

What Neopatrimonialism Is – Six Questions to the Concept

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Abstract:

The aim of this background paper is a modest one. It tries to establish in which areas consensus can be found in the application of the concept of neopatrimonialism. Also, it outlines the concept's limits and – more generally – puts forward some suggestions for using the concept in the following six areas: (1) Basic definition, (2) delimitation of a neopatrimonial system, (3) neopatrimonialism as a political authority concept, (4) relationship to other concepts, (5) indicators and (6) subtypes. A particular focus lies on using the concept for comparative analysis of informal institutions.

Keywords: Neopatrimonialism, informal institutions, comparison

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“Proponents of neopatrimonialism do not explicitly test its main propositions but take them as given (Therkildsen 2005: 41).”

“[A]nalysts need to avoid a priori assumptions about the existence of neopatrimonialism and hasty invocations of the phenomenon [...] without thorough documentation of the precise forms, characters, origins, transformations, contestations, extent, and other important features of neopatrimonialism (deGrassi 2008: 122).”

1 Introduction

Going by the plethora of current articles and monographs applying the concept to describe, and, less often, to analyse the exercise of political power, neopatrimonialism seems to be the prevalent form of governance in non-OECD countries. Researchers working in social science as well as area studies have widely applied the concept to very different time periods and contexts, including Latin America, the Middle East, Southern Europe, Eastern Europe, Western Europe before Industrialization, Southeast Asia, Central Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.¹ The widespread use of the concept, particularly in respect to regions such as sub-Saharan Africa, has created a voluminous and diverse body of literature.

Scholars applying the concept assert that distinct features distinguish governance in these non-OECD states from their counterparts in other regions (e.g. Bratton/van de Walle 1997: 63; Chabal 2005: 21; van de Walle 2001c: 16; Englebert 2000: 1, 5-6; Chabal/Daloz 1999: xix; Bayart 1993[1989]: xiv; Médard 1982: 165). The term neopatrimonialism denotes the simultaneous operation of two Weberian ideal types of domination: patrimonial (a subtype of traditional domination) and legal-rational (Weber 1980 [1922]: 133-134, 136). In other words, the basic proposition is that formal state institutions are fused with informal, particularistic politics of rulers (cf. Bratton/van de Walle 1997: 274). As I see an emerging consensus on this understanding in current literature employing the concept, I take this definition as point of departure for this paper. Thus, the working definition is: “Neopatrimonialism is a mixture of two co-existing, partly interwoven, types of domination: namely, patrimonial and legal-rational bureaucratic domination” (Erdmann/Engel 2007: 105).

Unfortunately, agreement seems to stop here and current publications have been highly critical of the concept, in particular of its application as a heuristic; a descriptive and analytical tool for gaining insights into governance in non-OECD states (e.g. Therkildsen 2005; deGrassi 2008; Pitcher et al. 2009). It is common to criticize the “catch all” or *deus ex machina* use of the concept (Theobald 1982; Erdmann/Engel 2006). In response, this brief background paper aims to achieve two things in particular: (1) provide some information about the current

¹ For an extensive discussion of the concept of neopatrimonialism see Erdmann/Engel (2006: on the use of the concept in respect to different area contexts see 5). See also von Soest (2009 37-41, 56-58).

state of research using the concept (what, in my view, “the concept is”) and (2) take stock of disagreements, limits and insufficient application of neopatrimonialism. Some initial disclaimers seem to be appropriate. Firstly, the text will not allude to the (historical) genesis of the concept of neopatrimonialism. Earlier contributions, such as Eisenstadt (1973) and Zolberg (1969), as well as more recent publications, such as Erdmann/Engel (2007) provide an adequate introduction in this respect. Secondly, my particular interest is to assess the empirical applicability of the concept. As outlined by Therkildsen and deGrassi in the initial citations, neopatrimonial relations are often said to exist but this is rarely tested. However, it is exactly this empirical application which is crucial for comparative analysis and new insights in the way domination is exercised in such polities. This paper therefore asks whether, and in that case how, neopatrimonialism can meaningfully be used for comparative analysis. Thirdly, and related to this, since I have particular knowledge of neopatrimonialism in the African context, the literature used might (unintentionally) be biased to that region.

2 Features of the Neopatrimonialism Concept and its Application

2.1 Definition – Fusion and Insecurity

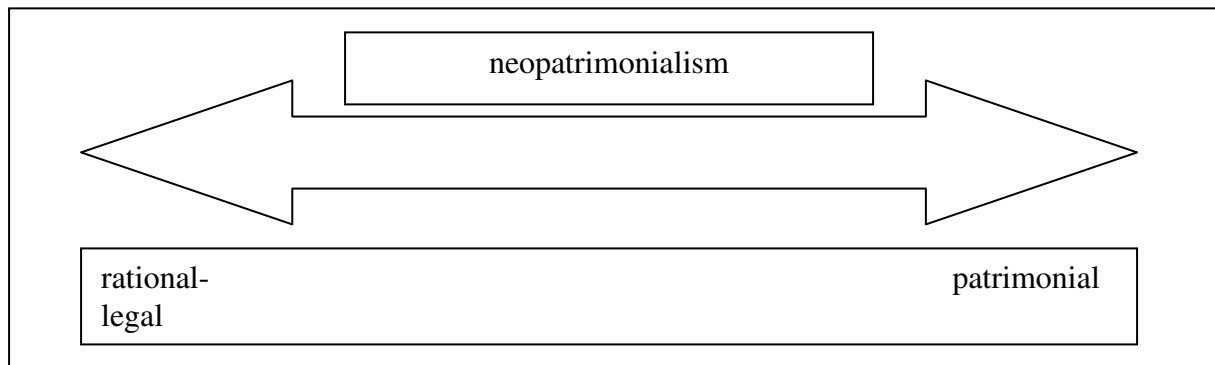
As outlined, neopatrimonialism denotes the simultaneous operation of patrimonialism and legal-rational domination. Specifically, the ideal type of patrimonialism connotes that a patron in a certain social and political order bestows gifts from private resources on followers to obtain and strengthen their loyalty (Weber 1980 [1922]: 133-134, 136). Clients, in turn, obtain material benefits and protection in exchange for support. Following Médard (1982: 178), “patrimonial domination is exercised by a ruler with the help of an administrative staff. [...] In other words, the patriarchal logic is used beyond the kinship ties, on a larger scale”. The exchange between patron and client is inherently unequal, which lets Rothchild (1986) to describe this relationship as a “hegemonial exchange”.

The “neo” in neopatrimonialism stands for the formal institutions and rational-legal rule of the state, which coexist along with patrimonial relations. Patrons typically are office-holders who use public funds or the power of being in office to build a personal following allowing them to stay in power (Therkildsen 2005: 37). Social practice as a result is fundamentally different compared to the impersonal formal rules which are supposed to guide official action. How-

ever, it is essential not to treat informal institutions as pathological in their own right, but analytically as norms which can produce conflicting rules and sanctions.²

Visibly speaking, neopatrimonialism oscillates on a continuum between the two extreme poles of rational-legal and patrimonial rule³ (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Neopatrimonial Continuum



Source: von Soest (2009: 39)

Three consequences follow from this reasoning: First, it is inappropriate to downplay the rational-legal aspect of neopatrimonial states as Chabal/Daloz (1999: 17) do when they maintain that “in most African countries, the state is no more than a décor, a pseudo-Western façade masking the realities of deeply personalized relations.” Secondly, the inherent consequence of this simultaneous interaction of different logics of rule is fundamental “insecurity” (Timm 2010) or lack of calculability (Therkildsen 2005: 36) about what behaviour, i.e. code, to expect from public officials. Third, as a further consequence of the fusion of different logics of rule, with varying degrees of rational-legal and patrimonial rule, respectively, it is hardly possible to – in a Weberian sense – define one ideal type of neopatrimonial domination. This is possible for rational-legal and patrimonial rule.

2.2 Delimiting a neopatrimonial system

As the concept of neopatrimonialism makes heuristic claims about state agents and state institutions, the state is the natural point of departure for any analysis of neopatrimonial relations. As a political sociology concept, the relationship of the state and society is of key importance (Migdal 2001; Migdal 1988; Chazan et al. 1992; Rothchild/Chazan 1988). Other scholars

² On different potential relationships of formal and informal institutions see Lauth (2000) and Helmke/Levitsky (2004; 2006)

³ Therefore, binary oppositions between rational-legal rule and patrimonial rule are insufficient (cf. the critique of several governance conceptions in Engel/Olsen 2005), but that a fusion – with varying degrees – is the main characteristic of neopatrimonial regimes

have attempted to incorporate additional factors, such as international influences (Schlichte 2005; Schlichte/Wilke 2000) and new social spaces (Engel/Mehler 2005) into the analysis, something which is highly warranted, but even in these explorations the state remains the basic starting point.

Furthermore, neopatrimonial rule is institutionalized, i.e. it has a rule and a sanction component (Lauth 2000: 24; Faust/Marx 2004: 33).⁴ Informal practice functions as a deeply ingrained logic of action which cannot be removed or changed by individual actors easily. Even a state president, who would potentially qualify as *the* patron, cannot change this pattern as he or she pleases as other actors rely on and expect neopatrimonial exchanges. Borrowing a phrase from Callaghy and Ravenhill (1994), neopatrimonialism is “hemmed in”. In much literature dealing with the concept, an implicit or explicit claim is made that some political systems are neopatrimonial and some are not. [Bratton and van de Walle \(1997: 277, see also 62\)](#) for instance maintain that “the distinctive institutional hallmark of African regimes is neopatrimonialism”. For Clapham neopatrimonialism even is “the most salient type [of rule] in the Third World” (1985: 49; see also [Kohli 2004: 394](#)).

In order to substantiate these claims, there is a need to specify “when” a political system can be termed neopatrimonial. Which mix of rational-legal and patrimonial strategies must be existent? This delimitation might not be a dichotomous differentiation but rather a continuum, but still, almost nothing can be found in the literature regarding the question of how to delimit a neopatrimonial system. Taking into account the obvious problem in clearly specifying informal institutions and coherently surveying heterogeneous state institutions, I would propose to start with two points of reference, functionally and historically, to characterize this kind of system:

- On the cross-sectional level, neopatrimonial practices must be found on various instances in a state. More than half of the state institutions must be characterized by neopatrimonial behaviour. Obviously, as states are not monolithic, this assessment requires a strong qualitative dimension (for potential indicators see below).
- Neopatrimonialism must have been historically entrenched. Following this longitudinal dimension, this logic must have been dominant for at least some years, far more than a legislative period, in order to be termed “neopatrimonial”.⁵

⁴ North, in his much-cited notion, defined institutions as “the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, [...] the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction” (1990: 3). It is therefore important to delimit individual cases of theft from institutionalised corruption and neopatrimonialism (van Donge 2008).

⁵ Colonialism with its “imported” statehood ([Badie 2000 \[1992\]](#)) and the implementation of a new type or rule can be seen as a central variable for the creation of neopatrimonialism. Yet, according to existing literature, neopatrimonial structures can also be found in states without colonial legacy. Here, the creation of a central state

Admittedly, these are very general qualifications, but I would claim, that they serve as a starting point for thinking about delimiting neopatrimonial states from those where patrimonial relations are not dominant (rational-legal system) or are completely dominant (patrimonial/sultanistic system). For assessing both the cross-sectional and longitudinal level, specific indicators have to be applied (see below).

2.3 Political domination vs. regime type

A clear consensus has emerged that neopatrimonialism is not a regime type *sui generis* but – in Weber’s terms – a form of exerting dominance which runs counter to the commonly accepted *trias* of democracy; hybrid regimes/defect democracies and autocracy (Bank 2010). As neopatrimonialism induces a fundamental insecurity about the behaviour of state officials and therefore abrogates the rule of law, it is incompatible with the realization of a democracy. Thus, as a dominating practice, neopatrimonialism can only be found in hybrid or autocratic regimes (on the other hand, an autocratic system is not necessarily dominated by neopatrimonial strategies; see table 1).⁶

In fact, this can be seen as one of the main advantages of the concept of neopatrimonialism: That it allows for moving beyond the traditional regime type debate and to gain more detailed information about the differences in power relations and how politics is conducted in hybrid and autocratic regimes. Political sociology concepts provide insights about how rule is organized in these regimes and might also be the basis for more advanced typologies in the current “demise of democracy” debate (cf. Timm 2010; on the alleged comeback of autocracies Merkel 2010).

Table 1: Government and bureaucracy in different regime types

Regime type	Democratic		Hybrid	Authoritarian	
		Illiberal / defect / deliberate etc.	Possible sub-types	Bureaucratic	Neopatrimonial
Government	Legal	Legal (personal)	Legal (personal)	Personal	Personal
Bureaucracy	Legal-	Neopatri-	Neopatri-	Legal-	Neopatri-

potentially also led to the overlapping of different logics of domination. On Thailand cf. Nishizaki (2006), on Nepal Pfaff-Czarnecka (2004).

⁶ To be sure, neopatrimonial instances can be found in every political regime, the question is whether they are dominant or not.

	rational	monial	monial	rational	monial
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Source: Erdmann/Engel (2007: 113)

2.4 Relationship to other concepts

Stating that neopatrimonialism is characterised by the simultaneous operation of patrimonial and rational-legal domination does not resolve the “problem of specificity” (Erdmann/Engel 2006: 31): Are there different modes of neopatrimonial practice and what concepts can be found for detailed analysis? The three concepts clientelism, patronage and corruption have found wide application in social science analysis of developing countries and are sometimes used interchangeably.⁷ Therefore, establishing definitions and through that the relationships of how these concepts relate to one another seems appropriate. I argue that neopatrimonialism is the general concept which encompasses clientelism/patronage and corruption as specific modalities.

Clientelism functions as an integral part of neopatrimonialism.⁸ The following definition is proposed: “Clientelism means the exchange or the brokerage of specific services and resources for political support in the form of votes” (Erdmann/Engel 2006: 20). It is based on personal relations (Boone 1998 [1990]: 189). As affirmed for neopatrimonialism in general, clientelism, denoting relationships between individual patrons and clients, “logically excludes relationships between equals” (Médard 1982: 171; see also Szeftel 2000: 435). Normally, patrons and clients are tied in a complex patron-broker-client network permeating whole state structures (Powell 1970). Clientelism does not necessarily have a strong redistributive effect; particularly in the African context it often has to be understood as a “symbolic” exchange (van de Walle 2003: 311-313; van de Walle 2001a: 71).

Patronage semantically takes the viewpoint of the patron as its point of departure. In common use it alludes more specifically to the particularistic provision of jobs in the public administration. In contrast, conceptualising patronage as “the politically motivated distribution of ‘favours’ not to individuals but essentially to groups which in the African context will be mainly ethnic or subethnic groups” (Erdmann/Engel 2006: 21) to me seems rather unusual and less convincing.⁹

⁷ As with neopatrimonialism, research using the concepts of clientelism, patronage and corruption is confronted with a plethora of different, sometimes contrasting, understandings. Thus, in finding definitions, this chapter necessarily has to be selective.

⁸ A different perspective is provided by Médard (1982: 165), who saw clientalism and neopatrimonialism as competing models for explaining the “politics of underdevelopment”.

⁹ In the section in question in Erdmann/Engel, apart from Clapham (1982), there is no original literature mentioned where this definition is provided or on which it could be based.

Corruption is another symptom of neopatrimonialism.¹⁰ In general, scholars stress the ubiquity of corruption in developing countries (see detailed overviews in Andvig et al. 2001; Williams 1999). The encyclopaedic definition denotes corruption as “misuse of public office for private benefit” (e.g. Anderson/Tverdova 2003: 92; Andvig et al. 2001: 5-6).¹¹ A more specific conceptualisation focuses on the transaction between private and public sector actors through which collective goods are illegitimately converted into private payoffs. Following this narrower understanding, corruption takes place at the point of interaction between state and non-state actors (Rose-Ackerman 1978: 85-88).

It is common to differentiate between “political” or “grand” corruption at the highest level of political authority and “bureaucratic” or “petty” corruption in the public administration, i.e. at the implementation level of politics (e.g. Szeftel 2000: 427).¹² Practicing bureaucratic corruption, civil servants “charge prices that are above the permitted prices” (Banerjee 1997: 1303). Bureaucratic corruption and political corruption tend to exist simultaneously and to be mutually reinforcing (Andvig et al. 2001: 11).

As an informal practice which runs counter to formal institutions, neopatrimonialism weakens institutional safeguards against corrupt practices. Hope concurs that widespread corruption “is a symptom that the state is functioning poorly” (2002: 103; see also Lederman et al. 2005: 1, 27-28; van de Walle 2001c: 51, 135). Weak formal institutions in neopatrimonial states make corruption a “high-profit, low risk activity” (Kpundeh 2004: 125).

Consequently, corruption serves as an indicator (amongst others) for neopatrimonial relations. However, one important caveat remains: Several scholars dealing with the concept of corruption treat it as an exception or as a violation of norms. That might certainly be the case, but substantive research (Anders 2002; Blundo/Olivier de Sardan 2006) has shown that what can be qualified as individual corruption in fact often is institutionalized behaviour of state agents in order to fulfil conflicting individual and societal demands. If this is the case, any analysis treating informal practices as deviations from the norm and as solely individual “misuses” of authority become inadequate (cf. [Mungiu-Pippidi 2006](#)).¹³

¹⁰ In contrast, other scholars see corruption as the general term encompassing other modalities (cf. Mungiu-Pippidi 2006).

¹¹ A different definition to the same effect was coined by Klitgaard (1997: 500-501): “Corruption equals monopoly plus discretion minus accountability.”

¹² In her ground-breaking study, Rose-Ackerman (1978) differentiated between “legislative” and “bureaucratic” corruption.

¹³ Furthermore, forms of corruption might differ strongly in response to different context variables (e.g. Sindzingre/Milelli 2009).

2.5 Indicators

Neopatrimonialism is a universal concept¹⁴, which despite being predominantly used to describe political relations in particular regional contexts makes a claim to explain governance everywhere, i.e. in different world regions. For this endeavour, it is essential to establish the concepts “hard core” and its “protective belt” (Lakatos), which can be altered without violating the concept’s foundational characteristics.¹⁵ For instance: Is it necessary that there is a single individual “who resists delegating all but the most trivial decision-making tasks” (Bratton/van de Walle 1997: 63) filling the state’s highest office in order to speak of a neopatrimonial state? Or can a neopatrimonial system also be dominated by an oligarchy? Such conceptual questions are of particular importance for cross-regional comparison. Reflecting the multiple understandings of neopatrimonialism, a plethora of indicators have been proposed and used (see figure 2):

Figure 2: (Potential) Indicators – inductively

Government

Apex of state

- President / Big man
- Oligarchy

Ministerial cabinet

- Size / number of ministries
- Composition / recruitment (“Family tree”)
- Minister rotation

State structure

Public administration – macro / state-owned enterprises

- Size of public administration
- Size of state-owned enterprises

Brokerage / clientelist networks

Patron-broker-client networks permeating the state

¹⁴ On the difference between universal and relative concepts see Hyden (1996: 26) and also Engel/Olsen (2005: 2).

¹⁵ Cf. also Sartori’s (1970; 1994) concept of conceptual stretching.

Law and policies

Contradictory laws

Complicating compliance

Government consumption

Consumption vs.
public investment

Administration

Corruption

Use of public office for private /
particularistic benefit

Public administration - micro

- Recruitment
- promotion
- Day-to-day business

The principal idea is to use indicators which permit cross-country, cross-regional as well as inter-temporal comparison.¹⁶ Taking into account the complex nature of neopatrimonial relations, this is a very demanding task as crucial information is at risk of being lost at the operationalisation of every indicator. Nonetheless, in order to systematically establish differences between cases as well as to create typologies and, in turn, to gain new knowledge about differences and commonalities of exerting domination in different polities, cross-national comparison is vital.

To start with, it is useful to distinguish analytically between the political and the administrative arena of governance. Neopatrimonial relationships on the political and the administrative level should be determined with different indicators taking into account the two spheres' different rationalities.

To a large degree, politics in a state is routinized through an administrative staff (Möller/Shierenbeck 2009: 12). That is to say, authority predominantly is bureaucracy (Weber 1980 [1922]: 126). Neopatrimonialism on the administrative level can principally be **analyzed** as deviations from Weber's ideal type of bureaucracy (Weber 1980 [1922]: 551-579).¹⁷ His conceptualization involves a clear separation between the private and the public sphere and

¹⁶ Principally, I do not think that informal institutions in every country are a case *sui generis* and hence not comparable to others.

¹⁷ Every real state differs from the ideal type laid out by Weber. Deviation is thus a matter of degree and not of principle. See for instance Clapham's article "Degrees of Statehood" (1998).

focuses on the expertise of the bureaucracy's "human agents", i.e. civil servants (Weber 1980 [1922]: 125-126). Five principles characterize the bureaucracy:

- (1) high degree of specialization,
- (2) hierarchical authority structure with limited areas of command and responsibility,
- (3) impersonality of relationships between organizational members,
- (4) recruitment of officials on the basis of technical expertise,
- (5) differentiation of private household and public income (Mouzelis 1967: 39).¹⁸

As a basic feature, rational-legal domination follows clearly specified procedures, i.e. it is rule-bound and depersonalized. Two aspects are of particular interest from a neopatrimonial research perspective: human resource policy (recruitment and progression of civil servants; appointment of senior staff) and day-to-day business of the administration (whether it is autonomous from political and societal influences) (for the complex conceptualisation cf. Evans 1995; Evans/Rauch 1999; Rauch/Evans 2000).

With regard to the political arena, Bratton/van de Walle (1997: 63-68), focusing on the African context, propose the following three informal practices as being constitutive of a neopatrimonial system:

- (1) concentration of political power ("presidentialism"),
- (2) systematic clientelism, and
- (3) particularistic use of state resources.¹⁹

They can be used to establish the neopatrimonial profile of a country on the political level. Responding to the often covert and secret nature of neopatrimonial practices, an attempt should be made to present "objective" and not only perception-based indicators. In the following, some indicators deemed to be particularly relevant are presented. Yet, in order to create a comprehensive neopatrimonial profile, all eight indicator types (figure 2) should be applied in small-N or medium-N analysis. This would allow scholars to establish more sophisticated typologies and subtypes of neopatrimonial regimes.

Two of the indicators briefly presented here focus on the ministerial cabinet which serves as the key locus of neopatrimonial practices in a lot of African states (van de Walle 2001b: 32-

¹⁸ Weber's full list includes ten characteristics: 1) personally free and subject to authority, 2) hierarchy, 3) clearly defined sphere of competence, 4) free selection, 5) technical qualifications, 6) fixed salaries, 7) primary occupation, 8) system of promotion, 9) separated from ownership, 10) systematic discipline (Weber 1980 [1922]: 126-127).

¹⁹ For similar "fairly predictable characteristics" of neopatrimonialism see van de Walle (2001c: 118-129). The understanding comes close to Teichman's (2004: 33, 31; see also Theobald 1999: 494) defining features of *caudillismo* – the Latin American "form" of neopatrimonialism – which involves personalism, discretion and selective access to state resources. In fact, the application of similar but nominally different concepts has largely prevented cross-regional comparison.

33). First, the “concentration of political power” implies the dominance of one individual, who controls the policies as well as politics and single-handedly appoints individuals to public positions (Bratton/van de Walle 1997: 63).²⁰ As a defining feature of this “big man politics”, at least in Africa (cf. e.g. [Young 2004](#); Hyden 2006: 94-115), the president or, in other words, patron, stays in power for a long time, sometimes until the end of his life. In other neopatrimonial systems oligarchic elites, e.g. land owners, political dynasties and economic elites dominate the political landscape. In these systems the patron at the apex of the state is recruited from the oligarchic elite or must deal with oligarchic elites outside the state apparatus ([Hutchcroft 1998](#): 46-55).

Additionally, neopatrimonial “big men” – at least in Africa – frequently rotate the political elite in order to prevent any potential opponent from developing his/her own power base, and to extend the clientelist network (Bratton/van de Walle 1997: 75, 86; Snyder/Mahoney 1999: 108-109; Snyder 1992: 392). The fulfilment of both requirements, a long tenure of presidents and a short tenure of key government members, points to the characteristic power concentration of a neopatrimonial system.

The second component of neopatrimonial rule introduced here is “systematic clientelism”, e.g. the distribution of public resources through public sector jobs, licenses, contracts and projects, by the patron in order to consolidate his or her rule. Generally, the president secures loyalty through an “extensive network of personal patronage, rather than through ideology or impersonal law” (Snyder 1992: 379). This practice can be observed through analyzing the size and the structure of a country’s cabinet, a body which often acts as a focal point for awarding personal favours to the political elite. As outlined by van de Walle (2005: 83), the tendency of cabinets to grow is “mirrored by an increase in the size of other national bodies.” Thus, in addition to studying the growth of the cabinet, the size of the whole public administration and of state-owned enterprises can be analysed.

The particularistic use of state resources constitutes the third feature of neopatrimonial practice. According to Bratton and van de Walle (1997: 66), neopatrimonial presidents make “little distinction between the public and private coffers, routinely and extensively dipping into the state treasury for their own political needs.” It is particularly difficult to find macro-level indicators for the hidden practice of using public office for particularistic benefit. For instance, high state consumption (compared to state investment) might not only be indicative of neopatrimonial practices but could also be attributed to a mere short-term time horizon of the

²⁰ Bratton and van de Walle term this feature “presidentialism”. This, however, is misleading as the traditional political science definition refers to the direct election of the president by the electorate.

executive. Some scholars therefore specifically use the extent of “sovereignty expenditures”, e.g. the expenses for the diplomatic service, as a proxy (van de Walle 2005: 79-82).

Here, the particularistic appropriation of public funds, assessed for instance through the existence of special funds over which only the president has discretion, is used as an indicator. In addition, Transparency International’s controversial Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)²¹ and the similar “control of corruption”-component of the World Bank Governance Index (Kaufmann et al. 2005b; [Kaufmann et al. 2005a](#)) can be used in order to give some indication of the prevalence of the particularistic use of state resources. Yet, both measures are rather rough and seem to provide scientific accuracy which is not necessarily existent. Furthermore, as both the CPI and the Governance Index assess grand *and* petty corruption (and not only corruption at the political level), they are only second-best indicators for the particularistic use of state resources.²²

2.6 Neopatrimonial subtypes

Differentiating between distinct forms of neopatrimonialism, i.e. finding sub-types, might be a promising route to overcome the catch-all character of much of the application of neopatrimonialism (see e.g. Sindzingre 2007 for a distinction between cronyism (East Asia) and neopatrimonialism (Africa)). As outlined above, a) power concentration, b) systematic clientelism and c) particularistic use of state resources are the three main modalities which can be used for the differentiation of various forms of neopatrimonial rule.

With respect to power concentration I have differentiated two types: 1) personalised (“big man”) and 2) oligarchic neopatrimonialism. Regarding the degree of patrimonial penetration in the state (i.e. systematic clientelism and particularistic use of state resources), there are systems with a high, medium, or low degree of patrimonialisation. Consequently, I present a generalized matrix, along which these two categories (figure 3) allow the building of a typology. In contrast to other attempts, it distinguishes two clearly specified dimensions.

²¹ The CPI is a composite indicator which incorporates various studies in which experts give their perception on a country’s incidence of corruption (Graf Lambsdorff 2005).

²² Other research has equally assumed low CPI scores to be highly correlated with neopatrimonial practices (Manow 2002: 24-25; Basedau 2003: 281-287).

Figure 3: Subtypes

		Mode of power concentration	
		Personalised	Oligarchic
Degree of patrimonial penetration	High		
	Medium		
	Low		

3 Conclusion: The Usefulness of the Neopatrimonialism Concept

The biggest advantage of the concept of neopatrimonialism is that it “systematically links politics to the exercise of power which is a core subject in political science” (Erdmann/Engel 2007: 114). It allows for analysis of different forms of exerting authority and transcends the broad regime type typology. With its universal claim the concept furthermore permits comparative analysis, also across different regions (“travelling of concepts”). Thus, it also has the potential to provide a contribution to comparative area studies (Basedau/Köllner 2007).

In this paper, an attempt has been made to further specify the concept by suggesting two general points of reference for delimiting neopatrimonial systems compared to rational-legal and patrimonial ones. These points of reference comprise a longitudinal (neopatrimonialism must have been the prevalent mode of governance for a certain period of time) and a cross-sectional dimension (the majority of state institutions must be influenced by patrimonial relations). Also, establishing differences along the two dimensions “mode of power concentration” and “degree of patrimonial penetration” might be a first route towards finding neopatrimonial subtypes and, in turn, gaining more specific knowledge of the mode of governance of a state.

On the other hand, the concept has got some serious deficiencies. On the methodological level, at least without further specification, neopatrimonialism is very broad in that it is manifested in many different ways. This feature is detrimental to the concept’s empirical applicability and explanatory power. As a result, several scholars doubt its empirical value altogether. With respect to patrimonialism, Theobald (1982: 554, 555) criticised that “rather than isolating a socio-political phenomenon, it tends to gloss over substantial differences.” To him, “it has become something of a catch-all concept, in danger of losing its analytical utility.”

Indeed, with its broad claim of fusing patrimonial and rational-legal domination within the state, neopatrimonialism falls short of the requirement that it should allow to link different expressions “to variations in observable outcomes” (Therkildsen 2005: 38). The question about *the* effect of the “elusive” practice of neopatrimonialism on public policy therefore is too general and, consequently, not falsifiable. The effect of neopatrimonial relations can only be assessed with respect to *particular* instances of public policy and/or public administration (von Soest 2009: 200f.).

The fluid nature of neopatrimonialism requires to exactly assess neopatrimonial manifestations of rule:

- (1) The respective expression of neopatrimonialism is highly context-specific and path dependent. Its specific manifestation might vary from country to country (inter-country difference), between state organizations in one country (intra-country difference), and between different points in time (inter-temporal difference). Therefore, comprehensive neopatrimonial profiles of different polities should be established.
- (2) Some facets of neopatrimonialism do not seem to be universal; at least some of its expressions can be different across countries. For instance, power concentration in Indonesia – at least recently – is not characterized by long tenures of state presidents. The extent of case particularity and commonality remains under-researched. Again, neopatrimonial profiles of countries would aid towards a more systematically study in the comparison of informal institutions.
- (3) Neopatrimonialism is highly flexible and resilient. An example from Zambia illustrates this point (cf. von Soest 2007): The semi-autonomous Zambia Revenue Authority (ZRA) has replaced the former state-integrated tax administration and has thus been able to partly separate from its previous position as a link in the neopatrimonial chain and to increase the capability to raise revenue. Consequently, the ZRA has reduced the space for neopatrimonial practices with respect to the collection of taxes, i.e. on the *revenue* side of the budget. In contrast, the continued particularistic use of state resources suggests that political actors in Zambia still satisfy neopatrimonial demands through state *expenditure*. It can even be argued that the strengthened capability to raise revenue has augmented the means available for neopatrimonial rewards through expenditure.²³ Following this argument, the diminished space for neopatrimonialism (clientelism, corruption) in one crucial area of the public administration might have even strengthened it on the whole.

Furthermore, the institutional perspective presented here leaves important questions unanswered. First, in this paper neopatrimonialism was defined as a set of informal institutions, which, as all institutions, are characterised by a rule and a sanction component. This implies that the resilience of neopatrimonialism not only is dependent on patrons' interests but also on demands from clients. Following this argument, elites in a neopatrimonial system are subject to sanctions in case they do not fulfil neopatrimonial expectations. Yet, it seems obvious that

²³ This reasoning fits well with other literature hypothesising that “new, relatively powerful Revenue Authorities that aid donors have been helping to establish in Africa have become major conduits for accumulating and channelling unrecorded revenues in wrong hands” (Moore/Rakner 2002: 7).

the ruler's individual decisions should make a difference. The importance of human agency in a neopatrimonial system merits further empirical investigation.

Second, and related to that, the perspective of clients remains under-examined. The three dimensions "concentration of power", "systematic clientelism" and "particularistic use of state resources" in their applied notion focus on the political elite. This, of course, is only one aspect of neopatrimonial relations within the state. Third, patron-broker-client networks can hardly be assessed fully through the framework proposed. Mapping the relationship of different actors through network analysis might be an appropriate method in this respect.

In summary, there is a growing consensus on some conceptual questions in much of the current literature dealing with the concept of neopatrimonialism (e.g., mode of authority vs. regime type, mix of rational-legal rule). This provides common ground for further conceptual and, in particular, comparative-empirical work. Despite the serious deficiencies of the concept and its application, using the neopatrimonialism concept can further advance our understanding of informal institutions and can provide detailed insights in their interaction with formal institutions.

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