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Clientelism, Corruption & Catastrophe

Morris Szeftel

In the previous issue of this journal (ROAPE 84), the author argued that international anti-corruption efforts created conflicts between aid donors and African debtor governments because they attacked the ability of local interests to control and appropriate state resources. The control of corruption is an essential element in the legitimation of liberal democracy and in the promotion of global markets. However, it also threatens the local accumulation of wealth and property (dependent as it is on access to the state) in post-colonial Africa. This article explores another dimension of this problem, namely the way in which clientelist forms of political mobilisation have promoted corruption and intensified crisis. Clientelism has been a key mechanism through which political interests have built the electoral support necessary to ensure access to the state's resources. In turn, it has shaped a politics of factional competition over power and resources, a politics obsessed with the division of the political spoils. The article argues that this process is not unique to Africa. What is different, however, is that factional conflict and its attendant corruption have had such devastating consequences. This reflects the particular forms which clientelism has taken on the continent. There is a need, it concludes, to find ways to shift African politics towards issues of social justice and government performance and away from a concern with a division of the state's resources.

The Context of African Corruption

Why is corruption seemingly so much more damaging in its consequences in Africa than in other parts of the world and what might be done about it? This paper explores ways in which patterns of clientelist mobilisation make corruption in Africa such a serious problem for economic and political development. Although widespread in Africa, high-level corruption (the misuse of public office, public resources or public responsibility for private – personal or group – gain) is not markedly worse than in many other parts of the developing and former communist world. The sums involved are often distinctly modest when measured against the scale of corruption scandals in Russia, France, Italy or the Pacific rim. Yet corruption in Africa is universally perceived, by external observers and by local reformers alike, as being 'catastrophic' in its impact on development, a major cause (in the eyes of some, even the main cause) of economic crisis, authoritarianism, political instability and state collapse. Stephen Riley wrote that 'corruption in African societies ... [has] short-term and longer-term development effects, both of them catastrophic', adding that it was often 'part of a syndrome of de-development or underdevelopment which destroys the life chances of the poor majority' (Riley, 2000:138). John Mukum Mbaku observes that corruption 'has risen to become one of the most important constraints to genuine development in

Africa' (1998:29). The president of the World Bank, James D Wolfensohn, speaks of the need to deal with 'the cancer of corruption' and calls for 'national leaders ... to take a stand' adding, for good measure, that 'civil society plays a key role as well' (World Bank, 1997: <http://www.worldbank.org/html/prddr/trans/so96/art3.htm>). And a former editor of *The Times* asserts that

several sub-Saharan African countries have been ruined by criminal dictators ... who shifted much of the national wealth to their own Swiss bank accounts ... In these countries children die of malnutrition because of past corruption (The Times, London, 15 February 1999).

Such views are, if anything, held even more strongly on the African continent than abroad. It is difficult to find (or even imagine) any African reformers or activists who do not identify corruption as a major cause of crisis and abuse of human rights or who do not demand action to curb it. Anti-corruption measures have become an important part of local demands for democratisation and of the economic and political 'conditionalities' imposed by international aid donors negotiating the terms of economic restructuring and political reform programmes.

Such claims and attention both exaggerate and underestimate the importance of corruption. They exaggerate the extent to which it is a cause of crisis in Africa rather than a symptom, albeit a virulent symptom, of much deeper problems. And they underestimate both the depth of its roots in the very fabric of the post-colonial state and its resilience in the face of reform measures imposed from abroad. External demands for reform identify important institutional weaknesses which need to be corrected if there is to be much prospect of stable, effective and accountable government. But the reform efforts attempted seldom challenge the link between corruption, on the one hand, and patterns of private accumulation and clientelist political mobilization, on the other, with the result that the anti-corruption agenda has had only modest success and limited staying-power. Moreover, because they interfere with patterns of private accumulation and political patronage and threaten the privileges which state office bestows on political elites and their supporters and associates, they create problems in the relationship between donor and debtor governments and are bitterly resented and resisted by ruling elites. In some cases this resentment has acted to poison relations between donors and African governments and even to discredit the wider liberal reform programme (Szeftel, 1998, 2000a). In the words of one former cabinet minister in Zambia, the aid relationship is 'a game of cat and mouse': donors try to nail down agreement on as many conditions as they can before writing their cheques and then try to insist on the most ambitious definition of the original remit when evaluating subsequent performance; debtor governments try to concede as little as possible without jeopardising the aid and then try to insist on as modest an original understanding as they can (Interview, 19 January 1998).

In a previous article (*ROAPE* 84), I suggested that part of the problem lay in the tension between, on the one hand, international efforts to reduce corruption in developing countries as part of a much larger process of improving the conditions for global capital accumulation and, on the other, the role played by political corruption in promoting the local accumulation of wealth, property and capital in Africa (Szeftel, 2000a). Globalisation increases the value for capital of having universal rules and norms of public behaviour, while the hegemony of the West ensures that such norms are logically those developed for and within liberal democracies. Thus, and to an extent that is historically unique, the process of globalisation has resulted in liberal

democratic norms of transparent and accountable government, of what is corrupt and what is not, being imposed as the *universal* rules of doing business. The trouble is they are being imposed in environments where liberal democracy is not established and where crisis obliterates most of the conditions necessary for its existence. More important, I have suggested, the reforms threaten the dependence of the African petit bourgeoisie on access to the state and its resources. In the context of underdevelopment, local accumulation rests heavily on political office and the ability it provides to appropriate public resources. Corruption provides a means of transferring public resources to the new middle class and bourgeois strata which emerged in the post-colonial order. And debt, economic crisis and underdevelopment ensure that this dependence on access to the state remains continuous. Indeed, Africa's development crisis has intensified rather than reduced the dependence of the national bourgeoisie on the political domain and has increased conflict as rival factions compete for a diminishing pool of resources. Far from arresting the upward spiral of corruption, the economic liberalisation and attendant governance reforms imposed by the donors have sometimes intensified it beyond anything that government can manage or control. At its worst, this has destabilised the state to the point of collapse amid a rising tide of corruption, looting and criminality, and even of violence as private armies are raised to protect the grip that leaders have on their loot (Allen, 1999; Reno, 1995; Bayart, Ellis and Hibou, 1999).

This spiral of crisis, corruption and criminality has encouraged the tendency, noted earlier, to identify corruption as the cause of 'catastrophe'. The recent research of scholars like Allen, Reno and Bayart et al., however, suggests that increasing levels of corruption and criminality are often the *consequence* of crisis and restructuring rather than their cause. The primacy given corruption in some discourses arises from the, often crude, ahistorical assumptions which underpin 'good governance' reform projects about the role of the state and the nature of African politics. Neglecting to locate the origins of corruption in the structures of colonial and post-colonial politics, they either decide that corruption is the cause of all Africa's ills (as if its history started just 30 years ago) or locate it in somewhat vague cultural characteristics (the cult of the 'big man', 'the politics of the belly', even a fabled 'return to the heart of darkness' and so on). Such representations tend towards understandings of African politics as a reflection of the way in which traditional institutions and cultural values respond to and appropriate the institutional arrangements of a modern state. Corruption then becomes one of the ways in which 'big men' employ traditional forms of patronage and clientelism to access state resources which they use to reward supporters or appropriate as personal tribute. The symbols politicians employ come to be regarded as the essence of the political rather than as their surface. Yet there is no need for such assumptions. African politics exist in the present, for the most part: debt, famine, poverty, repression, torture and, yes, even patronage and corruption are the present, not echoes of an exotic past. Underdevelopment and the post-colonial state provide the arena in which the political fields of action take place, whatever the symbols are that some may use.

Corruption in Africa is not unique, either historically or culturally – although the conjuncture of forces which give rise to it may be. Instead of elevating it into a universal explanation of Africa's ills, it is more useful for us to see corruption as a product of other structural forces, two of which are particularly important. The first is the dependence of accumulation and class formation on state power and public resources in the context of post-colonial underdevelopment (Szeftel, 2000a). Its outcome in Africa has been the plunder of the state. The second, closely related and the

subject of this paper, is the particular nature of clientelism as a means of political mobilisation. Their combined outcome has been to create patterns of competitive politics which lead to the plunder of state.

One reason corruption has been so destructive and resilient in post-colonial Africa is because of the forms taken by clientelism and its importance for local capital accumulation and class formation. Clientelism has been a widely employed mode of political mobilisation (through 'face-to-face' recruitment of networks of support) in all societies where peasant or migrant or otherwise excluded communities are integrated into electoral political competition. By galvanising such networks in order to gain access to the state and its resources, clientelism has proved to be an effective means both of giving a democratic voice to the demands of those previously marginalised and of enabling propertied classes to legitimate their political dominance. But it is also, inevitably, characterised by widespread corruption as competing patron-client networks form factions which fight to gain privileged access to public resources. In the context of underdevelopment, moreover, clientelism has proved an ineffective method of meeting longer-term factional demands and hence has become a source of instability as well as of corruption. Efforts to manage and limit factional demands for state patronage, through the one-party state for example, have proved unsustainable. Development crises and international debt intensify this instability and create pressures for increased looting of public resources, coercion, repression and violence. At its worst, this struggle for spoils has encouraged civil war. Corruption is thus an expression (or symptom) of intense factional competition; indeed, it could be argued that the more intense this competition becomes (as a result of increasing economic crisis) the more endemic corruption is likely to become too. The nature of this malaise was built into the fabric of the post-colonial state at its very inception.

Clientelism, Corruption & the Crisis of the Post-colonial State

The roots of African clientelism were bequeathed by the nature of colonial development and the post-colonial settlement which succeeded it. By the late sixties, the colonial state survived only in its settler form in southern Africa. The withdrawal of European colonialism for the most part left in its wake formally democratic states more or less modelled on the metropolitan constitutions of the former colonial powers. Yet the reality was somewhat different. In Anglophone Africa, for instance, the multi-party systems left behind were, in practice, dominant-party or single party states. One party, enjoying overwhelming support at independence (further consolidated with the resources provided by office) confronted a small, often divided, often regionalised opposition lacking resources and any real prospect of power. Botswana apart, this seldom endured for long. In Tanzania, the predominance of TANU created a *de facto* one-party state from the start. In Malawi, Kenya, Zambia, Ghana and Sierra Leone, the dominant party, under a powerful executive president, ensured some degree of political stability for a time before giving way to one-party or military oligarchies. Characterised by increasing authoritarianism, economic stagnation and corruption. Where the excluded political interests constituted a large proportion of the population, as in Nigeria, Lesotho and Uganda, conflict and instability characterised the state from its inception and military rule (rather than one-party civilian regimes) quickly overwhelmed the civil political order. Save for Botswana, multi-partyism had essentially disappeared in Anglophone Africa by the early seventies. Moreover, few one-party or military regimes ruled without the use of emergency powers, preventive detention, draconian labour regulations and the

suspension of civil liberties or the rule of law. A similar story could be set out for Francophone Africa as well.

The complex inter-relationship of three factors were of particular importance in ensuring the early failure of liberal democratic politics: economic underdevelopment, the nature of the inherited state, and the pattern of political mobilisation in post-colonial Africa. The first of these needs little rehearsal here: the legacy of slavery, colonialism, export cash cropping, plantation production, mineral extraction and migrant labour regimes entrenched the economies of individual African countries in a wider, international division of labour within which each acted as a specialised supplier of primary export commodities. Highly skewed economies, vulnerable to international economic changes and fluctuations, produced high levels of dependence on international trade and capital flows and extreme forms of uneven internal economic and social development. Uneven development took many forms, among them: the combination of declining peasant subsistence economies with multinational export production; extreme inequalities of income; the differential incorporation of different regions and ethnic groups into the colonial economy and state; and the exclusion of vast numbers of Africans from property ownership, capital, skills and market opportunities through institutionalized racism (Szeftel, 1987).

The problems confronting the African post-colonial state were rooted in these economic circumstances. Historical experience made it unlikely that the market forces which had produced underdevelopment and exclusion would mysteriously reverse themselves once independence was attained. Moreover, the market and private property were associated with foreign domination and racism. Thus, inevitably, the new state was central to African aspirations. Power was to be the engine for development and for individual job opportunities and upward mobility. For many, the state was the means through which past discrimination would be redressed and private wealth promoted. The conjuncture of colonial exclusion, nationalist promises and political independence produced almost limitless expectations of government to intervene in the economy, to redistribute entitlements and to provide jobs, loans, contracts and favours through political patronage (Szeftel, 1987:118). This placed a huge burden on the African state.

Unfortunately, the state was not equipped to bear this burden. Underdevelopment and dependence on primary exports gave it an uncertain revenue base which constantly undermined development strategies. More importantly, the colonial institutions inherited by the independent state were inappropriate for the project of social renewal. Lacking established democratic institutions, and run by an alien bureaucracy, the colonial state was designed to ensure order and facilitate the production of export commodities, not to respond to democratic demands or develop a new sense of citizenship. In a watershed contribution, Mamdani has argued that the colonial state represented a 'bifurcated' system of power, dividing Africans between those who experienced urban racial discrimination and those subjected to rural 'Native Authorities':

The African colonial experience came to be crystallized in the nature of the state ... Organized differently in rural areas from urban ones, that state was Janus-faced, bifurcated. It contained a duality: two forms of power under a single hegemonic authority. Urban power spoke the language of civil society and civil rights, rural power of community and culture. Civil power claimed to protect rights, customary power pledged to enforce tradition (Mamdani, 1996:18).

This bifurcation was institutionalised as

direct and indirect rule [which] actually evolved into complementary ways of native control. Direct rule was the form of urban civil power. It was about the exclusion of natives from civil freedoms guaranteed to citizens in civil society. Indirect rule, however, signified a rural tribal authority. It was about incorporating natives into a state-enforced customary order. Reformulated, direct and indirect rule are better understood as variants of despotism: the former centralized, the latter decentralized (Ibid.).

Political independence reinforced both the authoritarian character of the state and the duality of African incorporation into civil and political life. By creating powerful central executives, the independence constitutions ensured that presidential authority would dominate over post-colonial parliaments, restrain popular demands for welfare spending and suppress radical pressures for fundamental social restructuring. Thus, the roots of African presidentialism (and with it authoritarianism) can be found in the transition from colonialism. There is little need to explain it in terms of traditions of deference to 'The Big Man' or of 'neo-patrimonialism' (for discussions of which, see Bayart, 1993:70-83; Bratton and van de Walle, 1997:63-5). Authoritarianism was underpinned also by the way in which independence incorporated the urban-rural dichotomy into the politics of electoral competition. Drawing on the contrasting experiences of Uganda and South Africa, Mamdani argues that nationalist politicians addressed the problem of 'deracializing' urban civil society without tackling the 'detrribalizing' of the rural areas. By failing to free rural 'subjects' from the yoke of 'tribal' authorities, nationalism ensured their continued domination by traditional authorities and ethnic leaders rather than giving them the opportunity to take their place in the post-colonial order as individual 'citizens'. This fundamentally 'contaminated' the process of democratization itself, suggests Mamdani, with the result that African politics was 'tribalized' rather than 'democratized' (Mamdani, 1996:289 and *passim*).

Mamdani's argument helps to explain why 'civil society' has so singularly lacked autonomy in post-colonial Africa and why ethnic forms of political organization have been so ubiquitous and powerful. LeVine (1993:276) defines 'civil society' as an intermediate layer of associational structures occupying the space between the state, on the one hand, and ethnic and kinship networks, on the other. In this conception, 'civil society' refers to the organizations and interests which act to influence public policy and moderate the authoritarian tendencies of both community and state. The development of a network of such associations serves to underpin a fundamental feature of liberal democracies, namely the separation of the public and private domains, a separation on which liberal democratic concepts of corruption rests. Mamdani's argument, in contrast, highlights the failure to incorporate rural voters into the political realm through anything resembling the active, organized citizenship of 'civil society'. Instead, the franchise meant that ethnic identity was catapulted directly into the electoral arena through clientelist networks speaking for regional or 'tribal' factions. The test of public performance became how well it served particularistic interests.

This problem was reinforced by the way in which colonialism came to an end. In another landmark contribution, and working from a different perspective, Chris Allen examined the effects of the transition to independence and beyond, arguing that Britain and France organized a rapid process of decolonisation so as to ensure that radical elements lacked the time and resources to develop a strong grassroots base. This permitted the transfer of power to conservative nationalist leaders prepared to

guarantee key economic interests. Moreover, 'independence elections' were called at short notice,

requiring nationalist organizations to mobilize huge new electorates in a very short time. Those that succeeded had combined two strategies for party building and creation of electoral support: a reliance on individuals who already had considerable local followings, and the use of clientelist ('patronage') politics to bind local notables to the party and local voters to the candidates. In essence, voters were offered collective material benefits (roads, schools, clinics, water, etc.) for their votes, while candidates and notables were offered individual benefits (cash, access to licences, credit or land, etc.) ... This combination produced a set of locally-based MPs ... responsive to local demands, and loosely organized into parties whose leaders had access to private or public resources (Allen, 1995:304).

Political mobilisation thus rested on clientelist politics in which local and regional power brokers were incorporated into national political movements and electoral support was exchanged for access to state resources. Support was exchanged for access to state resources and the citizens of the new state were integrated into electoral politics on the basis of the access to public resources that political competition afforded rather than on the basis of ideology or class interests.

Given the underdevelopment of the economy, clientelism proved unable to meet factional demands and so became a source of instability as well as corruption. Governments lacked the resources to deliver the 'development goods' necessary to satisfy mass expectations. Popular disappointment put pressure on faction leaders to intensify their demands on the centre for an increased share of resources for their region or group, or face being replaced by those who would. Nor was it possible for the central leadership to satisfy all factions when distributing offices or career opportunities. Thus post-colonial politics became characterised by intense factional competition for patronage and by conflicts between factions which frequently became public and acrimonious, producing governmental crises and intensifying communal rivalries. Disappointed leaders could represent their personal frustrations as a snub for an entire region or ethnic group. In these circumstances, multi-party politics allowed dissatisfied factions to threaten the centre with withdrawal to join the opposition, taking with them their factional support. Thus, even the largest government majorities were fragile, vulnerable to wholesale defections. It is instructive that amongst the earliest legislation enacted in Kenya and Zambia were statutes that tied parliamentary seats to the party that had won them in an election. MPs defecting to another party had to vacate their seat and fight a by-election if they wished to continue to represent the constituency. While such measures may have moderated the competition for 'spoils', they were unable to control it or to check the corruption that inevitably arose as a result.

Over time, African governments became preoccupied with the need to manage patronage, making them intolerant of internal debate and increasingly inclined to use presidential power to control and ration the distribution of patronage. Attempts to manage patronage had varying degrees of success, depending on the nature of the state and central authority but all involved the growth of authoritarianism and the abandonment of the pluralist constitutions inherited at independence. The most common response was what Allen (1995:305-7) has called bureaucratic centralism, typically manifested in the creation of one-party states. This had four main elements: the continuation of clientelism under central control; the centralisation of power in an executive presidency standing above factional competition; the subordination of party politics to a bureaucracy answerable to the presidency, especially in the

distribution of patronage; and the downgrading of representative institutions relative to presidential appointments, including the absorption of much of civil society by the state. The one-party state was the ultimate expression of attempts to regulate factional competition and conflict over the division of spoils.

The strategy worked well for a time but became increasingly unsustainable as economic crisis undermined patronage and corruption increased. Once African economies began to contract from the mid-1970s, clientelist politics could not be sustained. Populations suffering the hardships imposed by debt and structural adjustment became increasingly critical of the shrinking patronage dispensed by an authoritarian state and of the leaders who managed it. In the case of Zambia, for instance, clientelism and corruption were exacerbated by crisis:

By 1988 corruption was such that the politics of spoils was approaching systemic levels. In the chill wind of economic crisis, the country ran up huge international debts. The ... patronage state was no longer sustainable. Capital stocks were run down, equipment ground to a halt, debts mounted. Thus pay-offs fell sharply and corruption rose just as sharply as public officials acted to offset their declining returns from office. For some, criminal activities replaced public sector corruption: Zambia became an important conduit for drug trafficking, particularly as a distribution point for the southern African region; and gemstone and currency smuggling became increasingly common. The state, too, ruled with an increasingly heavy hand; the period came to be characterised by severe repression of critics. If the spoils of office dwindled under the pressure of economic decline, a very small coterie of leaders continued to regulate the access of others while continuing to enrich themselves (Szeftel, 2000b:215).

By the end of the 1980s, and under pressure from donors, many of these one-party regimes gave in to demands for liberal reform.

Such liberal reforms stood in sharp contrast to the smaller number of states where clientelist crisis led not to reform but to repression and the plundering of the state by ruling 'kleptocracies' and the regional or ethnic interests they represented. Often such states lacked the repressive capacity to sustain this process for very long so that a 'winner takes all' struggle for spoils ensued, producing intensified corruption, extreme forms of factionalism, repression, violence and even the disintegration of the state (Allen, 1995:307-10). Yet even where liberal reform was attempted, less changed than was hoped. To return to Zambia:

For all the achievements of democratic reform, presidential power and patronage continue to be concentrated and centralised ... the main feature of politics is, again, jockeying for position and patronage within the ruling party ... The survival of clientelism and its adherence to the liberalisation of the economy produces opportunities for personal accumulation and corruption. Clientelism and presidentialism often run counter to efforts at democratisation and decentralisation of power ... In contrast with the one-party state, government is no longer an activity undertaken in the name of the nation as a whole. Rather it is conducted for the benefit of those who support the government (Szeftel, 2000b:221).

I have laboured this discussion, treading much old ground, because a more historical and structural perspective indicates clearly the way in which clientelism and corruption are rooted in the contradictions of the post-colonial state rather than in any personal inadequacies of African leaders or any inappropriate cultural qualities which might negate African efforts at modern statecraft. Yet there have been other societies with high levels of corruption, with factional rivalries, with a poor economic

base. Some of them have gone on to industrialise, others are doing so now. In almost no other time and continent have factionalism and corruption promoted the very disintegration of the state itself. We need to examine the nature of African clientelism to better understand why the present conjuncture in Africa has been different.

Clientelist Factions, Class & Corruption: Africa in Comparative Perspective

Historically, clientelism – a system of political organisation where vertical links across class lines are based on unequal reciprocal relations between patrons and clients – has been widely employed as a mode of political mobilisation. In particular, it has been a feature of societies in which peasant populations or migrant or otherwise excluded communities have been mobilised or organised politically. This is particularly so where such populations have been integrated rapidly into systems of electoral political competition. Clientelism has been (and is) an effective instrument of mass politics because it uses ‘face-to-face’, or ‘house-to-house’ contact in order to recruit support. Among people who are poor or excluded from equal citizenship it thus constitutes an efficient, sometimes even an energising and empowering, method of political recruitment. It has often been almost the only effective means of giving a democratic voice to the demands of those previously marginalised, for instance in nationalist, anti-colonial movements or among excluded urban immigrants. And it has provided a limited form of redistribution because it galvanises networks of political support precisely in order to gain access to political power and the resources of the state.

Yet the democratic credentials of clientelism are ambiguous and contradictory. If it mobilises the poor and excluded, it does so on the basis of the unequal relations of domination and deference that obtain between greater or lesser patrons and the massed ranks of their client followers. If it provides marginalised people with a political voice, that voice belongs to the relatively privileged strata and propertied classes who typically speak for the group. If it permits access to state office and resources that would otherwise be denied, that access is hardly democratic. For clientelist leaders, mass support gives them political clout and translates into opportunities for acquiring personal wealth, social entry and improved class positions in the wider political economy. For clients, it means hoping that the leaders who have been elevated in this way will be successful in directing resources towards them. Given the intensity of competition between rival clientelist networks or factions, there is always the possibility that pay-offs will be meagre or that particular groups will lose out altogether. Moreover, the corruption that inevitably results from factional competition, itself invariably produces unequal results with the spoils being far greater for those at the top of the factional pyramid than for the mass of clients at the bottom. Clientelism results in patterns of (sometimes corrupt) resource acquisition which have ‘consequences for generations to come when new classes stabilise’ (Mushtaq Khan, 1998:16). Moreover, the vertical integration of mass support under the leadership of privileged classes ensures that factions focus political attention on the distribution of state resources rather than on the use of state power to restructure society or change class relations. Clientelism in this sense represents a politics of class *domination* as distinct from a politics of class *struggle*. It becomes a means of enabling propertied classes to legitimate their political dominance.

Historically, we can identify three main mechanisms (which are not mutually exclusive) by which clients are incorporated into political factions. The first is based

on relations which we can term *coercive dependence*, the second on *politicised identity* and the third on *exchange relations*. In the first case, clients are dependent on patronage ties which are exercised through coercion. One obvious form of this is the use of violence, or the threat of violence, to obtain loyalty or obedience. The literature on the Mafia sets out just such a relationship. More commonly, however, this form of clientelism embodies the classic relationship between agrarian landlord and rural tenant, a relationship from which much of the general concept of clientelism derives. In this relationship, the dependence of the peasant on the landlord for access to land compels obedience and support in return for that access and protection. This form of clientelism is particularly important in the politics of the Mediterranean, parts of eastern Europe, Latin America and much of South and East Asia. Its dynamic was perhaps most clearly set out by Hamza Alavi in explaining the lack of class solidarity among India's poorest peasants. He is worth quoting at some length (1973:332-3):

The pattern of political behaviour of the peasantry is based on factions that are vertically integrated segments of the rural society, dominated by landlords and rich peasants at the top, and with poor peasants and landless labourers, who are economically dependent on them, at the bottom. Among the exploited sections of the peasantry there is little or no class solidarity. They stand divided among themselves by their allegiance to their factions, led by their masters. Political initiative thus rests with faction leaders, who are owners of land and have power and prestige in the village society. They are often engaged in political competition (even conflict) among themselves in pursuit of power and prestige in the society. The dominating factions, who by virtue of their wealth have the largest following, back the party in power and in turn receive many reciprocal benefits ... Many factors enter into the factional picture: kinship, neighbourhood ties (or conflicts), and caste alignments affect the allegiance of particular peasants to one faction or another. But broadly speaking, it does appear that in one group of factions the predominant characteristic is that of the relationship between masters and their dependants, ... The number of votes that the Left can hope to mobilize depends primarily not on the amount of agitation it conducts ... but on the relative balance of the factions. Above all, the decisive question here is that of winning over the votes of the large number of poor peasants and landless labourers who are still dominated by their masters. This cannot be done unless the factional structure is broken, for the allegiance of the poor peasants and the farm labourers to their masters is not merely due to subjective factors such as their 'backward mentality' ... It is based on the objective fact of their dependence on their masters for their continued livelihood. Thus it seems hardly likely, in the absence of any direct action by the peasantry or any action by a government which might break the economic power of the landlords and rich peasants, that effective electoral support can be won by the Left. This is a paradox of the parliamentary way ... [emphasis added].

Clientelist factions based on such relations of class dependence are, as Alavi notes, difficult to change unless there are alternative economic opportunities which permit peasants to opt out of the landed tenancy that binds them to patrons. Where economic change undermines the stability of this relationship, the politics of class conflict are likely to replace those of class domination but, until and unless that happens, the relationship is likely to be stable. By contrast, the other two kinds of clientelist relations identified are rather less stable and more fluid and the character of class domination is hidden rather than overt. Where dependence is weaker or absent, the loyalty of clients will need to rest on other factors. One of the most widespread is the politicisation of identity, the manipulation of caste, religious, linguistic or ethnic group solidarity by presenting them as 'primordial' interests with group entitlements. Such 'primordial' appeals are part of the political pattern in the Indian

countryside, as Alavi mentions, and they frequently underpinned also the more fluid exchange relationships that characterised support for urban 'political machines' (Scott, 1969, 1972). Thus, while the urban political machines of the early 20th century on the east coast of the United States emphasised the exchange of votes for favours, they frequently represented ethnic immigrant groups as well. And the Bombay organisation, Shiv Sena, not only delivers services and protection to its supporters but also articulates an abrasive Hindu chauvinist, anti-Muslim, extreme right-wing message.

In Africa, clientelism is nearly always based on the politicisation of identity. While landed class relations do play a part in compelling the loyalty of tenants and farm-workers, such relations do not shape the politics of rural Africa. Instead, for the reasons discussed by Allen and Mamdani, the advent of electoral politics resulted in the mobilisation of voters through traditional authorities and local or regional notables. Even in urban areas, where local political machines have developed, these have tended to have an communal character. Unmediated by that layer of 'civil society' described by LeVine, political factions recruited supporters directly through the politicisation of kinship, ethnicity, religion and other forms of identity and political parties then built coalitions of these competing factions in order to gain power. Once in power, the factions within the party could (and did) set about competing against each other to gain control over public resources. The result was the development of factional competition articulated through the language of ethnic (but also religious and racial) identities. As Mamdani observed, there was a 'tribalisation' of post-colonial politics.

In turn, clientelist factions have given an ethnic character to corruption. This has both increased and decreased tolerance of corruption in different ways. On the one hand, factions are invariably concerned to monitor the acquisitiveness of their rivals and, in consequence, are quick to denounce anything they see as corruption. This disapproval frequently extends to actions which may not be corrupt as far as the law goes but which are perceived to be evidence that rivals in power are enriching themselves. Given that much capital accumulation lacks legitimacy when set against the communal values of the majority of people in developing countries, the identification of accumulation with looting of national resources is easily made and widely held. On the other hand, however, the ethnic nature of factional alignments means that there is a high tolerance of corruption within a group where group leaders are involved. Attempts to punish corruption frequently alienate the faction's supporters and incur serious political costs. Thus:

In 1967, President Kaunda sacked two cabinet ministers (including Nalumino Mundia, one of the leading figures in the party) for directing public contracts towards a company in which they had interests ... Because clientelism and class formation were bound up with each other, attempts to punish corruption by prominent individuals risked alienating their clients and provoking the political defection of their factions ... After being sacked, Mundia eventually left UNIP to lead a new party which took every seat in his home region from UNIP in the 1968 elections, removing a number of prominent ministers in the process (Szeftel, 2000b:211-2).

Clientelism thus promotes a form of factional competition which encourages the plundering of the state. The intensity which ethnicity gives to factional competition tends to make questions about the entitlements of the group the only issue in which factions are interested – to the exclusion of broader questions concerning the efficacy of the overall political system or the stability of the state. Thus, if faction leaders and

supporters are disappointed by the results of their efforts to appropriate public resources – and in the context of African economic underdevelopment it is inevitable that pay-offs will always fall well short of needs or demands – they are likely to intensify efforts to appropriate spoils, regardless of how devastating such actions will be. The factions are engaged in a destructive game of Prisoner’s Dilemma. If they can co-operate in order to modify their corruption and appropriation, there might be some rewards for all groups and the looting of the state might be moderated. But the logic of ethnic competition drives them on and seemingly justifies their behaviour in the eyes of their supporters. If they don’t maximise rewards, another faction will. Thus all continue looting even to the point of institutional disintegration and development disaster. The ‘solution’ posited in the Prisoner’s Dilemma game is that there needs to be some central authority able to hold the ring and ensure that the competing interests cooperate rather than compete. Some among an earlier generation of African leaders (Nyerere and Kaunda, for example) sought to play precisely this role, to use the one-party system as a means of regulating the distribution of patronage and spoils. When such efforts failed, as they inevitably did, clientelism politics collapsed but the factions created by it continued in an evermore ferocious competition for the dwindling spoils of the state.

Clientelism & Capital Accumulation

Corruption driven by factional competition goes much further than the looting of resources, however. It reduces matters of policy to questions of pay-offs and spoils, in the process undermining the integrity of state institutions and subverting efforts to develop associational structures in ‘civil society’. Development crises and international debt intensify this instability and create in turn pressures for yet more looting, coercion, repression violence and, at its worst, even civil war.

The vicious circle of corruption described is augmented by the role of business in fostering corruption. Much of this is imported through multinational companies bidding for state contracts or seeking to circumvent regulations. In the process, government leaders learn that there are vast sums of money to be earned for gatekeepers who charge high rents. Moody-Stuart (1997:13) describes how the size of contracts may determine the nature of the bribery needed by business to influence officials: 5 per cent of \$100 million may net a head of state, 5 per cent of \$10 million may interest a minister and key staff, 5 per cent of \$1 million and one is down to permanent secretaries, and so on. In a 1996 report on corruption in Tanzania, Justice Joseph Warioba identifies business connections (not clientelism or an over-weening state) as the primary source of corruption:

Leaders who are supposed to take important national decisions are bribed by businessmen in order for them to take decisions which are in the interest of those businessmen.

Corruption does not always have this ‘catastrophic’ effect. South Korea industrialised rapidly (from a base in the fifties very similar to that of sub-Saharan Africa) despite high levels of grand corruption. So too did Japan before it and the United States before that. The peculiar form taken by clientelism, and of the corruption it produces, would seem to have militated against similar processes of accumulation in Africa. In one view, put crudely here, corruption in Asia has tended to support, or at least not hinder, capital accumulation where democratic demands have been limited. Thus, in some of the Asian ‘tigers’ politicians and bureaucrats have exchanged rents for state resources required by business clients (Kahn, 1998). Where corruption has required

state resources to be distributed more widely, the rate of growth has been slower, as in India. In Africa, clientelism seems to work against accumulation in two ways. First, it rests on the need for patrons to distribute state resources to a wide communal base rather than simply to business cronies. And second, in contrast with, say, India, there is not much of a capitalist class from which politicians can extort resources. Instead, the flow of resources is all one way, from the state to the private sector; the looting of public resources, rather than the accumulation of capital, is the name of the game.

In part, however, the resilience and increasing scale of corruption, particularly high-level corruption, owes something to the disruptive nature of the reforms being imposed on African countries and the weakness of the remedies against corruption which these reforms embody. Moreover, sanctions imposed by donors to indicate disapproval of corruption punishes *governments*, a penalty unlikely to influence the *individuals* or *factions* involved in the corruption who are being offered vast fortunes by multinationals or drug dealers. More importantly, structural adjustment, liberalisation and even democratic reforms have played a significant part in weakening the regulatory capacity of the state by removing oversight capabilities. By reducing state funding and excluding it from various areas of activity, adjustment programmes have undermined the possibility of improving auditing, investigation and enforcement. William Reno argues that restructuring threatens to 'take Africa back to the 1860s' by creating 'exceedingly weak trading states at the mercy of the international economy' and 'an increasingly dangerous political world' in which high level corruption may be augmented and even overtaken by criminal activities and the creation of private armies (1995:26-7). The ideology of rolling back the state, and the policies of deregulation and privatisation have, if anything, reduced the capacity of government to regulate corruption rather than reducing the corruption itself.

Beyond Clientelism & Catastrophe

The spiral of crisis and corruption has created a bleak vista for Africans over these last three decades. There is little in the reforms being espoused by the donors that seems equipped to break the circle and begin a process of renewal. If anything, their strategy seems likely to exacerbate corruption and so undermine the important institutional changes they wish to implement. In the longer term, it will be necessary for anti-corruption strategies to tackle the deeper problems of which corruption is just one symptom (and not the worst one either, given the human rights abuses too often visited on powerless African citizens). There is a need to de-couple clientelism from the corrupt appropriation of public resources, to ensure that factions do not have direct access to state resources by virtue of their capacity to mobilise voters and politicise identity.

There is a need to find ways to re-focus African politics. It needs to move away from the politics of personal acquisition, away from the use of brutality and violence used by corrupt despots to ensure that they can keep on looting. It needs to move towards a politics of social justice, of concentrating on equality, security, decency. A generation of donor reforms, predicated on the belief that rolling back the state and releasing the market will change things has – if anything – made things worse. At the turn of the millennium, it is clear that neither post-colonial clientelist politics nor the global market work for Africa. There is an urgent need for African politics to become more overtly class based. By this I do not mean that class plays no role in the present situation; on the contrary, the analysis presented here makes clear that clientelism and corruption impose a particular pattern of class formation on Africa. Nor do I wish to

imply that a class based politics would necessarily (or even likely) be a revolutionary or radical politics. Rather, what I am suggesting is that there is a need for political parties to represent the interests of workers, farmers, business and peasants and so on, so that material interests can begin to be articulated directly instead of being subordinated to nationalist patronage politics. This would encourage voters to judge government performance in terms of policy and delivery instead of in terms of how resources are divided up. It would encourage also a politics of growth and accumulation rather than of distribution and patronage.

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