst the latter could guide efforts towards better reforms intending to ensure stability and inclusivity in countries like the Comoros.

5.3 Description and delimitation of case study

This case study intentionally focuses on the historical period from 1975, when Comoros gained independence, to the present day. While the colonial history under French rule is a

crucial element in understanding the political dynamics of the Comoros, this research does not aim to analyze every detail of the colonial or pre-colonial periods. Instead, the goal is to leverage historical context to examine governance in post-independence Comoros.

The research is geographically confined to the Union of Comoros, with limited emphasis on Mayotte, an island that remains French territory despite being part of the Comorian archipelago. While Mayotte's continued French affiliation is significant for the other three islands, it is only briefly discussed here, as the primary focus is on governance and the interaction between Western-style democracy and traditional governance structures. Other aspects, such as economic development, are addressed but not central to the study.

As the results are context-specific, the study does not aim for broad generalizability across all postcolonial states but rather seeks to provide deeper insights into this specific geographical area.

5.3 Data collection

This study uses qualitative research to provide a comprehensive analysis of governance and political instability in the Comoros. The main research technique will therefore be to conduct interviews with identified key participants who have first-hand experience of the political climate and governance systems in the country.

5.3.1 Primary Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews

The primary method of data collection for this study is semi-structured interviews. This approach was chosen for its flexibility, as it allows interviewees to provide detailed and nuanced responses while keeping the discussion focused on relevant topics. Semi-structured interviews are particularly useful for gathering in-depth information from individuals who have directly experienced or been affected by political changes in the Comoros.

Participants

Three key informants were interviewed for this study:

1. Political Youth Activist and Refugee

A former political youth activist, now a political refugee, who was exiled following his activism and the fact that he is the son of the first governor of post-independence Comoros under the Ali Sholihi administration, which was overthrown. Having lived

through the country's political developments since independence, both personally and through his family's involvement, he offers insights into grassroots political participation and societal inequalities. This interview is referenced as *Appendix 1*.

2. Former Head of State Turned Journalist

A former head of state who later became a journalist, providing a top-level perspective on governance, political decision-making, and managing politically volatile regions from a post-colonial viewpoint. His experience in government offers a firsthand account of the power dynamics between traditional and modern, Western-style governance. This interview is referenced as *Appendix 2*.

3. UNDP Program Specialist

A UNDP Program Specialist working on development projects in the Comoros, and the only interviewee not from the capital, Moroni, but from a rural area. His perspective adds valuable diversity to the sample by representing rural experiences. This interview is referenced as *Appendix 3*.

Interview Format:

As noted earlier, the interviews were conducted using semi-structured methods, allowing participants the flexibility to guide the conversation while remaining within the scope of this research. To maintain focus, the interviews were structured around four key themes:

1. Governance structure and political instability post-independence.
2. The conflict between Western democratic models and traditional governance systems.
3. Social inequality and capital-centric governance in the Comoros.
4. The impact of the colonial legacy on political awareness and civic engagement.

5.4 Data analysis: thematic analysis

This paper utilizes thematic analysis, which centers on identifying and analyzing patterns within the data. For a robust analysis, it is crucial that the themes are clearly defined and transparently presented throughout the process. These themes must also closely align with the research question to ensure the analysis remains relevant to the study's objectives. The flexibility of thematic analysis is particularly valuable, allowing for the incorporation of new ideas as they emerge during the process, enhancing the depth and responsiveness of the research.

I selected this approach for analyzing the interview data because it allows for a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the various themes that surfaced. The method's flexibility enables an in-depth examination of both the similarities and differences within the themes, which is essential for developing a context-specific understanding of the issues (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This aligns with my research goals, as it provides the adaptability needed to investigate multiple themes while capturing the complexities and subtleties of the data, organizing them into coherent patterns.

5.5 Limitations, delimitations, and biases

This study has several limitations, including the small sample size, as it draws perspectives from only three participants. While these individuals were chosen for the richness of their insights and direct involvement in Comorian politics, their experiences may not be fully representative or generalizable. Additionally, due to the qualitative nature of this research, the conclusions regarding Comoros cannot be broadly applied to other countries or regions.

Moreover, given the diversity of local identities within the Comoros, the study would have benefited from incorporating perspectives from more islands and rural areas. Although one participant did spend most of his life in a rural area, his experience cannot fully represent all marginalized groups, particularly as he is a success story that may distance him from the realities faced by others.

Finally, the geographical focus of this study presents challenges due to the limited academic research on the Comoros. Despite being a unique nation, the Comoros is underrepresented in scholarly work, making it difficult to conduct a comprehensive literature review. As a result, this analysis relies heavily on first-hand empirical data, with few other sources available to supplement the findings.

7) Findings

The following section presents a comprehensive overview of the research findings. The interviews will undergo thematic analysis, with each subsection organized around common themes identified across the participants' responses. This thematic breakdown forms the first part of the overall analysis.

7.1. Political Instability and External Influence

One of the most persistent themes derived from the interviews is how the enduring legacy of colonial rule in the Comoros has resulted in political instability. Here there is a consensus between the three interviewees regarding the role played by external influences in the continued political instability in the country. Despite gaining their independence in 1975, the structural landscape of the Comoros has remained the same. Much of the Islands colonial past still remains embedded in its framework, through French systems and external control.

The interviews illuminate how the country's unstable governance has been directly influenced by the French, especially in light of the many coup d'etat's that have taken place in the small island state, through the French mercenary Bob Denard. The former political activist states: *"French mercenary Bob Denard, acting under the influence of France's 'Françafrique' network, directly led three coups: overthrowing President Abdallah in 1975, Ali Soilih in 1977, and finally Djohar."* (Appendix 1). He is not alone in this conviction as the former head of states corroborates this statement by saying: *"Every coup d'état in the Comoros has been a result of foreign interference, particularly from France, which has continued to meddle in our internal affairs under the guise of helping."* (Appendix 2).

Another topic that points to the connection between political instability and the influence of external actors, is the case of Mayotte. The island has remained French, and is still to this day considered an overseas French territory, despite the fact that the Comoros have never accepted the secession. Here there is once again a broad consensus among the interviewees, that this loss of territory is a terrible loss to the country, and another big facteur in the political instability the country experiences today. The former head of state states: *"It was a political trauma when, after independence, France decapitated a quarter of our territory. The separation of Mayotte from Comoros left the nation with a wound that hasn't healed."*

(Appendix 2). This statement is supported by the UNDP Program Specialist, who elaborated on this point stating: *"The separation of Mayotte from Comoros is the clearest example of French neo-colonial interests. This has left a deep scar in our political landscape, contributing to ongoing instability and distrust among the islands."* (Appendix 3). Moreover, the former head of state also adds that in the eyes of the UN, Mayotte is still a part of Comoros, thus giving France an incentive to want to destabilise the Comoros, to keep Mayotte from wanting to rejoin the Archipelago: *"The French have been always looking,*

aiming at discrediting Comoros... because Comoros has been always, according to international law, saying that Mayotte is Comoros." (Appendix 2). And to this day they are still living with the repercussions of this: *"The consequences of this injury of the fourth leg [Mayotte], still affect the political stability of the country."* (Appendix 2). Mayotte remains a French overseas territory, resulting in not only the continued loss of sovereignty for the Union of Comoros, but also increased economic disparity. On one hand, Mayotte has French investment and infrastructure, and on the other Comoros remains extremely underdeveloped, which creates a sense of injustice and division among the islands.

Both in the case of Mayotte and when looking at the many coups, it becomes apparent how tight of a grip colonialism still has on the island state. According to the political activist the country never really broke free: *"France still has economic and political control over Comoros through its influence in governance... It's like we never fully broke away."* (Appendix 1). He elaborates: *"Every post-colonial president in the Comoros has needed recognition and approval from the French government before being allowed to assume the presidency."* (Appendix 1). The continuous external interference in the Comoros hinders the ability to build sustainable democratic institutions. Leaving the citizens with a weak state and political instability, further resulting in stunted economic growth, weakened governance structures, and deepened mistrust in state authority.

The work of Kwame Nkrumah's "Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism" provides a comprehensive outline of the external powers who to this day continue to exert control on their former colonies, by means of economic and political interferences in the countries, even after former independence is achieved (Tiger, 1966). This Neo-colonial framework applies directly to the case of Comoros, as highlighted in this section, the interviewees all agree on the role of France in post independence Comoros. The involvement in the many political coups and the continued control over Mayotte reflect the very essence of Neo-colonialism, while exemplifying how former colonial powers hold a great power in the previously colonised countries post-independence.

One of Nkrumah's key arguments is the concept of interlocking global capitalist systems, in which wealth flows from poorer, former colonies to already wealthy nations—an idea particularly relevant to the Comoros (Tiger, 1966). This is evident in the island state's ongoing political instability, influenced by external actors like Bob Denard, a notorious

mercenary linked to France. Additionally, the stark economic disparity between Mayotte, which remains a French territory, and the rest of the Comoros highlights this neo-colonial dynamic. While Mayotte benefits from French development and prosperity, the remaining islands struggle with underdevelopment and post-independence rebuilding—benefiting both Mayotte and France.

Achille Mbembe's necropolitics adds another dimension to this theme, as his works shed light on the ways in which power operates through the control of life and death (Mbembe, 2001). In the case of the Comoros, the repeated Coups and violence perpetrated in the country can be examined through the lens of this framework, as external actors, such as France, maintain dominance by perpetuating instability. Mbembe's framework illustrates how these interventions create a fragile state that cannot function autonomously, as it is continuously subjected to the threat of violence and external influence (Mbembe, 2001).

Thus, the combination of neo-colonialism and necropolitics highlights the ongoing struggle for true independence in Comoros, as the country's governance remains intertwined with external control and political instability.

7.2 Centralization and Social Inequality

Another theme found within the Interviews is that of Centralisation and social inequality, this theme adresses the lasting effects of a capital-centric governance system. A form of governance which distributes the resources of a country unequally focusing, both administrative power and resources in the capital Moroni, leaving rural areas to fend for themselves.

This centralised form of governance within the Comoros is something the interviewees agree on, there is a disconnect between the capital Moroni and villages within Grand Comoros (Ngaxidja), as well as the remaining two islands Moheli (Mwali) and Anjouan (Nzwani), this is something the Former political activist touches upon, he states: *"People from other islands like Anjouan have to travel to Moroni for basic administrative tasks. This makes governance feel distant, and it's only the capital that benefits from any development."* (Appendix 1). Furthermore, the Former head of state adds to this consensus, he says: *"There is a deep inequality between the islands. Resources are concentrated in Moroni, and rural areas are*

left without proper infrastructure, education, or health services." (Appendix 2). Lastly the UNDP program specialist further adds to this general agreement: *"The centralized system has failed us. It prioritizes the elite in Moroni while completely neglecting rural communities. The government doesn't function beyond the capital."* (Appendix 3). This form of capital-centric governance instils a mistrust of the population in the government, and the structure neglects and marginalises great areas of the country, especially in a small island state like Comoros. This is all something the interviewees mentioned: *"Centralization means that Moroni is the only place where decisions are made, and everything else is ignored. The people in the rural areas feel abandoned."* (Appendix 2). Building on this idea of feeling abandoned and not as an equal, the former political activist said: *"Inequality in Comoros exists because everything is focused on Moroni. People in the other islands see no reason to trust a government that doesn't work for them."* (Appendix 1). This form of neglect from the state reinforces a weakening of the national identity while also intensifying the communal identity, these rural areas are forced to organise themselves and their community, this is something the UNDP program analyst highlights: *"When I was working in the villages, people had to create their own roads and schools because the central government never prioritized their needs."* (Appendix 3). For the communities to be able to come together and organise some form of infrastructure for themselves is an achievement, however incorporating centralised governance should not hinder a state in distributing resources and providing for all of its territory.

The theme of centralization and social inequality in Comoros aligns strongly with Jeffrey Herbst's theory of state failure and Robert Bates' concept of elite exploitation. Herbst's argument that African states face unique challenges in governing large, sparsely populated territories is echoed in the Comorian context, where centralization in the capital, Moroni, has marginalised the rural areas and the smaller islands. Herbst points out that African governments often concentrate their power in urban centres, neglecting vast portions of the country (Herbst, 2000). This is apparent in Comoros, where the other islands and rural areas struggle with a lack of infrastructure and administrative support.

Bates' theory of elite exploitation further explains this centralisation. In Comoros, the political elites in Moroni benefit from resource concentration and fail to distribute wealth or services equitably across the islands. This pattern of exploitation reflects Bates' argument that when political leaders prioritise their personal enrichment, they exacerbate inequality and

contribute to state failure (Bates, 2008). In the context of Comoros, the centralization of governance not only heightens social inequality but also weakens national unity, as the marginalised areas are left to fend for themselves.

These theories together help explain the growing disconnection between the islands and the capital, reinforcing the idea that state failure in Comoros is largely driven by the concentration of resources and power in the hands of a few elites.

7.3 Clash Between Traditional and Western Governance Systems

Yet another theme found in the interviews is the clash between traditional and western governance systems. A theme discussing the tensions which can be seen between the imported Western democratic systems and the traditional governance structure of the Comoros. In an island state like the Comoros the Traditional governance systems play a big role, despite having kept the Western style democratic governance structures post-independence the traditions from pre colonial times still lives on. These traditions hold local community-based leadership in high regard and in pre-colonial times, these were the decentralised governance structures of the country. However today the different traditions still hold a great socio-political importance, but clash with the current governance system.

In the interviews there can once again be found a broad consensus on the area, all three interviewees, more or less come with similar statements. They all believe that the Western style democratic system is not suitable for a small island state like the Comoros: "*Western democratic systems don't work here. They don't reflect our matriarchal society or the Hirimu system, where community members earn respect through local contributions.*" (Appendix 1). He explains the Comorian concept of Hirimu and how this traditional practice highly contrasts the Western style democracy systems. He is not the only one alluding to this, even though the specific practice is not mentioned, the UNDP program specialist does explain how respect is earned through local contributions: "*In Comorian society, respect is earned through contributions to the community, but Western democracy brings in leaders who are often foreign to these traditions. This has created a lot of tension.*" (Appendix 3). This view is further supported by the former head of state who states: "*Our traditions are based on communal decision-making, but the Western system puts power in the hands of individuals*

who are often disconnected from their communities. This creates a lot of confusion."

(Appendix 2). Thus, resulting in tensions and corrupt leaders as the tradition of Hirimu remains local and community-based, the UNDP program specialist notes: *"Traditional systems are built on trust and respect. The Western system is disconnected from this, and it leads to corruption and instability because leaders don't come from the communities they govern."* (Appendix 3). Moreover, the political activist elaborates on the clash of this community based governance with the Western style democratic system: *"Hirimu allows for community-based governance, but this system is completely overshadowed by Western democratic systems, which are foreign to our way of life."* (Appendix 1)

All of these statements showcase the clash between the traditional and western governance systems. There is an emphasis on community based leadership in Comorian cultural traditions and with the western style democratic governance system, this traditional form of leadership becomes redundant, however it does remain very much a part of the socio-political climate. As these traditional systems are all tied into the wedding ceremony called "Grand Marriage", a ceremony which to this day remains most Comorians top priority to achieve one day, the former head of state touches on this subject: *"The Grand Marriage is more important than politics. People care more about their social standing in the traditional system than they do about political participation."* (Appendix 2). Thus, resulting in a disconnect between the governmental institution and its citizens.

The tension between traditional and Western governance systems in Comoros can be analysed through Homi Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity. Bhabha argues that post-colonial societies are marked by the merging of coloniser and colonised cultures, which creates a space of cultural hybridity that is often filled with tension. In Comoros, this hybridity is visible in the clash between the traditional Hirimu system, where respect and authority are earned through community service, and the imposed Western democratic structures (Bhabha, 1994). These two systems reflect different values: the Hirimu system prioritises community involvement and respect for elders, while Western democratic systems focus on individualism and formal political structures.

Bhabha's theory helps explain the cultural conflict that arises when Western governance models fail to take into account the deeply rooted traditions of Comorian society. The result is a misalignment between the imposed political structures and the social realities of the

people. This tension not only fosters political instability but also weakens the legitimacy of governance, as leaders who emerge from Western democratic systems are often seen as disconnected from the communities they are supposed to serve.

This theme exemplifies the broader post-colonial dilemma of trying to integrate Western political systems into societies with rich pre-colonial traditions, highlighting the challenges of cultural hybridity in governance.

7.4 Corruption and Governance Failures

A recurring theme that emerged from the interviews was the theme of corruption and governance failure. This theme examines the systematic corruption as seen in the comorian *gouvernance*, a corruption fueled by the clash between traditional values of leadership and the individualistic Western democratic models. The corruption and the *gouvernance* failure becomes one as they fuel each other, through the ongoing corruption, it becomes harder to govern the people, who are collateral damage in this corruption, leading to *gouvernance* failure. However this equation works the same the other way as well, *gouvernance* failure can lead to corruption.

In the case of comoros the question is not if there is corruption or *gouvernance* failure the question is what are the causes of such developmental issues. According to the political activist the cause is really very straight forward he says: *"Corruption has taken over because the leaders installed by the Western system don't follow our traditions of community service. They're only interested in enriching themselves."* (Appendix 1). Which, arguably could be both the corruption fueling the *gouvernance* failure, as these leaders fail to understand these traditions of the country. However, one could also argue that the *gouvernance* failure is the cause of the corruption. As the Western style *gouvernance* systems lead to *gouvernance* failure, thus resulting in political leaders resorting to corruption. Whether one or the other is the case, one thing is sure the former head of state does corroborate this idea of western systems being the cause of such shortcomings in the nation state: *"The Western system brings people into power who don't understand our values, and they exploit the state for their own benefit. That's why we see so much corruption."* (Appendix 2). There is a recurring theme of disconnection between the state and its citizens, a disconnect which stems from this clash between the traditional governance systems and the new Western style governance. The UNDP program specialist states: *"We've seen how the disconnection between traditional*

systems and Western systems allows leaders to abuse their power without any accountability. The result is widespread corruption." (Appendix 3), another recurring consensus, showcasing how the Western governance structures fails in an island state like Comoros and leads to mass corruption. Moreover, the misfit of the Western governance system to the Comoros, does not just cover the structural systems, but also the clash which happens when a collectivist society like that of Comoros implement a system which focuses on individualism, something the former head of state mentions in his interview: *"The Western system focuses on individualism, but in our culture, leadership is about community. Corruption comes when leaders serve themselves rather than the people."* (Appendix 2). The function of the state is not something the greater population of the country believes in, *"The state is seen as a way to get rich quickly because there's no accountability, and the central government doesn't reflect the communities it governs."*(Appendix 3). Thus, resulting in corruption and governance failure, if one is the reason for the other, in the case of the Comoros, both are apparent and a huge development issue.

In examining the theme of corruption and governance failures, Robert Bates' theory of state failure is particularly relevant. Bates argues that state failure often arises when political elites exploit the state for personal gain rather than governing for the collective good (Bates, 2008). In Comoros, the imposition of Western governance structures has led to a disconnect between leaders and their communities, which in turn has fueled corruption. Leaders who do not understand or respect traditional systems are more likely to engage in corrupt practices because they are not held accountable by local customs and community expectations.

Furthermore, the clash between traditional collectivist values and the individualism of Western democratic systems contributes to the corruption problem. Bhabha's concept of hybridity can also be applied here to explain how the mixing of these governance models creates an environment where corruption can thrive (Bhabha, 1994). The Western system, which promotes individual power and authority, stands in opposition to the community-based, trust-centred governance structures that previously existed. This conflict leaves a vacuum in accountability, where leaders can exploit the state without facing the consequences that traditional governance systems would have imposed.

By tying Bates' theory of state failure to Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity, this theme illustrates how the failure to integrate governance systems has led to widespread corruption in Comoros.

7.5 Traditional Social Structures and Political Power

A central theme discussed by the interviewees was that of Traditional social structures and political power. A theme highlighting the significance of the traditional social structures within the Comoros. Structures such as the "Grand Marriage" and the matrilineal systems, which play a huge role in shaping the societal hierarchies and *gouvernance*, and how these are sidelined by the current Western *gouvernance* model.

The country, despite mimicking the Western style democratic *gouvernance*, continues to value these traditional governance structures such as the "Grand Marriage". Beneath the shell of a government which is the Comorian state, the citizens live in a parallel system, with a higher regard for the traditions, than the political climate of the country: *"The Grand Marriage is more important than politics. People care more about their social standing in the traditional system than they do about political participation."* (Appendix 2). Moreover, this wedding ceremony called the "Grand Marriage" holds a very central part of Comorian sociopolitics: *"The Grand Marriage still holds immense power in Comorian society. You cannot be a respected figure without completing this ceremony, and it outweighs political achievements in many ways."* (Appendix 1). The former political activist and the former head of state agrees on this point, they both believe that the sociopolitical importance of these traditions are undeniable: *"The Grand Marriage is still a way to gain political and social status, even though it's not officially part of the state system."* (Appendix 2). Adding to this point the former UNDP program specialist also agrees on the socio-political impact of these traditions, however he believes they are hindered by the Western style *gouvernance*, and ends up being side lined: *"Traditional social structures, like the Grand Marriage and the matriarchal system, are still highly respected. But the Western system sidelines these structures, creating tension."* (Appendix 3). These contrasting ideas still hold the same overall consensus of the traditional governance systems and how they still hold a socio-political importance.

Furthermore, the traditional governance structures of the country hold many dimensions but one important one which ties directly to the ceremony of the “Grand Marriage” is that of the matrilineal system. A system in which inheritance is passed down through the line of the mother and women, meaning when men marry to gain land and wealth. This system does not translate well into the context of Western style democracy: *"The matriarchal system is central to how we govern ourselves at the local level. Power is passed down through women, but the Western system ignores this and creates confusion."* (Appendix 2). The Former political activist shares this belief he states: *"Comorian society is matriarchal, and this influences how decisions are made at the community level, but the Western system doesn't take this into account."* (Appendix 1).

This theme emphasises the continued relevance of traditional social structures, such as the Grand Marriage and matrilineal systems, in shaping political power in Comoros. These structures reflect Homi Bhabha's hybridity theory, where traditional and modern governance systems coexist but also clash (Bhabha, 1994). The Grand Marriage serves as a key marker of social status and political influence, even though it operates outside the formal political system. This creates a dual socio-political structure, where formal political achievements are often seen as secondary to traditional rites of passage.

The matrilineal system further complicates this dual structure, as it contrasts sharply with the patriarchal norms embedded in Western democratic systems. In Comorian society, power and inheritance are passed through women, which does not fit within the framework of Western political institutions that tend to marginalise such systems. This creates a parallel hierarchy, where traditional forms of governance hold significant social power, even though they are not formally recognized by the state.

Bhabha's hybridity helps to explain how these traditional structures maintain socio-political importance in Comoros, despite being sidelined by the formal governance system. The failure to fully integrate these traditional systems into the modern state reflects the ongoing cultural and political tensions that define the post-colonial Comorian experience.

7.6 Summary of Interpretation and Theoretical Connection:

Each theme which has been discussed in the findings are all directly linked to the core of this study. In an attempt to answer the research question of this paper, these findings do provide a good insight into how the interaction between Western democratic systems and traditional governance structures has shaped the political landscape of Comoros. The thematic analysis of the interviews reveals the complexity of governance in the Comoros, where traditional systems and external influence intertwine, producing persistent political instability. The findings align with the theoretical frameworks of neo-colonialism, cultural hybridity, and state failure, showing that colonial legacies and governance misalignments continue to shape the country's political landscape. The ongoing influence of France, the centralization of power, and the conflict between traditional and Western systems provide insight into the failures of state-building and development in the post-colonial context.

8) Discussion

The following section of this paper aims to discuss some of the themes which the research has illuminated. For the purpose of this research, which aims to uncover in which ways the relationship between Western-style democratic systems and traditional pre-colonial governance structures has influenced political stability in Comoros post-independence, the discussion will focus on the colonial legacy as well as solutions to this.

8.1 Neo-Colonialism in the 21st Century: The Legacy of Colonial Influence in Modern Governance

From the findings of this research, it becomes clear how the echoes of colonialism still persist in the Comoros. The patterns of neo-colonialism in Africa are no relic of the past; it is very much still a contemporary political reality.

In the earlier days of independence, neo-colonialism remained more overt. In the case of the Comoros, this became apparent through multiple coups d'état, led by the French mercenary

Bob Denard. Even though the French support was implicit, there was still a broad consensus on the involvement of France in these coups (Appendix 1; 2; 3). However, looking in more contemporary times, the implicitness of the former colonisers becomes more and more covert.

It is interesting to look into how neo-colonial control has shifted. In the Comoros, the French do not have direct political influence, rather a postcolonial grip that remains detrimental to the small island state. In a globalised world like today, the means of neo-colonial control are endless: foreign aid, economic dependence, and international diplomacy are all areas in which former colonisers can maintain control over their former colonies. Corruption, state failure, and necropolitics are realities for many former colonies, and they are particularly relevant to the case of the Comoros (Bates, 2008).

Thus, it can be argued that since the political landscape of former colonies is plagued by instability, corruption, and authoritarianism, the political leaders of such states would not act in the best interest of the state, hence resulting in further destabilisation if these leaders are supported economically by other states. Furthermore, economic dependence is not only in the form of foreign aid but also caused by the fact that Comoros still uses the French Franc (CFA), a currency regulated by France and used in multiple former French colonies, which serves as another covert form of control.

Moreover, one could look into the concept of political instability as a tool of neo-colonial control, where the state remains dependent and unable to build a self-sufficient state, thus making these nations more susceptible to external actors and unable to resist outside control. The coups executed in the Comoros exemplify this—how the instability of the country becomes a means of maintaining control. As Mayotte remains interested in staying French, while the rest of the country faces instability, would this view change if the country became fully developed and independent? Would France lose a strategic territory? These are not questions that can be answered definitively here, but they are considerations to take into account when examining the French neo-colonial grip and the motives behind it (Appendix 2).

However, despite the clear colonial legacy still causing developmental issues in the country, can all of the problems really be blamed on colonialism? While the colonial legacy undoubtedly keeps the country underdeveloped, the question should also be about what the

solutions are to these issues. And in the following section, potential solutions will be discussed.

8.2 Can Traditional Governance Systems be the Key to Political Stability?

It is clear from the findings that traditional governance systems clash with Western governance systems. However, could these traditional systems hold the key to political stability in the Comoros?

Through the theoretical framework of Cultural Hybridity, the concept of blending cultures, which occurs when colonisers and the colonised interact to create a new, blended culture, comes into focus (Bhabha, 1994). In the case of the Comoros, cultures have indeed mixed, resulting in an adaptation of French governance systems rather than the continuation of traditional systems, which have continued to exist alongside the new governance structures (Blanchy, 1996). But could these systems thrive together in a hybrid governance system? Would it be possible to keep a centralised state that mimics the Western governance system of a federation, while incorporating decentralised governance at a local level? Could this work in an archipelago where both islands and villages have distinct communal identities?

One possibility could be the implementation of a three-layered federation. This system would keep the central government of the islands, add a vice leader on each island, and distribute resources to a communal leader, leaving each village to govern itself using traditional systems but with government-provided resources and essential services. Could such a small country manage such a federation? And would it be possible for citizens to organise such a complex system, or would it fall into the hands of a corrupt state? These are important questions to consider, but the answers remain in the future.

A key question to consider is how the state can reclaim legitimacy. Political disengagement is widespread in the Comoros, and restoring legitimacy should be the first step in nation-building. Could reintegrating traditional systems provide a solution? The disconnect stems from the fact that the majority of the population is occupied with the socio-political functions of traditional systems, so perhaps integrating these systems into political structures would restore trust. This would seem logical, but the deep-rooted disconnect makes it difficult to

know for sure.

8.3 Decentralisation: A Solution or Just a Redistribution of Power?

Throughout the paper, it has been established that centralised governance, as seen in the Comoros, has negative consequences for the population. However, these consequences are not an inevitable result of centralised governance. In many countries, centralising governance works well, particularly in Western nations, but unique geographic conditions create challenges for many African countries, especially in the Comoros (Herbst, 2000).

Would decentralisation simply redistribute power without addressing governance issues? Could it lead to new forms of elite exploitation on each island? These are important considerations. However, in a communal-based society like that of the Comoros, decentralisation that goes down to the village level (rather than stopping at each island having its own governance) would be less likely to lead to elite exploitation (Appendix 3). The communal governance systems are based on contributions to the community, and one of the findings from the research is that the political elite's exploitation of state resources is caused by a disconnect from the country's cultural and traditional systems, and a lack of communal oversight (Bates, 2008; Appendix 1).

However, decentralising at the level of each island governing itself would likely perpetuate existing problems. Moreover, fully decentralising without keeping a centralised governance structure to oversee smaller governance bodies could be detrimental. In precolonial times, the islands' governance systems were completely decentralised, which left the country vulnerable and unable to protect itself while being at war with each other (Blanchy, 1996).

Furthermore, the current marginalisation in the country is so widespread that complete decentralisation could lead to further fragmentation, fuelling strong local identities and old rivalries, thus creating new tensions. When discussing the potential for decentralisation in the Comoros, the case of Mauritius offers valuable insights. Despite its small size, Mauritius has pursued decentralisation with the aim of improving service delivery and governance. As seen in the analysis of fiscal decentralisation, empowering local governments can lead to more efficient service provision due to their closer alignment with local needs and preferences

(Nath & Schroeder, 2007). This contrasts sharply with Comoros' centralised system, which has concentrated resources in the capital, leaving rural areas neglected. By learning from Mauritius, Comoros could explore similar reforms to ensure a more equitable distribution of resources and foster greater political stability across its islands.

Limitations

9) Conclusion

This thesis has researched how the interaction between Western-style democratic systems and traditional pre-colonial governance structures has influenced political stability in The Comoros post-independence. Through an analysis of both traditional and contemporary governance practices, it has become clear that this interaction has been a significant factor in the persistent instability that continues to plague the nation.

The findings illustrate the tensions which can be found between the Western democratic system imposed during colonialism and the traditional governance structures that continue to hold significant social and political value in Comoros. The clash between these systems is most evident in the centralization of power in the capital, Moroni, which has exacerbated social inequality and marginalisation of rural areas. Traditional systems, such as the matrilineal inheritance system and the "Grand Marriage," still play a crucial role in local governance and social hierarchy, yet they are sidelined by the formal Western-style political institutions, creating a disconnect between the state and its citizens.

Furthermore, external influences, particularly the neo-colonial influence of France, have played a pivotal role in shaping political instability in Comoros. The country's dependence on French political and economic support, as well as the unresolved issue of Mayotte's separation, underscores the ongoing impact of colonial legacies. This has hindered the

development of autonomous, stable governance structures, further compounding the internal challenges posed by the clash between traditional and Western systems.

By tying the theoretical frameworks of neo-colonialism, cultural hybridity, and state failure to the case of Comoros, this research has demonstrated that the country's political instability is not merely a result of poor governance or corruption, but a deeper, structural issue rooted in its colonial past. The failure to fully integrate traditional governance structures into the modern state has left Comoros in a state of political limbo, where neither traditional nor Western functions effectively to provide stability or legitimacy.

This study suggests that a potential path to greater political stability in Comoros may lie in the integration of these traditional systems into the formal governance framework. Decentralisation that allows for local governance, incorporating traditional systems such as the Hirimu and matrilineal structures, could potentially restore trust in the state and bridge the gap between the government and its citizens. However, this would require a significant shift in both political will and local participation.

In conclusion, the Comorian case provides a broader reflection on the challenges faced by post-colonial states attempting to reconcile imposed governance structures with deep-rooted traditional practices. As long as these systems remain in conflict, political instability is likely to persist. Future research should explore how hybrid governance models, which blend traditional and Western systems, can be developed to better suit the unique socio-political landscapes of post-colonial societies like Comoros.

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