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## Does Patronage Still Drive Politics for the Rural Poor in the Developing World? A Comparative Perspective from the Livestock Sector

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### ABSTRACT

Is the analysis of patron–client networks still important to the understanding of developing country politics or has it now been overtaken by a focus on ‘social capital’? Drawing on seventeen country studies of the political environment for livestock policy in poor countries, this article concludes that although the nature of patronage has changed significantly, it remains highly relevant to the ways peasant interests are treated. Peasant populations were found either to have no clear connection to their political leaders or to be controlled by political clientage. Furthermore, communities ‘free’ of patron–client ties to the centre generally are *not* better represented by political associations but instead receive fewer benefits from the state. Nonetheless, patterns of clientage *are* different from what they were forty years ago. First, patronage chains today often have a global reach, through trade, bilateral donor governments and international NGOs. Second, the resources that fuel political clientage today are less monopolistic and less adequate to the task of purchasing peasant political loyalty. Thus the bonds of patronage are less tight than they were historically. Third, it follows from the preceding point and the greater diversity of patrons operating today that elite conflicts are much more likely to create spaces in which peasant interests can eventually be aggregated into autonomous associations with independent political significance in the national polity. NGOs are playing an important role in opening up this political space although at the moment, they most often act like a new type of patron.

### INTRODUCTION

Is the shape of patronage still a key determinant of how peasant<sup>1</sup> interests are represented in the policy process? A generation ago, patron–client systems

1. The term ‘peasant’ is sometimes ideologically or theoretically freighted. For us in this article ‘peasant’ is simply a short-hand term (much like the original French *paysan*). We use ‘peasant’ to denote a rural dweller whose livelihood is rooted in an agricultural economy that involves both subsistence and market relations. This definition embraces a very wide

lay at the core of the study of comparative politics in developing countries (e.g., Bates, 1983; Hyden, 1980; Lemarchand, 1972; Migdal, 1974; Scott, 1972, 1976; Zolberg, 1966). Work on clientelism continues today (e.g., Auyero, 1999; Kettering, 1988; Kitschelt and Wilkenson, 2007; O'Dwyer, 2006), but it is much less prominent. What has changed? Analytical fashion or the fundamentals of peasant politics themselves?

In this article, we argue that the nature of patronage has undergone significant changes, but the form it takes is still highly relevant to the ways peasant interests are treated, and its absence is frequently not advantageous to them. The fashionable analytic concept 'social capital' can obscure some of these continuities, so its advantages for other purposes should not displace an attention to patronage as well.

The evidence on which we draw in advancing this thesis is found in seventeen web-published country case studies the authors have conducted.<sup>2</sup> These studies, commissioned by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), analysed the current political and economic realities of each country in order to suggest feasible policy and institutional changes that would benefit its livestock-dependent poor.<sup>3</sup> The situation of the livestock-dependent poor provides a particularly good context within which to probe shifts in the practice and analysis of patronage. Previously questions such as cattle-loans and access to water and pasture were often discussed in terms of patronage.

range of social relations, ranging from relatively egalitarian freehold systems to feudal ones, as is exemplified in Migdal (1974). 'Smallholder', 'poor farmer' and the like don't quite convey the same meaning (see also, Magagna, 1991).

2. Case studies were prepared on Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, two states of India (Andhra Pradesh and Orissa), Kenya, Peru, Senegal, Somalia (including Puntland and Somaliland as well as the Transitional Federal Government), Sudan, Uganda and Vietnam. They were accompanied by a study of the politics of reforming the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union as it affects poor providers of beef and dairy products in the developing world, another on the organizations that set Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards (SPS) for world trade, CODEX, the World Animal Health Organization (OIE), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) and one on the international influences on IGAD as an organization. All of these case studies were published on the projects' web-sites without FAO or IGAD editorial control. For FAO PPLPI Working Papers, see <http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/programmes/en/ppipi/workingpapers.html>. For IGAD LPI Working Papers, see [http://www.igad-lpi.org/publication/working\\_papers.htm](http://www.igad-lpi.org/publication/working_papers.htm).
3. The studies were commissioned by the Pro-Poor Livestock Policy Initiative of FAO (funded by UK DFID) and the Livestock Policy Initiative of IGAD (in eastern Africa, funded by the European Community). Neither FAO, IGAD nor their funders exercised control over the way in which the research was conducted or the content of the case studies. Nonetheless, the 'sample' was selected by FAO and includes all of IGAD. So although the sample includes South and South-East Asia and Latin America it is biased towards eastern Africa. This sample bias and the fact that we focused on livestock production, around which political organization of smallholders is particularly difficult in poor societies, has made us careful in the interpretation of our evidence. We do not argue for any particular statistical distribution of political clientage; only that in all our cases it was relevant to ask about its presence and shape.

Traditionally a set of qualitative studies such as ours would have resulted in a book and this article would have been its introduction and conclusion. Instead we here invite the reader to enjoy the benefits of the web revolution and access the same information in a more efficient and inexpensive manner.<sup>4</sup> This article synthesizes and reflects on the results of the seventeen parallel qualitative studies (in much the same way as it would have done with the results of quantitative case studies compressed into tables). Here, however, the qualitative evidence is available to the reader in all its richness through the publication of all the case studies on the web instead of as chapters in a book. The references and footnotes in the article will direct the reader to the web addresses of studies whose detail may hold particular interest to them.

We will begin by summarizing the traditional model of patronage politics, then state the case against its contemporary relevance, followed by an analysis of why clientage really does still matter, even though its patterns often have changed. We will conclude with a consideration of the ways in which the organization of peasant groups by external national and international NGOs can represent *both* a transition to associational politics *and* a type of patron–client relation.

#### **PATRONAGE AND THE PEASANTRY: THE CLASSICAL MODEL**

Uneducated small farmers in poor countries are neither unsophisticated, traditional nor passive. A substantial body of literature attests to the rationality of decisions made by peasants, given their context and their vulnerability to risk. We also have ample proof of peasant willingness to change their methods of production where there are clear opportunities (Stiglitz, 1986). Peasant use of traditional healers rather than science-based medicine turns out to be more rational than many observers have suspected (Leonard and Leonard, 2004). A different set of studies shows that peasant producers can be subtly passive-aggressive when their interests are threatened and that rebellion to protect their autonomy is common (Magagna, 1991; Popkin, 1979; Scott, 1990).

Both of the latter points are evident today even in tightly controlled Vietnam. Tuong Vu (2003) notes that individual, unorganized ‘everyday resistance’ ultimately undermined collectivization there. In 1997, 3,000 peasants assembled in a provincial capital to protest against corruption among the government’s village-level cadres. Similarly in Senegal’s Doly affair, pastoralists mobilized effectively to defend a portion of their range from a land grab (Gning, 2004) and in Bolivia peasant defence of the right to grow coca undergirded the ability of Indino parties to mobilize mass demonstrations and ultimately claim the presidency (Fairfield, 2004). But these actions

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4. Please see: <http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/programmes/en/pplpi/workingpapers.html>

usually were reactive and defensive. Effective, collective, proactive peasant initiatives in the policy game are harder to find.<sup>5</sup> Why is this? Arguably, the answer to this question is that rather than organize independently, most peasants manoeuvre the political and policy landscape of their country via their patron — or, when necessary, their patron's patron, or even their patron's patron's patron.

We begin, then, by sketching the traditional, ideal-typical version of rural patronage politics. We discuss the reasons it so dominates the social systems of small agriculturalists engaged in subsistence and market production in developing countries, i.e., peasants. (The following analysis draws heavily on Migdal, 1974; Popkin, 1979; Scott, 1972, 1976.) We emphasize that this depiction is an *ideal type*, conveyed to make the reader sensitive to the critical dynamics of what occurs in many real-world political systems, even when there are divergences from the model.

Peasant families, both sedentary and pastoralist, face multiple regular risks that threaten their survival and against which formal insurance is unavailable.<sup>6</sup> Most peasants 'insure' themselves against these risks by engaging in informal social exchanges (where reciprocity is long term, imprecisely quantified and rooted in trust). These exchange systems are generally embedded in families, clans, castes or (less frequently) religious communities. Social exchange systems *can* be based in relative equality but frequently find unequal expression as well. The poor are often able to derive benefits from more advantaged members of their social systems by becoming their clients — exchanging subservience, service and political loyalty for material benefits (Adams, 1986).<sup>7</sup> In a patron–client system the horizontal ties between relative equals are replaced by vertical ties of dependence of the client on the patron. Patronage discourages horizontal bonds between peers.

Peasant politics is therefore grounded in (a) ascriptive units (i.e., those based on identities acquired by birth, which includes religion in many places) and (b) patron–client relations, which are the dominant form of political

5. Even 'traditional' nomadic pastoralists have production and marketing systems that would benefit from supportive government policies. Among those we identified in our studies were: protection of dry-season grazing from encroachment by sedentary agriculturalists (Kenya and Ethiopia); quality grading of animal fibres so as to discourage genetic degradation (Peru and Bolivia); genetic improvement of stock (widespread); control of access to bore holes so as to prevent overgrazing of the 'commons' (East Africa); animal disease surveillance and control so as to permit the export of livestock to lucrative markets (Somalia and Ethiopia); better access to preventive and curative veterinary medicine (Asia and Africa); protection from 'dumping' of subsidized animal products on regional markets (Africa and Asia); improved marketing systems for peasant livestock products (Latin America for fibre, almost universally for dairy).
6. On interlocking sources of poverty, see Chambers (1983).
7. Non-policy goods that support traditional patronage relationships with peasant livestock producers would include: food supplies in the face of drought, subsidized credit for livestock traders, selective access to subsidized veterinary products, bore holes, human health or educational services, etc.

organization and mobilization. Clientage implies political support (to a personage rather than a cause) in return for *individual or village* advantage. The vertical bargains between a patron and his/her multiple clients are distinct, can be quite different from one another, and may even violate the collective interests of the clients as a larger group. Clients therefore frequently offer indirect support for policies that are detrimental to their long-term *collective* interests in order to gain immediate, personal (or small group) advantage (Bates, 1983). The difficulties of collective action on a national scale that are inherent to clientage are exacerbated further by other common features of peasant life, such as the difficulties of organizing physically dispersed populations, of pressuring distant urban centres of power and of escaping local tyrannies (including armed thugs in parts of the Philippines and Brazil). These difficulties are even more pronounced in the case of collective action around livestock policy, as pastoralists are usually at the geographic periphery of their societies and, save for dairy production, livestock are usually a secondary 'crop' to sedentary farmers.

Peasants and migrant labourers who become disconnected from a social exchange network are most at risk and most likely to be severely poor. In principle one therefore might imagine that they are available for political mobilization along lines *other* than ascription (most often ethnicity) or patronage. But it seems that if they are rural, it takes little to mobilize them along these lines, as the promise of ascription or patronage offers such a huge gain in terms of security from risk (see Adams, 1986 on Egypt).

The various elite groups in these societies tend to be both less vulnerable to risk and may be able to purchase formal sector insurance. These groups can and often do use their resources to buy the clientage of peasant groups. Particularly in Africa the identity groups of peasants (most often kinship or language based) tend to be location-specific, so it is very easy for political candidates and their elite sponsors to see whether the community around a particular polling station has been honouring its part of the clientage bargain and has delivered — *en masse* — the expected votes in return for the patronage benefits provided earlier. This makes patron–client relations efficient and even more attractive (Kitshelt and Wilkenson, 2007: 1–49). As a result, even in democratic political systems in which peasants are in the majority, their interests generally will be systematically under-served, because they participate in politics as clients, selling their support to elite groups in return for modest personal benefits provided to members of their immediate circle (Bates, 1983).

Alternatively peasants are mobilized along ascriptive lines (ethnicity or religion), as these identities are metaphorically and symbolically linked to the community social exchange systems on which they depend. (Both ethnicity and religion stress the morality and necessity of in-group exchange, thereby solidifying the trust on which social exchange networks have to rely.) Identity politics substitutes symbolic benefits for material ones, so peasants that mobilize along identity lines are unlikely to achieve their collective

material interests. In both cases those groups that *do* organize politically along the lines of their collective material interests are more likely to have them attended to, advantaging elites and (to a lesser extent) urban labour, at the expense of peasants.

This is the traditional statement of political patronage. Is it still relevant to policy-making for the rural poor, and especially livestock producers, in today's developing world?

### **Is Clientelism Declining in Relevance?**

In many ways the explosion of research on social capital, fostered by Robert Putnam's path-breaking work on Italy (1993), has eclipsed the attention political patronage used to receive. 'Social capital' focuses on the density and benefits of networks of horizontal association, while clientage focuses on vertical ties. There is no doubt that associational strength is essential to the ability of communities to generate collective goods and that the effective representation of a group's interests in the political system depends on its ability to create associations that cross communal boundaries (Grix, 2001; Scott, 1972; Woolcock and Narayam, 2000). But the latter does not follow automatically from the former. Associational life at the village level is usually dense and rich in peasant societies but associational ties beyond the village can be difficult to form.<sup>8</sup> The point is *not* that 'social capital' and research on it are not useful but that political patronage may have a form and endurance in rural areas that are independent of social capital's presence. The relevance of clientage to rural politics and policy therefore should be *examined* and not simply assumed from evidence of social capital alone (Auyero, 1999; Kettering, 1988).

Those who are *self-consciously* moving away from patron–client analysis point to several ways in which its traditional fabric has become frayed. First, patronage resources are insufficient to win elections today in many (and arguably, most) developing world democracies. James Manor (2006) makes this case forcefully for India, arguing *not* that its day is past — since almost every senior politician in power in India (let alone Africa) persists with it — but that it no longer suffices to earn re-election. Demand overload is too great, and networks for patronage distribution are too inefficient. Most top politicians know this, he says. So something additional, some 'add-on', is required — what he calls 'post-clientelist' strategies.

The inadequacy of patronage would seem to have two quite different causes. For one, traditional patronage was supposed to provide insurance against the most severe effects of risk but in many countries too many people

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8. Fox argues that in rural Mexico the absence of non-patronage associational politics is often the result of violent repression from those elites who maintain the clientage system (Fox, 1994, 1996).

fall into poverty to be helped. Thus rural elites often have broken away from providing the rural safety net Adams (1986) observed a generation ago in Egypt. Quite differently, however, the character of the patronage relationship has shifted decisively in many democracies. When the patron controlled access to the land that the peasant needed for his survival, the relationship was a monopolistic one, granting power and stability to the patron. But the 'game' today has increasingly turned into a *competition* between potential patrons to see who can provide more forms of assistance that are simply supplementary, not about survival. This gives clients more leverage — even if the benefits provided are less adequate — and makes the client networks less stable. Thus Fox (1996) sees elite competition in Mexico as having fitfully opened up space for non-patronage politics.

Another aspect of the insufficiency of patronage is that many communities lack the ability to make claims on any politically provided resources whatsoever. For these communities patronage seems irrelevant, not because it is insufficient or has changed its form, but simply because it is altogether absent. Even in many remote rural areas the important actors in today's globalized world are international market chains or providers of overseas development assistance (ODA), not the local economic elites who traditionally dominated.

Finally, we are increasingly seeing external value-based groups (left-wing parties, trade unions, church-sponsored social movements and NGOs) challenging traditional patrons for the political loyalties of peasant communities (Fox, 1994, 1996). The prominence of internationally-sponsored NGOs in local politics is of course another aspect of globalization.

### **Clientelism Still Matters, Even if it is 'New'**

The foregoing points are generally true, but they have changed the shape of patronage, not its relevance. In this and the following section we will make the following case: there are several possible relationships between peasant communities on the one hand, and national governments on the other. While we may expect such populations to form interest groups in developed democracies, this was never the case in our country studies. Instead, peasant populations tended to either have no clear connection to their political leaders or were controlled by political clientage. Regardless of the associational social capital these groups enjoy at the local level, those that are part of clientage networks received greater benefits from the state.

Just as Manor acknowledges for India, even if patron–client networks have lost some of their power, they are still the predominant mode of political organization, particularly in the rural areas, in almost all the developing country systems we studied. Political clientage was an important feature of national politics in fourteen of the seventeen systems we studied; the exceptions — Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Vietnam — all have Leninist

heritages.<sup>9</sup> For example, politics in Orissa (India) is largely driven by patron–client structures (Turner, 2004). As a consequence, its livestock policy is often more responsive to larger farm than peasant interests. Similarly, the placement of animal health personnel is influenced more by civil servant interests than those of producers, especially the poor ones. Although neighbouring Andhra Pradesh is notably less patronage-driven than Orissa, one of the major weaknesses of the dairy co-operatives in both is that most are government creations headed by political patronage appointees and protected by the state with what have often been *de facto* local monopolies. Clientage was also an important feature of the national politics Fairfield (2005) found in Peru. Under President Fujimori, ‘The material foundation for populism . . . shifted from costly, impersonal programs such as universal consumer subsidies to less expensive, community-based projects that could be directly attributed to presidential initiative’ (Roberts, 1995:105–6).

Generally, patronage is not disappearing so much as changing its shape. As the critics assert, the traditional forms of political patronage are much less common now. Even the patronage system of Senegal, which is the most traditional and durable of all the ones we examined, now has international dimensions (as we discuss below). Otherwise most exchanges now are less durable and less rooted in sentiments of mutual obligation. Thus the client may see acts of patronage more as an indicator of what the future might bring if the relationship is continued than as creating a diffuse obligation to provide support when called upon. The patron is less likely to have a monopoly on the benefits provided and they are less likely to be essential for peasant survival. Often there is competition for the position of patron, with the ‘terms of trade’ consequently shifted more towards the client. Intense competition for clients was particularly evident for Bolivian national legislators (before the election of Morales as president), sedentary agriculturalist communities in Kenya, and Somali clans (Leonard, 2008; McSherry and Brass, 2008). Finally, benefits now may be more frequently directed toward the village or kinship unit than towards the individual.

The latter point raises the question of whether these new forms are really still patronage and not simply ‘constituency service’. Many scholars distinguish this ‘new clientelism’ from the ‘old clientelism’ of traditional patron–client relations and equate it to the ‘constituency service’ of industrial democracies (Hopkin, 2006). Our analysis, however, suggests it is still patronage (which is not to suggest that some similar practices don’t also occur in OECD countries). We note that the principle of exchange still rules, that the benefits provided are ‘private’ or ‘club’ goods, not ‘public’ ones, i.e.,

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9. This observation is common among political scientists but may be less familiar in other disciplines. It means (a) that the governing parties of all three were originally Marxist, and (b) despite having stepped away from traditional socialism, all continue to be governed by parties in the mode of Lenin’s democratic centralism. The consequence is that political competition in all three systems is limited and controlled.



they are directed to individuals or small communities, not toward the general interests of a class of people. The salience of these points is well-illustrated by Kenya, which probably has the largest and most effective smallholder dairy system in the world. Dairy production is economically important and receives a great deal of policy attention. The political system has been intensely competitive for fifteen years. It is striking, however, that there is no smallholder dairy producers' association in the country; patronage continues to hinder, rather than foster, collective action on policy (McSherry and Brass, 2008).

Another aspect of the 'new clientelism' is that 'patronage value chains' are frequently being internationalized. As noted above, at one level Senegal provides a classic illustration of the ideal-typical pattern of patron-client relations, but at another it has a new transnational twist (Gning, 2004). Groundnuts have been Senegal's most important export crop since colonial times and the region that produces them has been critical to presidential candidates since independence. The peasant producers of this region are bound by close ties of patronage to the Sufi Muslim brotherhood of the Mourides, whose leadership has historically delivered their votes in return for great influence with the Senegalese state. The electoral machines of Senegal's first presidents, Senghor and Diouf, relied upon the Mourides. Abdoulaye Wade was able to displace Diouf only because the leadership of the Mourides opted to be neutral in the transition election, thus he too is dependent on it. Senegal's pastoralists never were swept up by the Sufi movements, so they are outside this network of influence. Historically the leadership of the Mourides derived its income from the brotherhood's followers' cultivation of groundnuts. Thus it could be counted on to assure public policies favourable to peasant groundnut production. But the international market for groundnuts has deteriorated and the Mouride patrons are now in the process of shifting their income-generating strategies to gain more from trade, lessening their need to attend to the collective welfare of their peasant followers. Part of this new trade has come from the importation of milk powder and frozen chicken parts from the European Union. The Senegalese government *could* restrict these imports because the powdered milk is subsidized by the EU's Common Agricultural Policy and there are health and quality problems with the chicken because the cold chain necessary for frozen products is frequently broken. The failure to impose these restrictions hurts Senegal's milk and meat producers, who are undercut by the low prices of the subsidized or low-quality products from the EU. But the Mouride *traders* benefit from the imports and work to protect them.<sup>10</sup> Patron-client networks have thus expanded from the continued allegiance of peasant clients to

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10. After the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza scare Senegal finally did move to ban the import of frozen chicken. But it is notable that Cameroon acted well before HPAI. In other words, the patronage interests of the Mourides ultimately were overcome but they were successful in significantly delaying action until there was an international health alarm.

Mouride patrons to also include European super-patrons — governments and companies.

The expansion of patronage networks to include the ‘global north’ is a widespread phenomenon (Halderman and Nelson, 2004). At the Cancun World Trade Organization meetings over the Doha Round of liberalization negotiations, the developing country Group of 21 organized very effectively to challenge the American and EU defence of their subsidized and protected agricultural systems. Notably, the Group of 21 was *not* joined by any of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states, despite the fact that countries such as Jamaica and Senegal have small dairy sectors that are being damaged by EU subsidies. These countries were linked by special agreement to their former colonial masters in the EU, agreements that effectively bought their compliance with a highly unequal system of global trade in return for modest country-specific benefits that flowed to local elites.<sup>11</sup> Clientage is an international phenomenon, not just a national one. The binding ties include special trade arrangements and numerous development assistance projects. The latter give the ‘global north’ a physical presence in the rural areas of the developing world, further strengthening but also complicating the patronage relationships. (Sometimes the development assistance agencies, particularly NGOs, become advocates within the metropolitan states for their peasant clients; patronage networks *can* be used to positive as well as negative effect.)

### **Lack of Patronage Hurts**

The presence of clientage in the great majority of the countries we studied did not mean that all parts of these systems — even the rural ones — were reached by it. As might be expected, such ties were absent in the three Leninist systems, but there were also significant groups of livestock producers outside the reach of patronage in Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Peru, Somalia and Sudan. The absence of a patronage link to the centre generally was not a sign of an opening to interest group politics but instead of political weakness, for it meant no effective political presence in higher-level polities at all.

In the case of Sudan, the patronage systems have undergone disruption and change due to conflict and insecurity. Issues of land tenure are paramount, and tied to both oil interests and the continued expansion of crop agriculture. Oil exploitation and crop expansion have challenged and will continue to disrupt patronage systems, particularly those involving pastoralists. Oil has

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11. The EU–ACP agreements are gradually being dismantled through a combination of WTO rules and new EU preferential trade agreements, made on a sub-regional basis. One could argue that this reorganization will favour Europe’s role *vis-à-vis* Africa, but the jury is still out.

its own patronage ties (to China), as does horizontal crop expansion (to IFAD and Middle Eastern actors supporting it) (Fahey, 2008).

For another type of example, the collapse of collectivization has left the Vietnamese state with a conflicted and ineffective relationship with the peasantry. Marxist ideologues have historically been, and in Vietnam remain, convinced that the modernization of agriculture comes only through economies of scale (Jowitt, 1971). If the Party has backed away from collectivization but still fears the political consequences of medium and large-scale capitalist agricultural production, it has a difficult circle to square. It does so by encouraging active and retired government and party cadres to undertake larger agricultural enterprises. In terms of what we know about development this is a doubtful strategy for enhancing either production or the welfare of the poor (Tomich et al., 1995). It also makes the cadres ineffective representatives of peasant policy interests while keeping alternative political channels closed off to small producers. The result is that all we see in Vietnam are the ‘politics of everyday resistance’, i.e., non-cooperation (Vu, 2003).<sup>12</sup> Similarly, in rural Eritrea and Ethiopia isolation from the networks of the governing Leninist party does not imply an ability to organize collectively, but rather no real political influence at all. This is illustrated by the serious disregard for pastoralist interests in the lowlands in both countries (Halderman, 2004; Moehler, 2008). In Djibouti, which is simply authoritarian, the mostly rural Afar are wholly neglected by the dominant Issas (despite representing nearly half the population) (Brass, 2008).

The Khmer Rouge in Cambodia and the Shining Path (*Sendero Luminoso*) in Peru assassinated an entire generation of local leaders who were not willing to be wholly subordinate to them. (Indeed in Cambodia all ‘intellectuals’ were systematically eliminated.) They also made local peoples fearful of any kind of organization at all, atomizing people into nuclear family units. In Cambodia, the very meaning of the word ‘family’ has changed from the extended unit to the nuclear one. Thus even local community organization is difficult in these countries, not to mention involvement in national politics or policy making (Ear, 2005; Fairfield, 2005).

Another form of political isolation occurs when a local patronage system doesn’t articulate with a national one. The polity approach of Theda Skocpol holds that those groups that organize at a different level from the ones at which polity as a whole aggregates power and interests will experience a poor ‘fit’ with the system and consequently have little influence on its policies. Houtzager and Moore (2003) have applied Skocpol’s concept — which was first used on industrial democracies — to developing countries.

Thus Bolivia provides yet another interesting deviation from the patron-client ideal-type, as seen through Skocpol’s polity approach. Historically the hacienda system locked Bolivian Indians into extremely exploitative client

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12. Eritrea is making very similar decisions about the organization of agricultural production (Moehler, 2008).

relations with large land-owner patrons (Migdal, 1974). The revolution and land reform of 1953 dismantled this system. The land reform was a result of an intra-elite power struggle and was designed to destroy the political base of the landed aristocracy. The peasant unions that grew up to execute the land reform were incorporated into the then-ruling MNR party (Whitehead and Gray-Molina, 2003). At the time we did our research in Bolivia (which preceded the election of Evo Morales as president), these unions *and* patron-client politics paradoxically were both important in Bolivian politics but had become disconnected from each other in the way in which they affected policies (Fairfield, 2004). Under the Bolivian constitution, if no presidential candidate wins a majority of the popular vote (which none ever had until Morales' election), the outcome is decided by the National Assembly. The competition in the legislature was determined by intense bargaining and the provision of patronage appointments to the clients of the individual representatives. Thus almost all civil service appointments in Bolivia were patronage ones, but the client networks were elite ones and did not include the peasantry.

In principle patronage might extend below the elite level if an indigenous party were in the governing coalition, as has now happened with Morales' election. It is too early to know if such a transformation has taken place effectively. Before, the peasantry certainly was isolated from the operational mechanisms of the central government. Between national elections peasant political energies have been directed into the distribution of resources decentralized in the 1990s to the *municipios*. These local governments have been effective at allocating social services but not at supporting agricultural production. Because of scale economies the appropriate level for activities in support of livestock production would be one or two steps up from the *municipios* at the departments or provinces, which were then administered by the centre and under-resourced. The peasantry was therefore divorced from the levels of government at which its livelihood issues (such as genetic improvement, quality regulation, animal health and marketing) could be effectively addressed.

Ironically, indigenous Bolivians were (and are) politically highly mobilized around the protection of their land and their ability to grow coca, but they had virtually no capacity for lobbying. In a pattern reminiscent of the history of French syndicalism (Ansell, 2001), Indians could bring down governments through the mechanism of the general strike but they were ineffective in working on issues that addressed their daily lives as producers, especially around livestock. The peasant *unions* created through the land reform remain active but they have largely switched their allegiance to MAS, the new indigenous political party, and focus on the defence of land, not its productive use. Peasant *associations* are more involved in production issues but, partly because of the structural disjunction created by decentralization, have not been effective lobbyists despite their freedom from party ties.

Patron–clientage has remained the dominant mode of national policy making (at least until the election of Morales); but peasants were disconnected from those networks and had minimal influence on national agricultural policies. The structures of peasant politics have had an ineffective ‘fit’ with the mechanisms of national governance. In Uganda livestock infrastructure (such as dips and abattoirs) has deteriorated so badly as to inhibit production. But responsibility for its reconstruction has been delegated to the district level of government, where it is unlikely to receive priority — another example of a ‘poor institutional fit’ (Turner, 2005).

In Burkina Faso pastoralists are also well-organized but once again not in ways that articulate with the national system. They can address local problems effectively, but they find it hard to combine over national issues. Part of the reason is that ethnic organization is banned in that country. At the local level an ethnically homogeneous group can be portrayed as simply a local one, because African ethnicities tend to be geographically concentrated; but because most pastoralists in Burkina Faso are Fulani, an alliance of such organizations at national level is considered ethnic and is banned (Gning, 2005).

A final example of what it means for peasant communities to be cut off from patron–client networks is provided by van de Walle’s (2007) discussion of Nigerian politics, even though it does not concern livestock producers and was not one of our studies. That politics in Nigeria is structured around clientage is obvious: office holders use the state to generate income for themselves and their close associates (both sponsors and clients) and then use the accumulated wealth to purchase the election results they desire. Van de Walle argues, however, that there are three forms of clientelism: tribute (traditional gift exchange), classic patronage (the use of state resources to provide jobs and services) and prebendalism (the distribution of public positions to elites in order for them to gain wealth from the operation of the office). The latter term was devised by Richard Joseph (1987) specifically to describe Nigerian politics under the Second Republic and the form remains dominant there. In van de Walle’s view, only tribute and patronage are truly distributive, and reach ordinary voters. Prebendalism is an elite bargain, in which the benefits are narrowly distributed.

In Nigeria’s multi-party democracy, political entrepreneurs deliver *votes* but without necessarily recruiting and mobilizing *voters* (Egwu et al., 2008). In the other African states in which multi-party democracy is genuine, political parties are the vehicles of their visible leaders and try to distribute real benefits to their constituents. In Nigeria much of the power is behind the scenes, with the visible leaders simply assuring continued prebendal access to state resources for the invisible wealthy men who hire thugs to carry out the work of delivering the elections (sometimes by *preventing* people from voting and stuffing ballot boxes on their behalf). Thus these political parties are driven by prebends — the need of elites for continued access to and funding from officially controlled resources in order to purchase the election.

There is vigorous competition in Nigeria but puppet masters behind the curtain determine its outcome; the election is the movement of the puppets in response to the strings. The competition and clientage are largely between elites and determined by the bargaining among them, while the people are relegated to the wings and benefit little.

Finally, Nelson (2005) found that the strength of connections between peasant communities and their national leaders has ramifications at the international level as well. Governments that are most attuned to the needs of peasant communities are most likely to recognize and act on changes in international rules that affect them. Without advocates, however, international organizations may make rules that negatively affect producer's access to inputs — such as veterinary drugs — and their ability to get exports past unnecessarily stringent food safety barriers.

The larger point we are making, then, is that many peasant communities (especially those engaged in livestock production) are not incorporated in national patron–client relationships, despite having rich associational social capital at the community level. Moreover, these patronage-lacking communities receive even less benefit from the state than do those that are controlled by political clientage.

### **External NGOs Can Be Patrons**

Many international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have the empowerment of poor communities as a key goal and see themselves as building the associational social capital that would liberate the peasantry from political patronage (Bratton, 1989). Ironically, however, in practice many of these NGOs themselves assume the role of patrons to these rural communities. This is not to say that they are identical to the old-style patrons they have replaced. The values and political objectives of the NGOs are different, in that they are mobilizing the communities in what they see as the interests of the peasantry rather than some elite group. They are also less likely to award benefits to *individuals*. But like patrons they provide direct benefits to discrete, small rural *communities* in order to induce them to join in political action for larger policy goals that the communities, left to themselves, would not be pursuing. In his classic work on patronage Joel Migdal (1974) observed precisely this pattern among left-wing parties thirty-five years ago.

The social capital literature often sees those who provide a useful bridge between rural communities and the outside world as creating 'linking social capital', not as providing patronage (Bebbington, 1997). We insist, nonetheless, that unequal social exchanges always have an element of power in them, even when nothing but a linkage is being provided (for example, Ita, 1972). In this we follow Peter Blau in *Exchange and Power in Social Life* (1964). The question is not whether power is present but how it is used. It might be

that it is never drawn upon — but the reciprocity norms of social exchange create the potential that it will be. It might be used to advance the interests or agenda of the source of munificence — in which case most are happy to call it patronage. However, even if the motives of the ‘giver’ are altruistic and in the interest of the recipient, the former may still receive acknowledgement from the latter. This confers status on the giver or is accompanied by the implicit expectation that the recipient act in ways suggested by the giver. Thus although informed by generous motives, ‘linking social capital’ amounts to patronage and will be regarded as such by the recipients if it flows from an unequal social exchange.

Our first example of this phenomenon comes from Andhra Pradesh in India. Grazing by adivasis (tribals) in the state’s forests has been formally accommodated partly because their individual acts of defiance against Forest Department regulations had imperilled the forests themselves. But an NGO also did an effective job of organizing these sheep and goat herders to defend their grazing interests. This facilitated the Department’s making concessions in order to establish some degree of co-operation in managing the forests. From the peasant point of view, however, these NGO initiatives conform to the logic of patron–client relationships: external actors who can provide targeted benefits to individuals and communities<sup>13</sup> are binding these clients together for larger political agendas that would not be pursued by the peasantry alone. When these villagers were consulted on veterinary issues it was clear that they were acting under the direction of their NGO patron (Ahuja et al., 2008). Thus ANTHRA, the NGO, was not wholly selfless in this activity. Through this organizing work it gained a ‘weapon’ against a political party it did not support. But at least this political activity was about policy rather than the patronage characteristic of patron–client systems (Turner, 2004).

Brazil offers a noteworthy example of the political incorporation of the peasantry arising from various NGOs (including churches) investing during the military period in the organization, mobilization and networking of peasant groups along interest lines. Throughout Latin America the Catholic Church invested heavily in peasant organization under the influence of ‘liberation theology’. Once organization around collective interests had been achieved, it was easier to secure mobilization of the peasantry around future collective interests. Particularly in the earlier stages of this organization, however, priests would command peasant political behaviour in much the way that traditional patrons

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13. In this specific case, the NGO (ANTHRA) targeted tribal communities with community-based health services based on low-cost ethno-veterinary (indigenous knowledge-based) solutions and extension services for disease prevention and productivity enhancement. They also work with traditional healers and local tribal leaders to reach out to adivasi communities and have already created a network of local healers so as to obtain some recognition for their work.

had before (albeit to nobler ends) (Houtzager, 2000, 2001; Silberberg, 1998).

So long as patronage systems prevail, rural political leaders cannot be relied upon to represent the collective interests of their constituents at either the local or national levels and the parties in which they are involved tend to be devices for co-optation, not empowerment, of the peasantry (e.g., Silberberg, 1991). The record in Latin America strongly suggests that NGOs are much more likely to sustain the forms of organization — both organizing and strengthening the capacity of groups to organize themselves — that empower the peasantry over the one to two decades that are required for any significant impact (Houtzager, 2001).

Networks of NGOs and peasant organizations add even more leverage. Part of the Brazil story has been the linkages between local peasant unions and state and national confederations, which link up with public officials at different levels of government. Another part has been the Catholic Church, which is a local, national and international actor. The ability to ‘be present’ at many levels simultaneously is increasingly important (Houtzager, 2001).

Peasants rarely organize themselves politically for interests beyond those of the community. Arising out of their strategies for dealing with risk, they rely upon social exchange systems, not associations. When they lack mediators they are unrepresented. Contrary to what Easton (1965) suggested, peasant interests are *not* brought to the state or national level by ‘interest aggregation’ since that would imply that parties and interest groups merely *assemble* existing interests. Instead a mediation process takes place in which the political energies of the peasantry are reinterpreted and reapplied to the larger arena.

With traditional patrons this mediation process may actually direct the political power of the peasantry towards realizing ends that are contrary to its broader interests. Value-based mediators *may* be more dedicated to the collective interests of the peasantry. They do so through their own interpretation of those interests, however, even though they are much more likely to represent peasant collective interests than traditional patron-clientage is. This is the intermediate step towards associational politics for the rural poor.

## CONCLUSION

Political patronage remains highly relevant to the processes through which peasants receive benefits from the state. Most of the time peasant communities that are outside the patron-client networks of the country are worse, not better off. Nonetheless the patterns of patronage through which today’s rural dwellers are incorporated into their political systems are different from those that prevailed in earlier eras. First, patronage chains today often have a global reach — through trade, bi-lateral donor governments and international NGOs. Contemporary peasant politics is more directly tied to the



metropole than it used to be — and occasionally it even impacts policy debates in the metropole itself (particularly via NGO advocacy). Second, the resources that fuel political clientage today are less monopolistic and less adequate to the task of purchasing peasant political loyalty. Thus the bonds of patronage are less tight than they were historically. Third, it follows from the preceding point and the greater diversity of patrons operating today that elite conflicts are much more likely to create spaces in which peasant interests can eventually be aggregated into autonomous associations with independent political significance in the national polity. NGOs are playing an important role in opening up this political space. At the moment, they most often simply look like a new form of patron but in the long term the implications of the activity of many of them is for a genuinely ‘post-clientist’ world. That long-term prospect should not deceive us about the dominant current reality, however: patronage may have changed its shape but it is far from having lost its relevance to the political organization of peasants and the prospects of policies that will advance their interests.

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