From patronage to neopatrimonialism: postcolonial governance in Sub-Sahara Africa and beyond

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Abstract

Even if 'good governance' goals have dominated public policy in postcolonial polities in the last decades, their politics and public administration often continue to be marked by authoritarianism, nepotism and corruption – the very practices good governance policy was to eradicate. In this article, we try to account for this apparent intractability of 'poor' and, occasionally, outright 'bad' governance. First, we argue that what appears as 'bad' governance to those embracing conventional, essentially Weberian, 'good governance' conceptions, may in fact be 'good' governance after all. Practices of political clientelism or patronage may reflect and accord with widely shared cultural beliefs about good and legitimate governance. Second, we show that the predominance of personalism and unofficial relationships that characterizes political clientelism may combine with modern bureaucracy in ways that drastically subvert the type of 'good governance' embodied by traditional moral economies of patronage. We dissect the logics of neopatrimonialism, a type of regime in which ruling elites use the state for personal enrichment and profit from a public administration that is patently unstable, inefficient, nontransparent and that fails to distribute public resources to large segments of the population. Third, we argue that the pragmatic survival strategies to which 'ordinary' citizens resort in response to such neopatrimonial neglect often, and ironically, entail the direct engagement with – rather than an outright distancing from – neopatrimonial politics.

Key words neopatrimonialism, clientelism, patronage, good governance

1 INTRODUCTION[1]

CONFRONTING 'GOOD GOVERNANCE' IN THE POSTCOLONY

The debate about 'good governance' gained momentum in the 1990s as a response to growing dissatisfaction with the ineffectiveness of aid policy in the sphere of international development. After a decade in which international development had been marked by the paradigms of 'by-passing the state' and free-market ideology, international financial institutions, the World Bank and IMF in particular, concluded that good policy can only work when it is supported by a good policy environment (World Bank 1997, Santiso 2001: 5). Thus, the early 1990s saw a movement of 'bringing the state back in' (Evans *et al.* 1985), both in international development and academic thought. Good government and, later, good governance, came to be seen as the necessary preconditions for social and economic development.

By the mid-1990s, the development agenda had come to reflect the insight that both market and democracy could only function well when, as Marilee Grindle put it, 'governments are able to design and implement appropriate public policies, administer resources equitably, transparently and efficiently, and respond efficaciously to the social welfare and economic claims of citizens' (1997: 5). Consequently, the quality of a nation's public administration, public sector and economic management, became central objects of international scrutiny. 'Good governance', in fact, became both a *conditionality* for receiving bilateral and multilateral aid, as well as an *objective* of development assistance in itself (Weiss 2000: 801; Santiso 2002). Tellingly, the World Bank has, since 1996, initiated more than six hundred governance related programs in no less than 95 countries, including projects for civil service reform, legal and judicial reform, decentralization, anti-bribery legislation, red-tape reduction and the strengthening of accountability institutions such as ombudspersons and parliamentary oversight bodies (Santiso 2001, 2002).

There is, however, little agreement among scholars about what 'good governance' actually means. This is not surprising, as good governance is a normative

term, commonly used in a prescriptive sense, and embraced by different kinds of actors to serve different purposes.[2] Many academic studies refer to the World Bank's use of the notion of good governance. The Bank, pressured by donor governments to address economic mismanagement, bureaucratic ineptness and endemic corruption, put 'good governance' at the centre of its policy agenda defining it, rather vaguely, as 'sound development management' (Santiso 2001: 5). In the Bank's view, good governance is characterized by 'a well-functioning and accountable core public sector' (World Bank 2000: 5), which contributes to growth, private sector investment and poverty reduction (*ibid.*: 1).

Critics have argued that the World Bank view of good governance is too technocratic (Weiss 2000: 804, Santiso 2001, cf. Hyden *et al.* 2004: 15). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for instance, has offered a definition that puts more weight on popular participation and opportunities for the poorest and the most vulnerable to be heard in the policy process (UNDP 1997). These definitional disagreements notwithstanding, most reformers and students of non-Western governance now do share an analytical emphasis on the concept of governance as opposed to government. Governance in that sense does not only entail public administration, bureaucracy and political office, but also institutions and processes *outside* the structures of government, notably those of the civil society and the private or corporate sector (Rosenau 1992: 4, Bøås 1998: 120).

While approaches to understanding good governance vary widely, all these definitions of the concept *do* have a particular characteristic in common: good governance is almost always defined by what it is *not*. One of the most striking mirror images of good governance is exemplified in discussions of corruption, individual motivations of public officials and the appropriation of public resources for private ends. Good governance is the domain of disinterested, impartial, rule-driven and goal-oriented bureaucratic action, while its opposite, bad governance, encompasses political and governmental activity marked by private and limited group interests as well as favouritism. The distinction follows essentially from the classic Weberian separation between modern systems of rule based on legal-rational bureaucracy and traditional systems of rule based on patrimonialism, where political office is appropriated for private ends (Weber 1978). In the world of development and in most academic work, modern bureaucratic standards are taken as the norm for the evaluation of the public sector in any country. Consequently, instances of corruption, spoil of public resources or unresponsiveness of national elites to the needs of citizens, are seen as perversions

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[2]   The ambiguous notion of good governance thus chimes in well with the plethora of other 'seductive' and 'warmly persuasive' buzzwords (e.g. 'poverty reduction', 'participation', 'empowerment') that, at one time or another, have captured the imagination of policy entrepreneurs in international development (Cornwall and Brock 2005).

of this norm (cf. Cammack 2007: 599-600). In this view, national institutions are 'weak', democracy is 'deficient' and governance not yet 'fully accountable' to all citizens (see e.g. UNDP 2002).

However, such familiar stories of deficiency, of 'not quite there yet', are reductionist representations of political reality. In many postcolonial polities, Weberian, impersonal, and impartial goal-oriented public governance simply has not, or not yet, achieved the status of political norm. Often, the fundamental divide between the public and private spheres does not exist to the extent assumed in the discourses of good governance. Instead, personalized relationships and ingroup favouritism are part and parcel of the everyday practices of governance. In this context, the term 'good governance' can be seen as an ideological concept, based on Western historical experience, which fails to take into account, let alone represent, the political reality in many non-Western countries.

In this article, then, we seek to take analytical distance from the ideological and normative concept of good governance, so as to explore the actual practices of governance and political control in developing countries and the various ways in which ordinary citizens perceive and deal with these. Since, indeed, even if 'good governance' goals have dominated public policy in postcolonial polities in the last decades, recent studies indicate that politics and public administration in these countries often continue to be marked by authoritarianism, nepotism and corruption – the very practices good governance policy was supposed to eradicate.

As we will argue in section two, the challenges to good governance reform around the developing world are related to longer histories of political practice, often characterized by the appropriation of power as a personal asset and by the clientelist redistribution of wealth and official positions. Interestingly, such political practices expose their own, indigenous, understandings of what 'governing well' entails. Present-day 'personalized' rule can be traced to traditional moral economies of patron-clientelism: exchange systems in which dominant individuals provided livelihoods and/or political protection to the less resourceful in exchange for loyalty and/or labour. These practises were, and frequently still are, largely concordant with cultural beliefs about good and legitimate governance and might even be described within the 'good governance' paradigm of effectiveness, accountability and transparency.

However, in the context of (post)colonial modernizing processes, the scale of personalized politics has tended to move upwards, from local 'big-man' politics to intense political games at the level of the central state. In section three, we describe how many societies within the developing world saw the emergence of 'hybrid' political cultures in which public norms of 'modern' good governance came to exist alongside cultural practices of 'indigenous' good governance. The development of a

state apparatus did not prevent the continuation of redistributive politics along personal clientelist lines. On the contrary, blooming state bureaucracies typically, and increasingly, came to provide the very infrastructure and resources for such politics.

Our discussion of the moral economy of traditional patronage and the emergence of hybrid political cultures lays the groundwork for our subsequent argument, developed in section four, that these hybrid political cultures, by their very nature, have proved fertile breeding grounds for what may best be referred to as 'neopatrimonial' systems of rule. In such systems, the principle of *exchange* of patronage has come to be replaced by that of *extraction* of resources by political and bureaucratic actors for personal and limited group gain. Unlike patron-clientelist exchange, the politics of 'privatized' neopatrimonial extraction does not answer to 'governing well' to anyone's standard (excluding, of course, of those doing the extracting).

In section five, we deal with the question of popular response to neopatrimonial extraction.. One of the most striking ways in which ordinary citizens try and work the often cruel neopatrimonial system to their minimal disadvantage is through self-governance, that is, the formation of social collectives that offer a degree of security and subsistence in their daily lives. Interestingly, as our case study of Nigeria indicates, such self-governance initiatives do not necessarily sit comfortably with 'good governance' ideals: they often rework familiar patronage models and largely appropriate, rather than reject, neopatrimonial politics. The conclusion wraps up our main argument and raises some important questions as to the enforceability of the good governance paradigm and the usefulness of neopatrimonialism as a conceptual tool.

2 'INDIGENOUS GOOD GOVERNANCE'
PATRONAGE AS MORAL ECONOMY

The idea of good governance, as commonly understood, embodies the virtues of impersonality, universality and neutrality, in line with Weber's analysis of legal-rational bureaucracy. Many of the societies in which good governance has come to shape public policy, however, have evolved long political traditions embracing rather different values. In these societies, political accountability was, and often still is, based on decidedly personal links and considerations, not impersonal or impartial ones. 'Governance' in such contexts effectively takes the shape not of a universal and legal system, but of personal relationships between 'governors' and 'governed', or between those who enjoy wealth and status and those who are less resourceful.

When these relationships take on forms of reciprocal political exchange between actors commanding unequal resources (Lemarchand and Legg 1972: 151), they can be described as patronage, clientelism or patron-clientelism. In systems of patronage, high-status individuals ('patrons') provide physical protection and/or livelihood resources to lower-status individuals ('clients'), who repay the former by offering their loyalty, labour or political support. A large body of literature describes this type of political activity in the Mediterranean, the Middle East, Latin America, South and South East Asia and Africa, portraying it as a near-universal aspect of socio-political organization across human societies (see especially Schmidt *et al.* 1977, Gellner and Waterbury 1977, Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984). There is some agreement that predominance of patronage can be related to the lack of a centralized, redistributive state and to the prevalence of factors producing individual dependency, such as insecurity, poverty and social isolation (Gellner and Waterbury 1977, Schmidt *et al.* 1977). By committing themselves to a 'patron', less resourceful individuals -be they small peasants or artisans, landless, or poor urban dwellers- may be able to secure access to a plot of land to cultivate, a steady job, material goods, wealth, physical protection or direct assistance in times of scarcity of illness (see e.g. Scott 1972: 9).

Patronage systems tend to entail rather explicit norms of political accountability, responsibility and legitimacy. It is in this sense that patronage can appropriately be regarded as an 'indigenous', or 'traditional', form of good governance. Clients are unequal to their patrons, but they are not simply pawns in a one-way relationship (Scott 1977: 22). Indeed, the relation between patrons and clients can be described, as James Scott has done for Southeast Asian peasants, as a 'moral economy' in which 'the irreducible minimum terms the peasant/client traditionally demands ("expects" is perhaps more appropriate) for his deference are physical security and a subsistence livelihood' (Scott 1977: 22, Scott 1976). This expectation is the basis of these peasants' conceptions of justice, equity and legitimacy. Thus, in historical political cultures as diverse as West African, Southeast Asian and South European ones, legitimacy of power has been observed not to be based on equality of wealth, but rather on whether those in the position of power share their wealth with the less resourceful to a satisfactory extent (Guyer 1997: 228**,** Scott 1977: 22, Pitt-Rivers 1971: 61-3).

While clients depend on their patrons to acquire necessary services and resources, patrons in their turn need a clientèle to maintain a labour, security or electoral force and thereby secure their status and power (cf. Scott 1977: 35-6). Accordingly, patrons' elevated position depends on their ability to secure and dispense resources and, in so doing, enlarge their clientèle, making *achievement* at least as important as *ascription* when it comes to the emergence of patrons as 'big men' (Barber

1981: 724).

The continuing force of patron-client ties is often attributed to the persistence of insecurity and uncertainty in people's everyday lives (Gellner and Waterbury 1977). When people become more affluent and their opportunities increase, their need for patronage decreases. Patronage politics thus offer an apt illustration of Samuel Hays' statement that 'politics is necessary for those below the poverty line and an item of luxury consumption for those above it' (quoted by Lemarchand and Legg 1972: 169). This insight provides some nuance to the idea that the behaviour of 'clients' can be characterized before all by the freedom of choice to switch loyalties and 'shop around' for better patrons (Barth 1959, Barnes 1986). For those economically poor who are relatively isolated, finding a patron is often the only way to satisfy their daily livelihood needs (Auyero 1999). Once they are in a relationship with a patron, moreover, it is often virtually impossible to withdraw due to 'the lack of alternative means or livelihood, continuous indebtness to [the patron], or legally enforced contractual relationships' (Landé 1977: xxiii).

Even if patron-client bonds entail patently unequal relationships, most of the literature on patronage systems indicates their development as morally legitimate systems, in which inequality of wealth is accepted as long as the rich share enough of their wealth with the less resourceful. The rich and powerful are prone to guarantee such distribution and to uphold locally defined norms of fairness, as their position and wealth depend on their followers' continuing support. Sure, exploitation has been of all times, and powerful actors may turn to disinterested domination when they can (see e.g. Scott [1972]). Yet, essentially, patron-client bonds are characterized by the interdependence of both parties and by their relationship of exchange. In spite of its 'characteristic aura of illegitimacy or corruption' (Clapham 1982: 5), then, patronage does exemplify a form of 'indigenous good governance' whenever those who govern are felt to fulfil their obligations towards their dependents and realize a fair redistribution of wealth.

Interestingly, most of the parameters in the contemporary debates about good governance are translatable into the norms of indigenous good governance. For example, moral economies of patronage can be described as effective and responsive as they entail exchange relations from which both parties gain and in which both find satisfaction of needs. They are accountable to the extent that clients are able to forsake their support of certain patrons when the latter fail to provide necessary protection and support. And they are transparent as patron-client systems are, albeit to varying degrees, based on shared social norms.

3 'INFORMAL GOVERNANCE'

PATRONAGE AS STATE SYSTEM

Politically, the accumulation of patron-client ties in a society can form a pyramid-like structure, in which patrons 'at the top' distribute their resources to their clients who, in their turn, redistribute to *their* clients and so on (one person's client is typically another person's patron) (Cammack 2007: 600; Erdmann and Engel 2007: 107). The traditional patronage systems of Rwanda and Burundi, which structured *the whole* population, from the king to the peasant, by means of vertical and hierarchical patron-client ties, would be good cases in point (see Médard 1982: 166). Together, these links ideal-typically result in the top-down distribution of wealth and resources within society, aptly described by Richards (1996: 41) as 'a village-level moral economy writ large'.

With the emergence of modern state institutions, usually introduced by colonial authorities, this redistributive logic often continued to exist and was extended to include the highest echelons of the state. In Nigeria, for example, pre-colonial political systems were characterized by the competition between chiefs, who distributed their resources to their dependents. This system continued under colonialism, while the chiefs became dependents of, and clients to, the colonial government above them. After independence, the logic of vertical redistribution was maintained, with resources flowing from the state to regional and local governmental or political party officials (often linked to the former chiefly groups) and from them to the villagers and urban dwellers (Peel 1983).

The historical continuity of patron-clientelist redistribution of wealth indicates that patronage is not a stage in economic development (with modern, rational-legal bureaucracy as its end station), but, rather, an 'ethos', a way of doing things that may run through different types of political systems (Gellner 1977: 3). In these systems, the ends of patronage politics may remain relatively stable whereas the means through which it is provided may radically change: with the expansion of a central state the role of patrons has typically come to rely less on how much land they own or on how many people work for them, as on the extent to which they have secured access to government (Zuckerman 1977: 65). In postcolonial states, regional patrons, often representatives of political parties, have increasingly been taking up 'brokerage' functions by linking up local communities with the central bureaucracy and its funds (Brass 1966, Weingrod 1969: 383-4, Lemarchand and Legg 1972: 154). National elections are often being co-opted in patronage logics, as those who stand for office promise to provide services and resources in exchange for votes (Auyero 1999, Erdmann and Engel 2007: 106) and as voting entails a new way of expressing loyalty to a patron (Lemarchand and Legg 1972: 167-8).

Patron-clientelism could so easily find its way into the modern state because of its eminent malleability. Patronage, after all, is not a political system *per se* but a principle of interpersonal relations. As Alvin Gouldner has pointed out, this principle of asymmetric personalized reciprocity can act 'like a kind of plastic filler, capable of being poured into the shifting crevices of social structure, serving as a kind of all-purpose moral cement' (cited in Lemarchand and Legg 1972: 156). Hence, patron-clientelism feels equally at home in a wide variety of settings, ranging from the traditional small-scale kin-centred community to the modern state. Wherever the state succeeded in realizing, at least partly, its claimed monopoly over the use of force and the powers of regulation, taxation and redistribution, this almost naturally encouraged lively and lucrative transactions of these 'benefits' between those having and those seeking access to them.

Also, the modern state's fast-growing bureaucracies, hierarchically structured through their super- and subordination of bureaus and officials, chains of command and hierarchies of authority, readily lent themselves to the formation, spread and entrenchment of new chains of dyads of hierarchically positioned actors, whether formal (ministries, departments, bureaus, officials) or informal (cliques, coteries) (Lemarchand and Legg 1972: 153, Médard 1982: 166). The formality of these modern hierarchies, circumscribed by written-down rules, procedures and delineated jurisdictions, further helped the institutionalization of patron-client bonds by providing the means to disguise the transactional nature of these links behind cloaks of administrative paperreality. No wonder then, that postcolonial modern bureaucracies often readily evolved into clientelist *systems*, accounting for a substantial proportion of total allocations of goods and services made by the state.

Across the postcolony, government jobs - offering steady incomes, relative security, social prestige, and dignified retirement (Esman 1999: 354) - became highly sought after, rendering control over the allocation of such jobs an important source of political patronage. Leaders of new postcolonial states used their power over the bureaucracy to distribute government jobs to reward collaborators in the struggle for independence, for example, or to accommodate the swelling numbers of unemployed university graduates; always a politically dangerous category given their capacity for organized opposition (Evers 1987; Brass 1991; Okafor 2005).

The rapid expansion of bureaucratic activity further fueled postcolonial patronage politics. Alongside their inherited colonial functions of keeping the peace and collect revenues, bureaucracies absorbed new and wide-ranging tasks in education, health, banking, communication, transport, housing, scientific research, agricultural and industrial development *et cetera*. In order to carry out these tasks, new administrative hierarchies were created, often with vast and extensive regulatory

powers and discretion, penetrating the postcolony's hinterlands through its chains of field offices. International aid programs provided a further impetus to this development. Hence, across the postcolony in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, inherited regimes of 'security administration' developed into systems of 'development administration' consisting of formal, modern agencies closely resembling those of Europe and the United States (Riggs 1964: 12, 47).

The public resources controlled by these expanding administrative hierarchies could, and often were, turned into patronage by political leaders seeking votes and group support: land, hospital beds, police protection, schools, university admission, capital, credit, foreign exchange, business licenses, government contracts, private sector jobs, housing, agricultural inputs, health facilities, roads, water supply, electricity. Also, the personal access to the administrative or political actors who could influence or decide on the allocation of such benefits became a source of patronage. In short, postcolonial politics became so intensely preoccupied with locating, capturing and distributing the patronage contained within the modern state bureaucracy, that leadership struggles and democratic elections in the postcolony often evolved, as in India, into mere 'auctions for the sale of government services' (Chandra 2004).

In doing so, political relations and economic activity became much more centralized than in traditional patronage systems. 'What was previously a rather fragmented, locally centered nexus, limited to traditional exchanges in the form of tributes and prebends,' write Lemarchand and Legg, thus evolved into 'a far more encompassing network of relationships, directly dependent upon the volume and allocation of resources from the center' (1972: 158-9). In this situation, patrons' privileged and new-found access to the modern state often tipped the balance of dependence and power more firmly to their, rather than clients', advantage. By opening up new reservoirs of resources, such access not only meant less dependence on the resources of their clients, but also increased opportunities to control, manipulate and, importantly, *deny* their clients (Lemarchand and Legg 1972: 158-9).

The rise of modern statehood in societies traditionally governed by patronage, thus typically resulted in 'hybrid' political cultures in which the public institutions of 'modern' governance came to exist alongside cultural practices of 'indigenous' governance. Peter Ekeh (1975), writing about Africa, argued in this context that postcolonial political cultures are not constituted by one public arena, but by two: the 'civic public' and the 'primordial public'. The first is related to the state apparatus, comprising the civil service, schools, police and so on. The second is related to communal, kinship and ethnic groups. The civic public is the sphere from which gains and benefits can be drawn, the primordial public is the sphere in which people make claims to such gains and benefits. Political actors operate in both publics at one and the

same time, but on different moral grounds:

> A *good* citizen of the primordial public gives out and asks for nothing in return; a *lucky* citizen of the civic public gains from the civic public but enjoys escaping giving anything in return whenever he can. But such a lucky man would not be a good man were he to channel all his lucky gains to his private purse. He will only continue to be a good man if he channels parts of the largesse from the civic public to the primordial public . . . . The unwritten law of the dialectics is that it is legitimate to rob the civic public in order to strengthen the primordial public. (Ekeh 1975: 108)

Corruption, understood in this sense, *is* the political and socio-cultural norm (Olivier de Sardan 1999, Cammack 2007: 605). In fact, a citizen 'may risk serious sanctions from members of his own primordial public if he seeks to extend the honesty and integrity with which he performs his duties in the primordial public to his duties in the civic public by employing universalistic criteria of impartiality' (Ekeh 1975: 110).

Clearly, this hybrid political culture creates an environment that is very different from the earlier local big man politics. Political actors no longer gain riches primarily by having many people working for them, but rather by having direct access to the resources of the state. They have become less dependent on the clients supporting them, than on the notables who helped them gain political office and to whom they pay allegiance. (Cammack 2007: 603). As a result, less resourceful peasants and urban dwellers can often no longer count on protection and support from their erstwhile patrons.

4 'BAD GOVERNANCE'

NEOPATRIMONIALISM AS EXTRACTIVE ECONOMY

The kind of political system that may readily evolve in such conditions is akin to what Weber called *patrimonialism*. Weber wrote: 'The patrimonial office lacks above all the bureaucratic separation of the "private" and the "official" sphere. For the political administration is treated as a purely personal affair of the ruler, and political power is considered part of his personal property…' (1978: 1028-9). Yet, in systems such as that described by Ekeh, the distinction between private and official, personal and public, *is* made (at least formally), political action *is* normatively discussed in terms of legal accountability, legitimation for such action *is* sought in terms of public norms and universal ideologies, and modern bureaucratic institutions and formal-legal rules *do* exist (Médard 1982: 180-1, Erdmann and Engel 2007: 105). In practice, however, these

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norms and rules make place for markedly personalized politics, a 'shadow state' (Reno 2000), which 'leaves the formal institutions of government little more than an empty shell' (Ferguson 2006: 39). Such a dual political system (Cammack 2007: 600), in which patrimonial politics exist next to, and feed off, modern bureaucracies, has been described as *neopatrimonialism*.

The term 'neopatrimonialism', introduced by Eisenstadt (1973), has gained currency since the late 1980s. It proved useful because it presented a positive concept for what modernization theorists had only been able to describe in negative ('breakdown', 'political decay') or essentially teleological ('transitory', 'transitional') terms and because it suggested some 'internal logic' to the political systems or phenomena thus defined (*ibid*.: 10).[3] Unlike 'traditional', Weberian patrimonialism – a form of political domination characterized by a chief's or royal household's exercise of formally arbitrary, personal and bureaucratic power through an administrative apparatus 'staffed by slaves, mercenaries, conscripts, or some other group' without an independent power-base (Weber 1978)–*neo*patrimonialism is a distinctly *modern* phenomenon: its impact is felt in societies that have experienced the rise of modern state organization and that have been incorporated in the modern international system (Médard 1982: 179). Put simply, neopatrimonialism is patrimonialism combined with a modern state bureaucracy (*ibid*., Budd 2004: 2).[4] In this section we discuss the characteristics we regard as archetypical of neopatrimonial systems and contrast them with the characteristics of traditional patronage politics out of which they have typically evolved.

Neopatrimonial politics is first and foremost bureaucratic politics. As described above, postcolonial bureaucracies, far from being merely administrative apparatuses for the execution of policies often developed into the focal employers for the job-hungry and ambitious, prime providers of material benefits and social prestige, and primary sources of political patronage. In consequence, the offices and barracks of modern, urban and small-town civil and military bureaucracy, rather than the agricultural estates of rural landlords or the meeting halls of newly founded political parties, legislative assemblies and elected executives, came to act as the postcolonial

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[3]   The concept has proven particularly popular in studies of sub-Saharan Africa (e.g. Médard 1982, 2002; Clapham 1992[1985]: 44-60; Bratton and Van de Walle 1994; Englebert 2000; Erdmann and Engel 2007; Cammack 2007). Some authors do not distinguish between 'patrimonialism' and 'neopatrimonialism' and use the former term to describe what is here called *neo*patrimonialism (e.g. Richards 1996; Chabal and Deloz 1999). Other authors have coined different terms to denote substantially similar regimes, such as the 'shadow state' (Reno 2000) or the 'privatized state' (Hibou 2004).

[4]   The term 'modern bureaucracy' is used here in the conventional, Weberian sense, denoting a permanent, hierarchically structured organization with a clearly defined divisions of labour and authority (Weber 1978: 956-8). When used without qualification, the term may be taken to include all the officials, both civil and military, of a state (cf. Riggs 1969: 221).

political arena *par excellence* (Riggs 1964).

Often, an important side effect of the shift in the locus of politics was the emergence of a new class of political patrons. As Médard writes, 'a skilful leader *has to learn* how to reconcile his own search for booty and spoils with the redistribution of those [state] resources necessary to get political support and strengthen his position' (1982: 167, emphasis ours). Recognizing, locating and capturing patronage in modern bureaucracies and distributing it through them, asked for skills and competences not always possessed by old-school patrons accustomed to a politics vested on local roots and prominence in geographically bounded agricultural economies. The new, bureaucracy-oriented politics of patronage thus enabled the rise to power of another, 'virtuoso', type of leader – literate, educated, more 'urban', and bureaucratically competent - whose position of new-found power was no longer primarily built, as those of traditional patrons, upon personal 'esteem and awe', local clout and peasant labour dependency, but also on his practical ability to navigate the bureaucratic maze, grasp the logic of electioneering, and 'get things done' in the modern institutions of government (cf. Brass 1966; De Zwart 1994).

The dispensing of patronage to clients, particularly to clients within the bureaucracy, then, is integral to the functioning of neopatrimonial systems of rule. Bureaucrats who act as loyal allies to their political patrons – by providing information, developing attractive policies (or blocking threatening ones) and assisting in the distribution of public benefits to constituencies outside the state apparatus - may be rewarded with much sought after 'wet' posts: positions that offer considerable discretion and substantial informal and off-the-record opportunities for generating additional personal incomes, in the form of bribery collection, fee-benefices, tax-farming opportunities and the like (Van Gool 2008). Conversely, punishment of 'uncooperative' bureaucratic agents who are unable or unwilling to do the neo-patrimon's bidding typically involves the denial of such lucrative forms of patronage, character assassination and threats of physical harm *(ibid.).* Given these high stakes, the pressures on bureaucrats to comply with neopatrimons' wishes are often formidable.

Bureaucratic clientelism in neopatrimonial systems tends to go hand in hand with factional manoeuvring and infighting between rival groups within the bureaucracy. Politicians who succeed in climbing the neopatrimonial hierarchy are sure to attempt to take their 'tail' or 'clique' of followers from the lower echelons of the administrative apparatus along with them. Alternatively, politicians losing out in factional struggles may try and 'plant' their own men in bureaus controlled by their enemies (Clapham 1982: 26-7). Even if the clientelist, vertical exchange (and denial) of favours is an important aspect of factional struggle in neopatrimonial bureaucracies, it may be supplemented by a mutually lucrative, horizontal 'you scratch my back, I

scratch yours'-type of favour swapping between (members of) contending factions (*ibid*.: 27-8). Rival bureaucratic factions may also find themselves actively cooperating in controlling or containing the rise of extra-bureaucratic collectives - political parties, election committees, legislatures, courts, interest groups, social movements, and the like - that pose a threat to bureaucratic power *per se*.

In comparison to polities constituted by ideal-typical patronage pyramids, neopatrimonial regimes are, as indicated above, typically characterized by a strong centralization of power and a concomitant, steady erosion of the political importance of 'lower' and peripheral layers of patronage networks. Echoing traditional patrimonial rulers' classic strategy, neopatrimonial regimes typically attempt to *monopolize* political activities and resources, *minimize* any independent access of the periphery to the centre, and to actively *prevent* the formation of 'broader groups' and potentially rival, autonomous centres of power (Eisenstadt 1973: 18, 33). If successful, such attempts may result in the formation of what Médard calls a 'state patrimonial bourgeoisie': a closed class or clique with privileged access to economic resources, directly occupying the best positions in the state apparatus (the senior echelons of party, army, bureaucracy and public corporations) and almost entirely dependent for its wealth and status on the political and administrative positions it occupies; a class, in short, which 'actually owns the state, and in various ways, uses it to its own profit' (Médard 1982: 183). Centralization of the economy in many postcolonial societies facilitates such neopatrimonial practices: profits from the export of natural resources and capital flows from international aid, result in a 'pot of gold' controlled by the regime and used strategically in factional politics (cf. Robinson and Verdier 2002: 4). Indeed, the rise of neopatrimonial forms of governance is often associated with the rise and subsequent routinization and banalization of what Olivier de Sardan calls 'big-time' corruption, 'the type practised at the summit of the state (presidents, ministers, directors of important offices, directors of public or parastatal enterprises), involving millions or even billions of CFA francs'(1999: 28).[5] Such big time corruption typically takes on the form of 'market' corruption, whereby power holders use their positions to drain off public resources and *sell* them to those who can afford to pay. For example, bureaucratic capitalists in state-owned or controlled 'corners' of economic activity - liquor, tobacco, opium, salt, sugar, rubber, lotteries, exploitation of lumber and mineral resources *et cetera* - may exploit loose political and administrative control structures to sell benefits and services at prices considerably above free market rates and divert substantial parts of the income from these operations into their own pockets. Such lucrative exploitation of economic niches typically involves the handling of ingenious systems of 'duplex bookkeeping' in which formal, open budgets are supplemented by

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[5]   CFA is the currency in most Western and Central African states formerly colonized by France.

secret, 'second' budgets used for internal incentive schemes and intra-bureaucratic redistribution (Riggs 1964: 313, cf. Evers 1987; Karklins 2002).

Bureaucratic capitalists may also go into business on their own account, using trusted entrepreneurial front men to do the work. Officials empowered to 'license' or 'permit' particular forms of economic activity – export trade, banking, big industry - may use these powers to sell their approval, or willingness to overlook 'violations' of the law, to those able to pay for it, whether in kind or in company shares. Neopatrimonial officialdom can also use its control over government agencies to influence procurement procedures and sell government contracts. Another well-established form of market corruption is the running of informal markets for public office, in which aspirants are made to pay, often fixed amounts, for entrance to bureaucratic office, or for promotion to higher office (see for example Riggs 1964; Evers 1987; Karklins 2002; Van Gool 2008).[6]

Clearly, all these forms of big-time corruption stand in marked contrast to more conventional, common kinds of 'petty' or 'parochial' corruption, so typical of postcolonial patronage systems, in which individual transactions involve comparatively small amounts of money and in which ties of kinship, friendship, affection, ethnicity and caste, rather than sheer purchasing power, determine access to the favours of power holders (Médard 1982: 177; Olivier de Sardan 1999).

In neopatrimonial systems, then, politics tends to become 'a kind of business with two modes of exchange: connections and money. The state is a pie that everyone greedily wants to eat' (Médard 1982: 182). As the stakes of gaining political office thus become very high, political actors may engage in fierce contestation, intimidation and, often, violence in their quest for office. In fact, the odds of winning intra-bureaucratic struggles under neopatrimonial conditions are very much in favour of those who command and control the means of violence, which explains the frequent occurrence of coups d'état by alliances of military officers and seasoned civil servants (cf. Riggs 1973).

With the stark centralization of power and wealth at the level of the state, ordinary people under neopatrimonial rule may find themselves far removed from the centres of resource allocation and therefore easily miss out on getting their share. Once in office, neopatrimonial rulers face little constraints to care for ordinary citizens. In fact, from the ruler's perspective, denying ordinary citizens unregulated access to markets and public goods and services (like security or economic stability) is a perfectly rational strategy, since it encourages individuals to seek the ruler's personal

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6   In North India, for instance, there are 'going rates' for employment as police constable (Rs 40,000 to 75,000), army sepoy (Rs 30,000 to 50,000), bus conductor (Rs 20,000 and 60,000) and clerk (Rs 40,000 to 70,000), to be paid under the table to officials of state recruitment bodies and the 'brokers' through whom they typically 'work' (Jeffrey and Lerche 2001: 97-8).

favour to secure access to these (Reno 2000: 3). For the elites, the weakness of rational-legal bureaucracy and the prevalence of personalized rule are particularly profitable. These provide them with direct access to public resources, which they can use for self-enrichment or investment in clientelist networks. They have little reason to dismantle this system of 'political disorder', which serves them so well (Chabal and Deloz 1999: 14). 'In neopatrimonial systems', as Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith succinctly put it, 'the state exists to serve the rulers, not the ruled' (2002: 8). In extreme cases - Liberia and Sierra Leone can serve as telling examples for much of their recent history - neopatrimonial rulers have perfected this strategy to the extent that 'the state', or whatever is left of it, has become their private commercial syndicate (Reno 2000).[7]

Bureaucrats, dependent as they are on the whims of neopatrimonial rulers who can reward or punish them, may be counted on to focus their allegiance upwards, to their masters, rather than downwards, to their agencies' nominal clients, from whom they have less to gain or fear. In fact, bureaucrats typically have ample reasons to extract resources *from* their nominal clients (rather than to distribute resources *to* them). The informal markets for public office in neopatrimonial regimes tend to be closely intertwined with systems of bottom-to-top corruption, quite like the one described by Robert Wade (1982) for canal irrigation in India. In such systems, officials buy themselves into lucrative posts by bribing political and administrative superiors. Once in position, officials are allowed, even encouraged and expected, to use their power and discretion to extract rents from the populace in order to earn back their investment and save for a new one, while also sending part of the collected rents upwards to secure the protection and satisfy the financial demands of administrative superiors and politicians. The proceeds from lower-level extraction thus 'trickle up' intra-bureaucratically, galvanizing factional alliances and fueling neopatrimonial politicking at higher levels.

Large sections of less resourceful villagers and city dwellers under neopatrimonial rule are, thus, largely deprived from livelihood and physical protection by the state. This often renders everyday life extremely insecure. The wider population is hardest hit when economic decline sets in and the available resources for patronage at the level of the state diminish, as often happens in relatively unstable economies. Indeed, when patronage resources crumble, the priority of the political regime often

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[7] A few examples discussed by Reno illustrate the sheer extent to which the state may come to function as patrimonial rulers' private enterprise. 'Zaire's president Mobutu (1965-1997)', Reno writes, 'reportedly controlled a fortune of $6 billion, exceeding the recorded annual economic output of his country. Malawi's president Banda managed much of the country's commercial activity through family trusts. Illustrating very close ties between state agents and illicit markets, Albanian officials in the early 1990s turned their state into an entrepôt for trade in arms, drugs, and stolen goods. After a decade in power, Liberia's president Samuel Doe accumulated a fortune equivalent to half of Liberia's annual domestic income' (Reno 2000).

goes out to maintaining loyalty within the security apparatus, at the cost of the impoverishment of social services, health and education (e.g. Richards 1996: 36). No wonder, then, that ordinary citizens often come to 'see their leaders as having forsaken the obligations of sharing associated with patron-clientelism in favour of personal enrichment and unabashed venality' (Smith 2007: 86).

Clearly, neopatrimonial rule presents a distinctly different mode of governance from the politics of patronage out of which it has characteristically evolved. Neopatrimonialism lacks the moral component of patron-client relationships. While it does entail some extent of redistribution, neopatrimonialism –unlike patronage- is not *defined* by the redistribution of resources to clients. Sharing of the spoils is rather aimed at satisfying specific political bases of support. Put differently, under neopatrimonial rule, patron-clientelism persists but becomes substantially confined to galvanizing and structuring interpersonal relations *within* the state, while largely disappearing as a linkage between the central state and the erstwhile client groups positioned outside it. The money 'robbed' from the 'civic public', to use Ekeh's terms, no longer flows substantially to the wider bases of the 'primordial public'. 'Traditional' patrons, as described in the previous section, were *directly* dependent on their clientèle to sustain their status, power and wealth. The 'new' patrons, or neopatrimons, are only *indirectly*, if at all, dependent on the masses of villagers and city dwellers, who often have very limited means to call them to account. Indeed, given neopatrimonial elites' penchant for predatory self-enrichment, the principle of *exchange* found in patron-clientelism is being replaced by that of *extraction*. These distinctions may be schematically presented as follows:

Ideal-typical characteristics of patronage and neopatrimonialism

Patronage	*Neopatrimonialism*
Exchange	*Extraction*
Moral economy (strong legitimacy)	*Predatory economy (weak legitimacy)*
Parochial corruption	*Big-time corruption*
State-society clientelism	*Bureaucratic clientelism*
Redistribution to less resourceful	*Redistribution to those that 'matter' politically*

Neopatrimonial governance is not a rare or marginal phenomenon. In fact, it is quite commonly accepted as a prevalent form of contemporary politics across the developing world (cf. Clapham 1992[1985]: 48-9). Apparently strikingly adaptable, neopatrimonialism, or neopatrimonial features, can be found to thrive in almost any kind of polity, 'whether multiparty or one-party, whether civilian or military, capitalist

or socialist, authoritarian or democratic' (Médard 1982: 184).[8] Even if neopatrimonialism has been particularly well documented in the polities of (sub-Sahara) Africa –including Zaire/Congo, Malawi, Equatorial Guinea, Somalia, Djibouti, Swaziland, Guinea, Gabon, Togo, Congo, Benin, Madagascar, Guinea-Bissau, Cameroon, Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, Sudan, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Burundi, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Liberia, Niger, Comoros, Lesotho, Tanzania, Kenya, Zambia, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Cape Verde, Sao Tome, and Seychelles (see for instance Bratton and Van de Walle 1994, Chabal and Deloz 1999) – it has not been restricted to them. Outside of Africa, the political systems of countries as varied as the Philippines, Indonesia, Burma, Afghanistan, India, the Dominican Republic, Chile, Palestine and Ukraine have long or recently been analyzed in terms of (neo)patrimonialism (see e.g. Dua 1985, Remmer 1989, Hartlyn 1994, Brynen 1995, Van Zon 2001, Lowi 2004, Webber 2005, Geller and Moss 2008).[9] These examples indicate that neopatrimonialism is strongly rooted in everyday political life around the globe.

5 COPING WITH 'BAD GOVERNANCE'

ORDINARY CITIZENS AND THE NEOPATRIMONIAL STATE

Neopatrimonial politics bring about considerable insecurity in the everyday lives of ordinary people (those who do not belong to the state neopatrimonial bourgeoisie). In this final section we examine the various kinds of coping strategies to which people resort in the face of such pressing insecurity. We talk about 'strategies' to stress the point that ordinary citizens confronted with neopatrimonial insecurity are not by definition merely its passive victims, but can instead be seen to try and work the often cruel system to their minimal disadvantage. Indeed, even a superficial glance at the vast literature bears out that there is an enormous range of such coping strategies, including the direct pursuit or purchase of neopatrimonial office, informal association with the neopatrimonial state through various forms of 'brokerage', the cultivation of clientage ties with neopatrimons through bribery and the exchange of votes for material goods, racketeering and banditry, apathetic resignation, public protest,

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[8]   As should have become clear, we treat the concept of neopatrimonialism as an ideal type. This implies that particular polities may be *more or less* neopatrimonial, depending on how well their governance features fit the constructed model.

[9]   This short, rough-and-ready enumeration excludes polities that have not been explicitly treated as instances of neopatrimonialism. Otherwise, this list would have been much longer. Nickson and Lambert's description of the Paraguayan 'privatized state' (2002), for instance, bears close resemblance to 'our' neopatrimonial states..

guerrilla warfare, and migration.[10]

One of the most striking ways in which people seek to cope with neopatrimonial insecurity is through self-governance, that is, the formation of social collectives that offer a degree of security and subsistence in their daily lives. Such collectives might take varying forms, from village friendship clubs to neighbourhood watch groups to politicised militants (see e.g. Andersen *et al.* 2007). The quest for security through such informal means relates to the politics of neopatrimonialism in varying ways. Some collectives may seek -or are forced- to act outside of the neopatrimonial environment and give shape to forms of self-help livelihood and protection. Others try to improve their livelihoods within the politics of neopatrimonialism by demanding the attention of the political elites through lobbying, political tactics or violent means. Often, however, the same groups simultaneously resort to all of these strategies to varying degrees. Indeed, as Pratten (2008a: 11) argues, in people's everyday quest for security commonplace distinctions between state-society, law-disorder or legitimate-illegitimate violence, collapse. Coping with insecurity means investing in the social relationships with friendship groups, family and community, but also in relationships with those in power who might offer a share of the privileges of neopatrimonial rule (*ibid.*).

How these emergent forms of self-governance may play themselves out in the harsh realities of neopatrimonial extraction is perhaps best illustrated by way of a brief case study of Nigeria. This country, indeed, presents a paradigmatic case (an exemplary instance that 'highlight[s] more general characteristics of [the phenomenon] in question' [Flyvbjerg 2006: 232]), of the kind of polities that we have here termed neopatrimonial. Nigeria is an immense country - the most populous in Africa - that thrives on a vast oil production, but with otherwise very little industry and a largely collapsed agricultural sector. The oil-boom of the 1970s rendered Nigeria a veritable 'oil rentier state' marked by economic centralization at the level of the national state and a prevalent economic dependence on export returns from oil. By 1980 it was a monoculture in which 95.3 per cent of total export revenues were derived from oil (Watts 1992: 35), rendering the stakes of political office in post-boom Nigeria extraordinarily high. After the oil crisis in the early 1980s, oil production fell by two-thirds, the national currency (naira) devaluated rapidly and Nigeria was confronted with a huge external debt (Marshall 2009: 102). With national dependence on oil export intact, securing access to political positions increasingly became a 'do or die affair' (Jega 2000: 18), as the politics of redistribution intensified and factional divisions

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[10] See e.g. Reddy and Haragopal (1985), Gupta (1995), Richards (1996), Chabal and Deloz (1999), Olivier de Sardan (1999), Auyero (1999), Jeffrey and Lerche (2001), Chandra (2004), Andersen *et al.* (2007), Van Gool 2008.

deepened.

These divisions had characterized Nigeria since the colonial period during which a plurality of regional, ethnic and religious groups fell under a single administrative unit and an antagonistic political relationship between the (largely Muslim) North and the (largely Christian) South evolved. Much of the popular discontent following the several transitions between civil and military regimes that have marked Nigeria's postcolonial history, resulted from conflicts between southerners (especially Yorubas), northerners (especially Hausas) and the southeastern Igbos who often felt deprived of economic and political resources by the former groups (Maier 2000: 28, 70-1; Smith 2007: 199). This pluralism has not so much tempered neopatrimonialism as contributed to a politics of redistribution by which the various factional groups scramble for 'their share of the national pie', as Nigerians call it.

Nigeria's economic centralization and factionalism combine unfavourably with a public bureaucracy that has increasingly suffered, since the end of the colonial era, from inefficiency, ineffectiveness and lack of transparency with regards to implementing public policy, but that has been effectively appropriated as a prime currency in the distribution of patronage. As for example Okafor (2005) has shown, appointment and promotion in the Nigerian bureaucracy is typically not based on merit or talent, but on political, family, ethnic or religious factors, meaning that civil servants may often lack the skills needed for their positions. Moreover, a 'politically neutral, professional core of senior administrators is rare in Nigeria', largely because incoming political leaders tend to reward their supporters with jobs in the bureaucracy, often replacing incumbent senior servants (*ibid.*: 68). Bureaucrats' effective activity is further thwarted by insufficient salaries (prompting many of them to hold additional jobs in the informal sector), poor and outdated equipment and office space, and the flourishing of petty corruption such as the need to 'dash' (pay) seniors for wanted services. Unsurprisingly, the public at large reacts with suspicion and cynicism, regarding bureaucrats as biased and self-serving persons who act according to religious, ethnic and other limited group considerations (*ibid.*).

In the context of such bureaucratic inefficiency, factional strife and a politics of redistribution that is being played out among Nigeria's political, bureaucratic, military and economic elites, the available economic resources hardly find their way down to the millions of 'ordinary' Nigerians who lack the necessary connections, leaving them increasingly impoverished: almost sixty per cent of all Nigerians today live below the poverty line of around one U.S. dollar per day (Smith 2007: 13). Such deprivation is both a result of and a reason for widespread corruption, both parochial and 'big-time' (Olivier de Sardan 1999: 28), which has become a defining feature of social, political

and economic relations in the country (Smith 2007: 20).[11]

Neopatrimonial Nigeria, then, has in recent years seen a striking emergence of various forms of everyday, practical self-governance (Gore and Pratten 2003, Pratten 2008a). Marginalized young men, in particular, faced with pressing livelihood challenges, rampant unemployment and few opportunities for social mobility, have set out to 'deploy their very marginality to their own advantage' (Pratten 2008b: 70) by collective mobilization through for example youth gangs, vigilantes, militants and 'secret cults'. Interestingly, these groups can be characterized not just by one specific objective, such as violent control over a gang territory or informal administration of justice, but by a compounding of various functions such as offering protection and vigilance, securing patronage, providing livelihoods and striving for political self-determination (Gore and Pratten 2003, Pratten 2008a, Beekers 2008: 29-41).

The so-called Area Boys gangs, for example, exert control over specific neighbourhoods, but also give shape to self-fashioned livelihoods and economies, participate in political campaigns and request patronage by cultivating liaisons between the more senior 'area fathers' and politicians (Momoh 2000). Similarly, Nigerian vigilante groups are, apart from catching criminals, deeply involved in regional struggles for self-determination, such as Igbo separatist politics in the southeast (Smith 2007: 184-6) and the implementation of *shari'a* laws in the north (Casey 2007). Vigilantes in the Annang southeast do not only keep close watch over the activities of (potential) criminals but also over those of (potential) patrons, as they are engaged in 'screening political candidates, monitoring local government expenditure, checking the award of compensation payments to local chiefs [and] threatening contractors and parastatals to complete development programmes' (Pratten 2006: 710).

Indeed, the very existence of a neopatrimonial environment can be said to *demand* the constant vigilance of the community to ensure that its interests are satisfactorily represented (Pratten 2006: 711-2). Ultimately, such demands of patronage may result in the formation of violent militias that seek to enforce a more beneficial distribution of national wealth, as in the oil-rich Niger Delta (Watts 2004). These manifestations of self-governance can not be characterized simply by a clear-cut opposition between state and non-state actors, but rather by shifting alliances between local communities, youth leaders, state actors, politicians and private enterprises (Watts 2004, Beekers 2008: 37).

Yet, apart from such attention-grabbing vigilante groups, youth gangs and

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[11]   The politics of redistribution, factional conflict, bureaucratic inefficiency and widespread corruption that characterize Nigeria's neopatrimonial environment, should not be seen as 'primordially Nigerian'. Instead, they have matured as a result of a long interplay between the local and the global, fed as they were by the political arrangements during colonial rule and, more recently, by those of the 'Bretton Woods era' (cf. Jega 2000, Ferguson 2006).

militants, the quest for security - entailing protection, patronage and livelihood - can also be found on a more mundane level. One of the present authors has conducted research among motorcycle taxi-riders in the millions' city of Ibadan in south-western Nigeria.[12] Working as a commercial motorcyclist, or 'okada rider' (as they are known in southern Nigeria), has become one of the main sources of livelihood provision for young men throughout Nigeria. Cities such as Lagos, Ibadan, Kano and Jos, but also Nigeria's rural areas, are sprawling with thousands of men carrying passengers on their motor bikes.

Working as okada is appealing to less resourceful young men because it requests little starting capital, provides a daily income that meets their priority of day-to-day survival, and gives an amount of personal freedom (okada riders are their own boss, they decide themselves when they want to work and the profit they make, if not always much, is theirs to keep). For tens, perhaps hundreds, of thousands of young men, okada riding is a self-help opportunity that alleviates the pressing livelihood challenges of everyday life in the neopatrimonial environment of Nigeria.

It is compulsory for okada riders to be a member of one of the transport unions or motorcycle associations - those who are not face sanctions, such as fines or the impounding of their motorcycle, imposed by union officials or the police. These organizations are officially recognized, though during the research period, competition between the unions was expressed by some officials claiming that theirs was the only okada association recognized by the state. The unions have an extensive organizational structure: one of the main transport unions, the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), is organized in neighbourhood units, local branches, state offices and the national office. The management of the neighbourhood unit is in the hands of a body of officers (most of whom continue to work as okada riders), comprising such positions as chair, vice-chair 1, vice-chair 2, secretary, organizational secretary, financial secretary and treasurer. The union charges a one-time membership fee from its members as well as the daily fees for government taxes known as 'tickets'. Union officials are able to make money from these tickets, by buying them in a bulk from the local government and subsequently selling them to their riders with profit (cf. Albert 2007).

Apart from providing such financial capital, okada riders are also a source of political capital for the unions, as they constitute a physical force that can be co-opted in strikes or conflicts. As for the latter, transport unions are regularly enmeshed in

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[12]   This research entailed five weeks of ethnographic fieldwork conducted by Daan Beekers among okada riders in three different neighborhoods in Ibadan, in December 2007 and January 2008. The principal research methods were participant observation and interviewing: socializing with riders at taxi-stands, carrying out open-ended interviews and informal talks (often during rides) as well as attending union meetings. The fieldwork was complemented by literature and newspaper archival research.

conflicts with one another in their competition over local or regional jurisdictions. Albert (2007) has shown that these conflicts can be violent and enmeshed with party politics: In 2001, Ibadan witnessed a major conflict between two unions, each allegedly backed by a political party. The resulting violence between union members that spread throughout the city cost the lives of three hundred people. Capitalizing on their political connections, none of the union officials were arrested and violent confrontations in the transport sector remained a 'terminal problem' in the city ever since (Albert 2007).

However, on the level of neighbourhood 'units', these unions can be characterized by the construction of small worlds of security. These local collectives take the shape of quite close-knit groups, a kind of committee of friends, whose members support each other financially by keeping a savings pot that is allocated by rotation or according to one's specific needs (in the case of special family events such as marriage or of hospital costs resulting from a road accident). Their solidarity is put in words in such slogans as 'If you marry, we all marry with you. If you mourn, we all mourn with you' or 'If one of your fingers has a problem, your whole body has a problem'. While such (financial) solidarity is not formally enforced, it builds on a widely shared cultural disapproval of working exclusively for one's own profit ('chop [eat] alone, die alone' as a Nigerian proverb has it). Particularly in Nigeria's harsh neopatrimonial environment, any okada rider will think twice before rejecting such inter-member support, which he too will undoubtedly need one day. This is not to say that the riders are always pleased to donate money to their colleagues, and it is likely that the other riders, if not the union executive, will force unwilling members to do so, for example by threatening to take away some of their union membership privileges.

Loyalty among okada riders is further expressed by the rapid mobilization of riders when any one of them gets into trouble with other road users or the police. Okada riders can form 'instant mobs' that may not shy away from using violence when their interests are at stake. This can have consequences for political policy: in the northern city of Kano for example, commercial motorcyclists successfully, and by force, resisted *shari'a* enforcement squads that tried to prevent women from boarding okada bikes, regarding it as offensive to public morality (Adamu 2008: 148-9). In this way, okada riders can be seen as a social organization that, like vigilantes, commands obedience in the local community.

Riding okada, further, often entails a new source of patronage for deprived 'clients'. Many of the riders have obtained their bikes from senior family members or union leaders and subsequently repay them in weekly instalments. Okada riders are also widely believed to receive their motorcycles from politicians or state governors, in return for public demonstrations of support or for acting as paid muscle in conflicts

with political adversaries. Smith reports for example that during two recent elections 'Governor Orji Uzo Kalu of Abia State garnered significant urban support (and recruited a small army of potential political thugs) by pledging and then creating a program to provide okada drivers with new motorcycles on credit' (2007: 198).

In a broader sense, okada riders find themselves under the patronage of their unions. Union officials may not necessarily do much for them on the personal level (indeed, okada riders generally insisted that they receive more help and support from their co-riders than from the union executive), but they do provide individual riders with an institutional framework. The union supplies riders with an ID-card and a uniform, which, together with the 'settlement' the union pays to the police, saves them from some of the regular police hassle and bribes. In the case of conflicts with the police, market salesmen or car taxi drivers, okada riders can seek help within their unions, which are often big players in the national political arena (Albert 2007). This is reflected in the sense of respect riders have for their local okada chairmen and in their compliance with union rules.

Apart from providing young men with daily livelihoods and social networks of protection, support and patronage, the local collectives of okada riders also set rules and norms of proper conduct. Next to the imperative to help each other in times of need, the riders are told to drive responsibly, to abstain from using alcohol or drugs, and not to fight amongst each other. Some local okada units explicitly talk about themselves in terms of discipline, decency and purity. They insist that they are not 'thugs', but law-abiding, incorrupt and educated. These discourses can be seen to counter the perceived lack of moral discipline and law in the wider society.

Local okada collectives, then, constitute distinct 'worlds within a world', characterized by a form of self-governance that has its own moral codes and provides social support and security. In the context of weak state governance and neopatrimonial rule in Nigeria, okada signifies a form of self-governance in everyday life, providing security not only in terms of livelihood but also in the wider senses of protection, rule enforcement, social safety and morality. This mode of self-governance however comes with the dangers of (apart from the daily navigation of the hazardous Nigerian traffic) the often violent world of transport unions, as riders are easily drawn into the neopatrimonial politics of resource allocation fueled by the overlapping interests of the union leaderships and political parties.

As this brief discussion shows, the coping strategies pursued by ordinary citizens faced with neopatrimonial insecurity can take on a dazzling array of guises and immediate aims. But what is clear is that these emergent forms of self-governance cannot be easily bracketed within conventional dichotomies of formal-informal, public-private, personal-political *et cetera*; perhaps unsurprisingly so, as they are prompted by

a mode of governance which is itself fundamentally ambiguous in these respects. What also becomes apparent is that solving day-to-day problems in conditions of neopatrimonialism often calls for, ironically, the direct engagement with, rather than an outright distancing from, neopatrimonial politics. The poor and resourceless simply cannot afford to stay away from politics and must pick up whatever spoils they can. The forms of self-governance described here, then, are perhaps first and foremost defined by their pragmatism, allowing for subversion when possible and useful, but prompting engagement with the state when needed and gainful.

CONCLUSION

Even if 'good governance' goals have dominated public policy in postcolonial polities in the last decades, their politics and public administration often continue to be marked to varying degrees by authoritarianism, nepotism and corruption – the very practices good governance policy was to eradicate. In this paper we have tried to account for this apparent intractability of 'poor' and, occasionally, outright 'bad' governance. We set out by indicating that the limited success of good governance reform in many postcolonial states is related to longer histories of political practice, often characterized by the appropriation of state power as a personal asset and by the clientelist redistribution of wealth and official positions. Yet, we have shown that what appears as 'bad' governance to those embracing conventional, essentially Weberian, 'good' governance' conceptions, may in fact be 'good' governance after all. Practices of political clientelism or patronage may reflect and accord with widely shared cultural beliefs about good and legitimate governance. When this is the case, patron-client modes of governance may well be described within the 'good governance' paradigm of effectiveness, accountability and transparency.

However, the predominance of personalism and unofficial relationships that characterizes political clientelism may combine with modern bureaucracy in ways that drastically subvert the type of good governance embodied by traditional moral economies of patronage. The rise of the modern (post)colonial state has tended to produce hybrid systems of governance in which patronage politics have worked their way into ostensibly modern bureaucracies and economies, and have been able to 'live off' the resources provided by them. In many cases, these hybrid systems have evolved into extractive, neopatrimonial regimes, in which the state has come to be the source of rulers' personal enrichment and in which state elites *profit* from a public administration that is unstable, inefficient, nontransparent and that fails to distribute public resources to large segments of the population.

Strikingly, the social and political initiatives that 'ordinary' citizens develop in response to such conditions of neopatrimonial neglect do not necessarily correspond to the ideals of 'good governance'. To the contrary, these initiatives most often rework familiar patronage models – giving shape to alternative forms of patron-clientelism – and fashion systems of self-governance that exert alternative, sometimes violent, modes of political control. Just as the neopatrimonial regimes to which they respond, these popular forms of self-governance are ambiguously positioned within such conventional dichotomies as private-public, personal-political, state-society.

The argument developed here probably raises more questions than it answers. One set of issues sparked by this article relates to the enforceability of good governance paradigms by national and transnational actors. Even when assuming that good governance values such as transparency, accountability and efficiency are supported by significant segments of the postcolonial public, it is hard to see how the dominant approach of enforcement of these values could work. For the implementation of its good governance projects across the postcolony, the World Bank, for example, continues to rely heavily on the co-operation of state agencies that, given the neopatrimonial logic by which they operate, would seem to have preciously little to gain from such projects.

A second set of questions raised by this article relates to the usefulness of the concept of neopatrimonialism. Though the concept, as we see it, has much to offer as a heuristic device, bringing together otherwise seemingly disparate elements into a rather coherent model of ('bad') governance, the issue of its pertinence outside sub-Sahara Africa is still largely undecided. Added to this, our discussion raises questions with regard to the various causes that may underlie the emergence of neopatrimonial rule. Though much of the literature from which we have drawn agrees *that* traditional patronage politics tends to have translated into informal systems of state patronage, which, on their part, may serve as fertile breeding grounds for systems of neopatrimonial governance, it remains disappointingly silent as to the exact *why*, *when* and *how* of these 'regime switches'. Even if the history of colonial state-building, economic centralization, weak institutionalization and economic recession all seem to be causal agents, none of these, however, would seem to be sufficient conditions for the emergence of neopatrimonialism (cf. Pitcher *et al.* 2009). This could mean, as we suspect, that neopatrimonialism does not simply arise, rather mechanically, out of certain identifiable 'initial conditions' but is effectively constructed along the way, quite contingently, by real-life political actors dealing with, and taking advantage of, such conditions. In any case, more research in this field is needed to understand why neopatrimonial politics have become prevalent in certain postcolonial states.

Equally pressing is the issue of the wide range of cases that are currently covered with the concept of neopatrimonialism. The many polities that have been described as instances of neopatrimonialism differ widely in significant respects, ranging, for example, from 'consolidating democracies' such as Ghana, to autocratic regimes such as Chad and Sudan, to polities that are hardly governed at all, such as Somalia (Siegle 2006, cf. Bratton and Van de Walle 1994). Surely, within the broad category of neopatrimonialism, different types of neopatrimonial regimes might be distinguished. Bratton and Van de Walle (1994), for instance, distinguish four different 'meaningful variants' of neopatrimonialism in sub-Saharan Africa alone. Grouping all possible types and variants under a single, broad category of neopatrimonialism would also obscure the empirically widely varying degrees of 'badness' presented by them. The partial and relatively 'benign' neopatrimonialism found in the countryside of North India, for example, compares favourably to the comprehensive, extremely dysfunctional and devastating neopatrimonialism of such 'sultanistic regimes' as Idi Amin's Uganda or Charles Taylor's Liberia (see e.g. Chehabi and Linz 1998, Bøås 2001, Van Gool 2008). Also, insensitivity to different types and degrees of neopatrimonial governance carries the risk of over-, or underestimating the 'room to manoeuvre' of ordinary citizens in coming to terms with it. The elaborate and well-institutionalised strategies of self-governance by ordinary Nigerian citizens described in this article, for example, may not be viable in ethnically and politically less pluralistic neopatrimonial regimes. Hence, explicit sensitivity to the scope, causes and large inter-case variety of neopatrimonial regimes would seem to be a *sine qua non* for 'neopatrimonialism' to claim its place as an indispensable conceptual tool in the comparative study of governance.

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