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ABSTRACT
Concepts such as democracy and accountability rely heavily for their normative framing on scholarship originating in Europe and America. While these theories of democracy are useful for setting up frameworks with which to engage, it is important to assess the actually existing practices of everyday state–society engagement in informal locations and economies of the global south. Practices of everyday democracy may differ in contexts such as South Africa's and it is important to assess what this tells us about reconceptualising democratic theory in our region. While not uncritical of the power imbalances inherent in clientelism, this article attempts to provide a clear conceptual definition of clientelism and then investigates how this practice may fulfil democratic tasks such as increasing participation and accountability at the local level of governance. By reframing democratic expectations and unpacking where traditionally vilified practices such as clientelism may hold moments of democracy, the paper advances the idea that the study of democracy can be decolonised.

Introduction

There is an important and pressing need to make sense of state–society relations in post-apartheid democratic South Africa. Why do some political practices flourish and what does this tell us about how citizens make choices in regard to maximising their influence on decision-makers and the allocation of resources? In other words, if democracy broadly revolves around establishing a collective decision-making process where all citizens have an equal say, why do some citizens choose to exercise their democratic participation through working with political patrons? Can we say this is an undemocratic act? This paper investigates whether practices of clientelism are necessarily undemocratic and whether they erode conventional neo-liberal democratic norms. It does so in regard to the idea of decolonising analyses of state–society relations at the local level.

Following Mbembe (2015), 'decolonization' is a project of 're-centring':

> It is about rejecting the assumption that the modern West is the central root of Africa's consciousness and cultural heritage. It is about rejecting the notion that Africa is merely an extension of the West. Decolonizing (à la Ngugi) is not about closing the door to European or other traditions. It is about defining clearly, what the centre is.

The paper thus raises a debate about what the 'centre' is in regard to how we conceptualise and theorise the ways in which citizens engage with the state through (political) patrons. The article looks to 'de-centre' Western normative framings that see clientelistic

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practices as having a negative moral valence when juxtaposed with the positive moral valence of (liberal Western-centric notions of) democracy. It does not replace these binaries with indigenous or alternative conceptions; rather it is offering a set of reflections about how to think about democracy in South Africa. How do we decolonise our analyse of state–society relations by 're-centring' a western pejorative framing of clientelism as antithetical to democracy, in order to open space for alternative, emergent or indigenous accounts of reciprocity in politics?

Contextualising clientelism

Writing about clientelism in Europe, scholars note that clientelism and patronage have often been seen as cultural phenomena, the reflection onto the political sphere of a generalised way of conceiving interpersonal relations, particularly those between the powerful and the powerless (Hopkin and Mastropaolo 2001, 168; Piattoni 2001). While the concept was initially used to explain local level (i.e. village) politics, it soon became applied to entire political systems, often with strongly negative connotations. The clientelistic relationship was frequently viewed as one of domination and inequality, including different forms of social interaction such as exchange, conflict and prostitution. Clientelistic relations constituted a realm of submission; a pillar of oligarchic domination that reinforced and perpetuated the role of traditional political elites (Hagopian cited in Auyero 1999, 297). Transferred to an African context, this negative reading of patron–client relations was reframed as neo-patrimonialism, a system where a personal rule exists alongside legal-bureaucratic order (Lodge 2014). Neo-patrimonialism has been analysed by academics in a wide variety of contexts but is essentially seen as a combination of clientelistic practices and Weber's patrimonialism, where government powers and associated advantages are treated as private rights (Medard 1982, 178). Scholars argued that the typical African regime is 'a system of patron-client ties that bind leaders and followers in relationships not only of mutual assistance and support, but also of recognized and accepted inequality between big men and lesser men' (Jackson and Rosberg 1982, 39 cited in Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 2002, 3). Certainly during the 1960s and 1970s clientelism was seen as an example of unaccomplished modernisation or a cultural trait typical of agrarian or 'backward societies'.

This pejorative reading of clientelism, and indeed neo-patrimonialism has been reflected in policies emanating from the development assistance community. Examples of this thinking are reflected in papers such as that published by the World Bank titled, 'Democratization and Clientelism: Why Are Young Democracies Badly Governed?' It argues that 'younger democracies are more corrupt; exhibit less rule of law, lower levels of bureaucratic quality … and spend more on public investment and government workers' and that one theory to explain this is that political competitors in young democracies are 'less credible' and 'more reliant on patrons, and more likely to focus public policy on transfers and rent-seeking than broad public good provision' (Keefer 2005, 5). As Kelsall et al. (2010, 2) note, 'donor thinking is subject to binding ideological constraints. Where such matters as private property and democracy are concerned, there is a default position with which it is difficult if not impossible to argue'. This default position attributes a 'mainstream political science explanation' for Africa's disappointing development performance to 'a syndrome of ailments associated with what analysts … call "neo-patrimonial"

governance' (Kelsall et al. 2010, 2). These systems are seen as personalistic and clientelistic; as governments of men rather than of laws that become associated with elevated levels of corruption, waste, authoritarianism, arbitrariness and political instability. While the authors note that this neo-Weberian account is not necessarily wrong, they reflect, as does this paper, that a one-size-fits-all approach does not pay sufficient attention to variation or detail and that some types of neo-patrimonialism may be better for development than others.

The framing of clientelism changed to some extent in the 1980s and 1990s where clientelism began to be seen, not as a phenomenon that would disappear in the course of development, but as a mode of social exchange and political mobilisation identifiable in 'first' and 'second' world countries (de Sousa 2008; Roniger 2004). Indeed there is now wider understanding that clientelism is a rational act, practised in multiple settings, including countries conventionally viewed as advanced democracies such as the United States and Japan, Austria and Belgium (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007, 3; Piattoni 2001). Nonetheless, clientelism, and indeed neo-patrimonialism, are still generally seen as harmful to democracy (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 2002). Adding to the different normative views on clientelism is that, as a concept, it is notoriously difficult to delineate. There are vastly differing accounts of what constitutes clientelism and these are applied at different levels of government and across historical periods.

This paper shall first outline a conceptual frame of the concept clientelism, largely from the Western tradition. It will then look at a clientelistic spectrum, or what practices count as clientelistic. Applying this conceptual frame, the paper compares democratic norms emanating from the Western tradition to clientelistic relations and shows how these concepts are not only at times compatible, but at times mutually reinforcing. In so doing, the western normative and conceptual binary between democracy and clientelism is called into question. The paper concludes by arguing for the decolonisation of the study of democracy, through a re-analysis of previously vilified practices such as clientelism.

The characteristics of political clientelism

One of the key traits that many authors attribute to clientelism is that it is a rational, interest-maximising act, which involves the exchange of resources for political support. Patrons wish to maintain or maximise their interests while clients wish to protect and promote their interests. Clientelism is based on a 'rational economic calculus more than on blind or reflexive personal loyalty' (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 2002, 3). Clientelism as a rational act accounts for the adaptation of the practice to different countries and political systems, regardless of culture and the level of political development (Piattoni 2001).

The same view can be applied to neo-patrimonialism. For Nyaluke (2014) the neopatrimonial approach goes astray where it reifies the patrimonial in neo-patrimonialism as a primordial African tradition, centring African politics in the traditional as opposed to the modern realm. In a similar vein, Mustaph (cited in Nyaluke 2014, 151) argues that this biased and reductionist perspective of African politics robs non-elite groups of political agency. Kensall and Booth (2010) also argue that under certain conditions neo-patrimonialism can be good for development and poverty reduction (although they do not relate this to democratic practices) and justifiably termed 'developmental patrimonialism'. The point these authors make is that neo-patrimonialism can be a 'modern' developmental

practice and its instrumental relations should not be cloaked in cultural terms, perceived as primordial.

Allied to the notion that clientelism is a rational interest-maximising process is the idea that it is also voluntary (Hicken 2011). While the extent of clientelism may differ depending on different contexts, its adoption (by both clients and patrons) is ultimately always a question of choice. Clients are theoretically free to choose their patrons and have the choice to exit the relationship should it not meet expectations (Hilgers 2012). This does not deny the reality that clientelism can be exploitive and involve unequal power relations, as discussed below, but it highlights the difference between clientelism and coercion or oppression. While the extent to which clients are free to exit the relationship may differ in certain contexts, the qualification to this conceptual framing is that this is an analysis of clientelism in a formally democratic state. Clients do have the option of accessing the bureaucratic state, or indeed other patrons who are vying for political power, no matter how weak these resources may be. Indeed one could call this competitive clientelism.

The third characteristic of clientelism is that it is dyadic, intrinsically based on a relationship between two actors (Hicken 2011). This can be a face-to-face personal relationship or it can be through a series of brokerage relationships (see Piper and von Lieres 2014). A political broker, in a clientelist setting, can either obstruct or facilitate the flow of demands, favours, goods and services to or from some constituency (Auyero 1999). Brokers may be individuals with high standing or influence in a community, and they may engage, as representatives of (or at least claim to represent) their clients with a political patron. Indeed the patron is not always an individual politician, although this is the conventional reading of clientelism. A patron may be a group of political actors, a political party, a local government official, etc. Clientelism can also be experienced in both individual and collective settings. Based on research in Brazil, Gay (1998) argues that clientelism is increasingly a means to pursue the delivery of collective interests as opposed to individual goods. Political clients are therefore more likely to assume the form of organisations and communities that 'fashion relationships or reach understandings with politicians, public officials and administrations' (Gay 1998, 14). What is key in the relationship is not exactly who the political actors are, but the contingent nature of the patron–client exchange.

The fourth characteristic is the idea that the contingent exchange is also reciprocal between the two actors (Hicken 2011, 291). The patron offers access to resources in exchange for the promise of political support. The exchange between patron and client may not be immediate or time-bound, but it is always conditional: there are always strings attached to the client that accepts the resources. The types of resources that can be exchanged are broad and will vary in different settings. It can range from food parcels to flats. Clientelistic relationships can include access to a range of opportunities beyond fixed resources, such as public employment (Fox 2012). In terms of private goods, such as local government housing, allocation would be clientelistic where discretionary criteria (potentially based on political affiliation) are used for allocation, whereas programmatic logic would be in play where allocation to families was based on objective indicators, such as need or socio-economic status (Fox 2012). Clientelism can, however, also be a struggle over symbolic resources and political 'credit' as much as it is over jobs, infrastructure and access to the state (Gay 1998, 16).

Political clientelism is unlikely to be a once-off engagement. It is differentiated from bribery, for example, with an iterative nature in the relationship between patron and client. It may be intermittent but there is an assumption (certainly on the part of the actor who first delivers their part of the exchange) that there will be an ongoing inter-action, which influences behaviour today. (Hicken 2011, 292; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007, 4). Clientelism requires one of the parties to trust the other will deliver on their prom-ises; it is seldom a relationship of simultaneous exchange. The patron must have good reasons to expect the clients targeted will behave in a predictable fashion and not be opportunistic; this requires a good knowledge of the predicted behaviour of their clients, which often arises from repeated patterns of behaviour. In other words, 'the evol-ution of party organisational forms that manage clientelistic relations is a drawn-out process, not an instant result of relational strategic interaction in single-shot games' (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007, 8). Clientelistic relations are thus rarely isolated, but rather part of a dense web of social relations based on shared history and cultural frame-works. This can facilitate ongoing opportunities for indirect surveillance, regulation and feedback.

Lastly is the notion that political clientelism includes a measure of hierarchy. This characteristic refers to the idea that there is an actor with either a higher socio-economic status or degree of access to resources (patron) that uses influence and resources to provide benefits to a person (or specific group) of lower status (client). There is thus an assumed asymmetry of power in patron–client relationships (de Sousa 2008, 4; Hicken 2011, 292). Although this relationship may be asymmetrical, it does not mean it is not mutually beneficial or that even the most highly constrained of clients cannot turn the relationship to their advantage (Hicken 2011, 292; Roniger 2004, 353). It is also unclear as to the extent of power imbalances needed between a patron and client before it can be called clientelistic. Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007, 4) argue that in the context of demo-cratic institutional settings clientelism evolves into more symmetrical exchange relation-ships. This attribute relates to the concept of power. Patrons are often able to enforce a client's compliance through condign (punishment) or compensatory (reward) power (Gal-braith 1983) but clients, acting as individuals are often less able to force a patron to honour his commitments (Hicken 2011, 294). This imbalance in power can of course be different in cases of collective clientelism.

Drawing on the above, a conceptual definition of political clientelism would thus include patron–client relationships that are interest maximising, voluntary, dyadic, recipro-cal, iterative and hierarchical. While these are important characteristics it is also important to situate the study of clientelism structurally.

Scales and spectrums

Where do we find conceptions of clientelism, as framed above, in the political and public arena in South Africa? If the concept is to be a useful analytical tool, it is important to locate the site and context of its existence. Levels and scale make a difference to how one assesses clientelism (Fox 2012). This paper argues that clientelism is an effective and appropriate analytical tool for the study of micro-level state–society engagements. In other words, it is well suited to the study of governance and democracy at the local level: at the community, neighbourhood, village, ward, sub-council, municipal and City

levels. While it can be applied to all level of governance there are other framings that are often better suited to the study of national or provincial level resource allocation. There are certainly widespread instances of patron–client relationships at the national level, or even within state-owned enterprises. These Van de Walle (2007) may call 'elite clientelism', a form of prebendalism limited to a narrow political elite. This is the strategic political allocation of public office to key elites, allowing personal access to state resources. This form of patron–client relationship is usually found at the national level and is perhaps most closely related in South Africa to the idea of 'state capture'. While some African countries are moving on a trajectory from authoritarianism to electoral democracy, and thus from 'elite clientelism' to mass-based clientelism, in South Africa (and indeed Zimbabwe) the trajectory seems to be going the other way: from electoral democracy linked to mass-based clientelism towards, particularly during the Presidency of Jacob Zuma, prebendalism for a narrow elite. While clientelism can be applied to the study of elite capture of state assets, this is often act between corporate and political actors and, as discussed below, is more effectively analysed as a form of corruption, which is arguably on the far end of the clientelistic spectrum.

In term of scale, there is also a debate about whether clientelism exists only at the micro-sociological level of study (a relationship between individuals) or at more meso and macro levels of relationships (between organisations and groups of actors). For Hilgers (2012, 207) clientelism is most appropriate to the study of relationships between individuals of unequal socio-political status. She argues that clientelism can be contained in meso and macro sociological organisations and structures but that these tend to involve more complexity than clientelism (Hilgers 2012, 207). She notes, however, the importance of political context to the study of clientelism, particularly when assessing how democratic or authoritarian a clientelistic relationship may be. Others argue that collective clientelism is an important level of analysis (Gay 1998). Arguably, the individual micro-sociological level is a site of study where it is clearer to map lines of power and reciprocity; however, where clients act collectively to demand resources or where patrons and brokers are organisations (including civil society groups that have access to the state), these too can be seen as clientelistic actors. The more important question is whether the relationship has key clientelistic characteristics such as those described above, rather than whether it is between individuals and groups.

Finally, before moving to the relationship between clientelism and democracy it is useful to conceive of clientelism as operating on a spectrum. For example, some practices are very personal and sit on one end of the analytical lens of the concept, while others are explicitly illegal and move towards systemic corruption. In this reading, personal relations between socio-economic equals, with little hierarchy, or contingency would not suit clientelism as an analytical tool, such as some forms of nepotism. Corruption, particularly defined in the Western mainstream view, is also on the far end of the clientelism spectrum. While a contested concept, corruption is often referred to as the 'abuse of public office for private gain' (World Bank 2000). Corruption usually refers only to illegal decisions made by individuals in positions of public authority (Khan 1996). When clientelistic practices break the rule of law they are then best analysed through concepts such as corruption, or if they occur at the national level between power holders and corporate interests, theories of state capture may be applied. In other words, when a patron–client relationship explicitly involves breaking established laws, it has moved to the far end of the clientelism spectrum

and into the realm of corruption. For example, a clientelist relationship may involve particularistic arrangements that favour specific clients; however, the allocation of a public resource to favoured clients may not be illegal, and indeed neither is the contingent offer of political support, through such acts as voting or attending rallies. Where the allocation of a resource involves breaking the law, or where the 'kickback' to the patron is in the form of money, for example, the relationship is better suited to the analytical lens of fraud or corruption.

Clientelism and democracy

With a conceptual understanding what political clientelism is (and is not), as informed by the western mainstream view, and where it occurs, it can now more accurately be analysed in relation to the theory of democracy. To what extent is clientelism a democratic act, or to what extent does it erode democratic norms? Clientelism is frequently understood as a threat to the foundations of democracy. It is 'almost universally described as an evil, largely responsible for the failure of democracy in Africa' (Bénit-Gbaffou 2011, 456). Where clientelism is very broadly defined, it has been viewed as leading to government capture by interest groups, damaging institutional performance of the state and undermining the idea of the public good. For some it is a form of patrimonial corruption of public agencies, neutralising the system of representation by placing associates and friends in strategic positions of power and control. From this viewpoint, clientelism goes against the institutionalisation of public accountability and mechanisms of administrative control. It can result in the overemployment of underqualified personnel in public administration, biased processes of public works and overpricing and private deals involving public resources (Roniger 2004, 354). In this light, it is seen as replacing political accountability with a transaction, where citizens 'surrender their vote for the right price' (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007, 2).

If we analyse clientelism with the characteristics defined in the previous section, and as a form of everyday state–society engagement at the coalface (local level) of governance it is possible to have a nuanced discussion of the relationship between clientelism and democracy, which is relevant to the lived experiences of residents and brokers in local communities. This section will first outline key democratic norms, drawing on conventional understandings of democracy, which indeed originate in Euro-American scholarship, and then apply these to examples of clientelism.

Democracy is not a uniform concept but rather a multi-layered one, with different meanings for different constituencies. At its most basic democracy originates from the Greek terms *demos* and *kratos*, which approximate to the idea of 'rule by the people' (Arblaster 1987, 2). Since ancient Greece, however, the concept has developed in many directions, with no single definition or understanding. Contemporary descriptions and practices vary widely, and indeed today, the populist tradition that emphasises the will of the people is prevalent in many countries today. At its most narrow, Joseph Schumpeter describes democracy as simply a political method, a mechanism for choosing political leadership. He believes that, 'the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote' (Schumpeter 1943, 173–174). Other contemporary models of what democracy is and how it ought to function include

competitive elitism or technocratic democracy; pluralist or corporate capitalist democracy, participatory democracy and democratic autonomy (Held 1996). In democratic autonomy, for example, individuals should be free and equal in the determination of the conditions of their own lives. They should have equal rights when specifying the framework that generates and limits the opportunities available to them, and they must not use this framework to negate the rights of others (Held 1996, Chapter 9). Debates about the meaning of democracy are often a reflection of the dichotomy between democracy's normative value and how it works in practice.

Although different emphasis is placed on different norms or institution, among key contemporary theorists (Beetham 2004; Dahl 1991, 2000; Diamond 1999; Held 1996; Sorensen 1993), several core democratic norms stand out, particularly in relation to the dominant Western model of liberal representative democracy. These include: (1) meaningful and extensive competition in democratic processes; (2) citizens must be politically equal under the law; (3) civil and political liberties, including the freedom to form and join independent associations; freedom for all to express their interests; freedom of belief, opinion, speech, assembly, demonstration and petition; (4) the constraint of executive power by other government institutions; (5) unfettered access to alternative sources of information; (6) a highly inclusive level of political participation, with free and fair elections, effective participation and perhaps even direct participation in local community institutions and (7) accountability of the state and responsiveness of government to the preference of its citizens.

There are of course many other norms that scholars and practitioners of democracy believe should be core to its meaning. Beetham (2004), for example, lists transparency (government open to legislative and public scrutiny) and solidarity (support for democratic governments and democratic struggles abroad) as two additional mediating norms. Held's (1996) democratic autonomy has social and economic rights as a component of democracy. He is in line with the eighteenth-century philosopher Rousseau, who argued that political democracy, and equal political rights, cannot exist where there is vast socio-economic inequality (Sorensen 1993). While these additional norms may form part of a 'deepened democracy' (Gaventa 2007), the focus of this argument is on widely agreed upon baseline norms.

Clientelism is arguably compatible with democracy where democracy is understood as meaningful and extensive competition. Indeed, without competition political actors would have no need to win over clients' support. South Africa may have historically been seen as dominant party state, but there is evidence that 23 years after the end of apartheid electoral competition flourishes. While the African National Congress (ANC) holds the majority of seats in the national legislature, at the local level opposition parties continue to win support. The Democratic Alliance (DA) is in power in four metropolitan centres and local government elections are highly contested. There is also contestation within political parties, as we see in the form of ANC 'slates'. Clients know they have a choice of patrons, within or outside a particular party. Every ward in South Africa has numerous electoral candidates for both proportional representation and ward councillor seats (Independent Electoral Commission, n.d.). Rather than eroding the democratic norm of competition, clientelism works hand in hand with it.

Allied to the norm of competition is the idea of political equality under the law. Here each citizen's vote counts equally. In the South African context, clientelistic relationships

do not undermine the legal standing of any citizen to vote, nor can a patron–client relationship affect voting equality under conditions of free and fair secret elections. Thus, clientelist relationships are compatible with voting equality. Indeed, the fact that each vote counts equally has an impact on accountability, as patrons have to win over individual citizens as equals and no one individual is *electorally* more powerful than another. This of course does not account for situations where representation is group based, and thus if a patron wins the claim to represent a collective or group, all voters in this collective will vote for them. This viewpoint is also not to deny that clientelism thrives in situations of inequality and poverty (Gay 1998) and as such is poorly suited to challenging entrenched social or economic inequality and hegemonic positions of power. Clientelist practices may struggle to challenge existing power holders who can quickly remove their patronage.

This conception of democracy as voting equality is also related to the idea of the 'rule of law'; that is that all citizens are equal before the law and that laws are publically know and consistently applied to all citizens by an independent judiciary (Diamond and Morlino 2005). Where patrons expressly break the rule of law and are not held accountable by a judiciary then this practice moves along the clientelistic spectrum towards corruption and bribery. Many forms of clientelism, however, involve the discretionary distribution of goods that is within the legal bounds of the patron to distribute. This can, for example, be at a meso level, where a mayoral committee decides which area to allocate new housing based on historical and predicted electoral support. A ward councillor can choose how to allocate his discretionary funds for the year. At the more local level, a political party leader of a party branch in a township can oversee who is able to get letters stamped at the branch office that officially recognise their address, allowing them to access a bank account, for example. In practice, there is often a blurring between what is a clientelistic exchange and what is distributed as a programmatic good. What is specific about clientelism is that the main criterion for receiving targeted benefits is political support, often voting, but not limited to votes. Programmatic redistribution by a political actor will usually look at criteria such as 'do you live is a particular area' or 'do you fall into a specific socio-economic category' not 'will you support me politically' or 'are you part of my personal networks'.

Distribution of resources is clientelistic not based on what the resources are, but on the understanding that there is substantial discretion by political actors over disbursement and that this is contingent on clients' (as individuals or groups) promised political support (Hicken 2011, 294–295). Drawing a clear distinction between programmatic resource allocation and clientelism is not always straightforward, however. Fox (2012) explains clientelism can involve a mix of politicised resource allocation *and* rights-based, or entitlement-based resource allocation. When examining the principles under which public goods are allocated it is seldom done on a basis of only needs-based, bureaucratic criteria or based only on political discretion. Clientelistic relationships can, furthermore, include access to a range of opportunities beyond fixed resources, such as public employment (Fox 2012). Indeed clientelism can also be a struggle over symbolic resources and political 'credit' as much as it is over jobs, infrastructure and access to the state (Gay 1998, 16). Clientelism does not, furthermore, only relate to a political actor gaining votes in return for goods and services. It can include 'a more implicit but nonetheless firm understanding between public administration and whole regions that it takes a certain amount of government activity to produce votes' (Gay 1998, 22). In these examples, this type of

clientelism does not necessarily erode democracy as it is not structured to break the rule of law, but rather to work within its 'grey areas'.

The third norm of civil and political liberties is closely bound up with the idea of civil society (White 2008). Here the freedom to form and join independent associations, the freedom for all to express their interests and the freedom of belief, opinion, speech, assembly, demonstration and petition are all key components of both democracy and civil society. Any democracy will face the test of establishing an effective and symbiotic relationship between a free and open civil society and the state. While clientelism does not necessarily prevent the exercise of civil and political liberties, the practice is not traditionally viewed as fostering civic engagement, or the strengthening of civil society. Clientelist bonds have traditionally been seen as vertical in orientation, and so differ from the horizontal networks of civic engagement that are viewed in the liberal tradition as the true roots of a civic community and that in turn, 'make democracy work' (Putnam cited in Auyero 1999, 298).

However, evidence shows that clientelism is a form of civic engagement that can do what civil society organisations do, when engaging in democratic participation (Anciano 2017). Indeed Gay (1998, 17) argues that those who have made use of clientelism have 'articulated new demands, established alternative discursive arenas, challenged dominant practices and achieved, at the very least, a measure of symbolic power'. Auyero's (1999) work on political clientelism in Latin America describes complex social networks formed directly through patronage brokers. In South Africa, a case study of an organisation, the Peace and Mediation Forum (PMF) in Hout Bay, Cape Town shows that clientelism can perform tasks such as building social capital. The PMF was formed through the mandate of the court to represent all the residents of Hangberg, in Hout Bay. After 39 leaders were democratically elected onto the forum it then became the 'only recognised legal entity within the community that has the right to liaise with the City' (Interview with PMF leader 2015. Interview Conducted by Fiona Anciano, March, Cape Town). This structure has facilitated ongoing clientelistic relations between the DA and PMF brokers, a view reinforced by research with residents of Hangberg who describe resources and opportunities being selectively channelled by PMF 'brokers' to compliant members of the community. The City of Cape Town has also over time prioritised support for PMF 'leaders' it feels are more amenable to its views (Anciano 2017; Focus group with PMF women leaders 2017; Interview with Development Practitioner 2017. Interview Conducted by Fiona Anciano on November 28, Cape Town). While clientelistic in many of its practices, the PMF has built networks across civil society by linking into multiple forums in Hout Bay. It has also built social networks (mainly of beneficiaries) in Hout Bay through acting as an advice office and dispensing social and economic opportunities. These networks may be biased in favour of their participants' needs, but this does not differ significantly from other civil society organisations such as trade unions, which explicitly support member's interests.

Norms four and five are areas in which patron–client networks at the local level of governance have little influence. Norm four, the constraint of executive power by other government institutions, is understood to include the notion that other government agencies, especially the judiciary, are used as an avenue to constrain, where necessary, executive power. This is not an area in which clientelism directly operates, as clients exist outside of the state. Norm five, access to alternative sources of information, can be defined as

the idea that 'citizens must enjoy ample and equal opportunities for discovering and affirming what choice in a matter before them would best serve their interests' (Held 1996, 310). Certainly, patrons could decide to withhold information from citizens in general or their own clients in particular, in order to influence decision-making. Indeed in the case of the PMF, residents complain that information regarding meetings or work opportunities are selectively communicated to favoured 'clients' (Interview with Hangberg Pastor 2016. Interview Conducted by Fiona Anciano, September, Cape Town; Interview with Hangberg resident 2015. Interview Conducted by Fiona Anciano, March, Cape Town). This, however, makes the clientelistic relationship no less democratic than any other form of state–society engagement we may see, for example, between civil society organisations and political actors. Any grouping or individual can be selective in what information they share with citizens. The democratic question is whether patrons are preventing citizens from accessing information. In the age of social media, and in the context of the bureaucratic South African state where citizens legally have access to planning information from City departments, for example, it is difficult for clientelistic relationships to block access to information. How transparent information is in clientelistic relationships is, however, a related and important question. Transparency, however, is not widely regarded as a core democratic norm, but rather, as part of a 'deepened' form of democracy, allied to the notion of deliberative democracy (Cohen 2006; Young 2001).

Participation and accountability

The norms of participation and accountability are frequently seen as central to a strong or 'quality' democracy (Diamond and Morlino 2005). These norms, however, can be narrowly or broadly interpreted. In a narrow interpretation, the norm of inclusive political participation is supported where there are clientelistic relationships. Patrons and clients are highly incentivised to participate in the electoral system (a system which is currently regarded as free and fair in South Africa) or indeed there is little benefit for patrons from clientelistic support. For many patrons and brokers, the end game is electoral office, which requires the participation of clients.

Broader definitions of participation are espoused in debates on 'deepening democracy'. Here democracy is based on the models of participatory and deliberative democracy. Participatory democracy is the primary counter-model on the left to the 'legal democracy' favoured by the right (Held 1996, 264). The distinguishing feature of participatory democracy from other democratic models is the fundamental belief that democracy can only be truly sustained if society enjoys relatively high levels of citizen intervention in the tasks of governing (Terchek and Conte 2001). Participatory democracy offers a critique of liberal democracy in respect to social equality and the ability of different groups (from women, to the working class to ethnically differentiated groups) to actually realise their formally recognised rights (Held 1996; Pateman 1985). As Held (1996, 265) notes, 'asymmetries of power and resource impinge upon the meaning of liberty and equality in daily relations'. Citizens are in practice often restricted, due to both lack of resources and opportunities, from participating actively in political and civil life (Held 1996, 265). The emphasis placed by the liberal democratic model on political parties and interest group politics means that not only are the voice of vulnerable members of society lost but citizens become increasingly disinterested spectators (Terchek and Conte 2001, 165).

It is arguable that even on this expanded measure of participation-clientelism holds the potential to include a form of participatory consultation. Patrons acting as a mediator between the political party or state and citizen can inform those in power of the needs of their clients, and potentially generate responsiveness. Intermediaries who 'speak for' various groups of citizens can secure democratic outcomes, turning 'subjects into citizens' as it were, by 'explicitly teaching people about their rights in the democratic political system, and organising and mobilising on this basis' (Piper and von Lieres 2014, 5). Clients may also favour participation through their broker of choice in response to what is often seen as distrustful formal institutions, bureaucratic indifference and exclusion (Gay 1998). Indeed, for Dawson (2014, 539), 'it is not necessarily the patron who establishes the relationship with possible clients or supporters; instead agency may equally lie with clients or residents in seeking out a patron who will give a specific group leverage and access to resources'. Choosing a clientelistic broker through which to engage politicians or the state reinforces the idea that 'democratic representation is both a mode of political authorisation and a social relation through which governance is organised' (Piliavsky 2014, 31).

'Deepened' forms of public participation (as exemplified in the Porto Alegre process[1]) may be institutionalised, open to all and based on a set of predictable rules, but even processes such as these are vulnerable to the politicisation of the application of rules. This denotes the existence of an important grey area that is neither clientelistic nor strictly rule based (Fox 2012). Indeed there are many instances of 'participatory governance' that in practice are simply forms of clientelism in action. Lemanski (2017, 23) notes how it is 'axiomatic that a participatory process devised by the state will promote a statist agenda and vision … and that state actors (e.g. local politicians) and powerful citizens will direct the process to suit their interest'. Research has shown that practices of participation between elections may depoliticise rather than empower participants by legitimising and highlighting the voices of those with the most influence and power. Participation processes may simply cover up existing top-down development and not challenge existing inequalities and patterns of power (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Lemanski 2017). These practices are often rightly critiqued as forms of poor governance, they are, however, still viewed as compatible with, and indeed (failed) attempts to deepen, democracy.

Inverting the participation-clientelism relationship, one could argue that examples of clientelism are in fact forms of participatory democracy in action. Beresford (2015) describes how local government councillor positions are often used to distribute spoils to clientele. State-sponsored development projects require the use of local labour and local business to complete projects, and councillors often have influence over this. A senior member of the ANC describes how:

> When there is a development project to build houses in Diepsloot, the councillor forms what is called a project liaison committee. [The committee] oversees firstly who are the local labourers that will be used and councillor can also influence with selecting subcontractors for the project. (Beresford 2015, 9)

If the councillor is asked to assist with the development project (this is in line with the developmental democracy as the councillor is a representative of the ward and thus an obvious point of community engagement) and there is reciprocity of political support from the labourers selected it is a clientelist relationship. How the councillor forms his committee is most likely similar in practice to how a ward committee is formed. A ward committee is,

however, a key tenant of South African participatory democracy (Piper and Deacon 2009). The formation of a ward committee can be done is several ways; however, the ward councillor often has significant discretion in influencing which representatives are selected. In an interview with a ward councillor elected in the 2016 local government elections (Ward Councillor, personal communication, February 21, 2017), he explained how he chooses which portfolios would be represented on the committee as 'it's the councillor's prerogative to select portfolios'. He specifically allowed three seats for organisations involved with security, for example, so that all his preferred members would have a place. While some seats were drawn by a lot, he ultimately had nine of the 10 ward committee members that he wanted:

> … if there's a network of relationship that existed prior to the committee's formation so that organisations that are aligned work together … all the better … so I hit the ground running and started working with organisations before [the formation of the ward committee].

Ward committees are an intrinsic part of South Africa's participatory democracy and the inherent clientelism build into their formation is accepted as a part of the democratic system. Indeed ward councillors are democratically elected by patrons and then have the discretion, for example, to allocate funds to projects they feel are important. In this ward, the councillor decided to allocate a large proportion of his discretionary funds to a security camera system that tracks cars coming in and out of a township in his ward that borders the wealthier area where the majority of his supporters live. This meets the needs of only one section of his ward, but it is the section that is his political supporters. This is clientelism; it is also democracy.

The extent to which participation is effective in 'deepening' democracy, relates closely to the seventh norm of accountability. Accountability implies the right of persons who are affected by an action or decision to be given an explanation of what was done and to be able to pass judgement on the conduct of those who carried out the act (Sklar 1999). Political accountability is built into the idea of representative government; representatives should be accountable to those on whose behalf they claim to act. First, representatives must show during elections that they have the appropriate formal qualifications and that they stand for some version of the public good. Second, once in power, they must make themselves available to public scrutiny around the discharging of their duties and act in accordance with legal rules and conventions of their office. Lastly, when seeking re-election, they should provide an explanation of their record in public office (Whitehead 2002, 91–95).

Clientelism has not traditionally been seen as stimulating accountability. Political scientists, in particular, view it as replacing political accountability with a transaction, where citizens 'surrender their vote for the right price' (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007, 2). However, research from anthropologists and researchers who work at a local level show that clientelism can stimulate accountability. Clientelist politicians and community leaders who do not deliver on a consistent basis soon lose support and are replaced by others (Gay 1998, 14). In reference to India Piliavsky (2014, 34) explains that:

> The people cast their chiefs … elders and MPs in the role of 'patrons', not only entitling them to special honours and privileges but making them responsible – obliging them to provide, protect and stand accountable for their actions.

Indeed South African research has shown that in certain contexts clientelism allows for local and immediate accountability of politicians to residents (Bénit-Gbaffou 2011) and

that patronage politics at the local level is often used as a deliberate political strategy, particularly where the state is seen as absent or indifferent (Anciano 2017; Dawson 2014). In a study on patronage in South Africa, Ndletyana, Makhalemele, and Mathekga (2013, 9) note that:

> Councillors' dependence on votes, in turn, gives residents leverage. They are buoyed to make demands upon their public representatives. Indifference to such demands risks loss of political support. Consequently, councillors take great effort to provide patronage going beyond what is ordinarily prescribed in their duties.

While Ndletyana's study focused on the negative aspects of patron–client relations, the quote above can be interpreted as an indication that patrons in a clientelistic relationship are in fact more likely to be accountable to their existing clients (or indeed potential new clients) than politicians not involved in clientelistic relations. Accountability relates closely to the idea of contingency, as client support is contingent on patron accountability.

When applying a clearly defined understanding of clientelism to a widely accepted set of democratic norms, it becomes apparent that, far from eroding or undermining democracy, clientelism can be, in practice, highly compatible with democratic norms. Indeed, in terms of norms such as accountability and civil and political liberties, it may in practice strengthen these. This argument is reinforced by research on neo-patrimonialism that argues that the practice is not simply an anachronistic remnant but rather a form of authority that can function effectively in democratic settings (Pitcher, Moran, and Johnston 2009); patrimonial leaders can be held accountable by the collective. In Van de Walle's (2007) well-known work on neo-patrimonialism and clientelism in Africa, he too argues that a key typology of clientelism, *mass* clientelism – where state resources are used to provide jobs and services for mass political clienteles, normally involving party organisations and electoral politics – 'is quite compatible with an effective and responsive state apparatus'. It can be 'responsive to citizen concerns and deliver services' (Van de Walle 2007, 6). Indeed patronage is often legal and officially codified and circumscribed in so-called 'consolidated' democracies often found in the global north. While it may be frowned upon, it remains present in state structures in advanced economies. Theobald (cited in Van de Walle 2007) gives an example of this, explaining that in the United States, based on a study of the 1980s, there was an estimated four million patronage positions in state and local government spheres.

What is important for the purposes of this argument is the notion that forms of clientelism, such as mass clientelism, is not incompatible with democracy and that these forms exist in all countries of the world (included historically colonial consolidated democracies). For Van de Walle (2007, 6), the locus of mass clientelism is usually in the legislative branch and political parties. Arguably, this can be extended to local, urban levels of governance, which are indeed at the coalface of political party citizen engagement. Thus, if we are to decolonise our understandings of democracy, we need to rethink practices of clientelism as inherently anachronistic, traditional, undemocratic customs that occur only in countries of the global South.

Conclusion: clientelism, democracy and decolonisation

This paper argues that clientelism, even a mainstream western framing, is not necessarily undemocratic, nor does it always erode neo-liberal democratic norms. The practice

does, however, sit uncomfortably with Euro-American frameworks of political developmentalism, particularly as espoused in neo-liberal arguments of good governance emanating from international institutions such as the World Bank and development agencies such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). A World Bank paper argues, for example, that political reliance on patrons may enhance welfare in the short-run, 'but in the long run reliance on patrons may undermine the emergence of credible political parties', and thus damage democratic prospects (Keefer and Vlaicu 2005). A paper prepared for USAID, for example, focuses on providing strategies for reforming clientelistic systems in order to facilitate democratisation (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 2002). Yet, as Koelble and Lipuma (2008, 8) explain, postcolonial states have a different sociohistorical trajectory from their Euro-American counterparts and are thus 'not easily assimilated to a one model fits all developmentalism'. Euro-American frameworks tend to, perhaps unintentionally, vilify many everyday practices of citizen engagement.

In this view, clientelism needs to be analysed not as a practice deviating from an assumption of what a 'consolidated' democracy should look like, but as a valid and rational form of state–society relations that citizens, as agents, choose to utilise to maximise their interests and express their voice in decisions that affect them. Mbembe (2015) reinforces this view when he cites Ngugi wa Thiong'o (*Decolonizing the Mind*, 1986) saying that:

> With Africa at the centre of things, not existing as an appendix or a satellite of other countries and literatures, things must be seen from the African perspective. All other things are to be considered in their relevance to our situation and their contribution towards understanding ourselves. In suggesting this we are not rejecting other streams, especially the western stream. We are only clearly mapping out the directions and perspectives the study of culture and literature will inevitably take in an African university. (Mbembe 2015, 17)

We cannot frame everyday practices of state–society engagement that citizens see occurring around them, or they choose to engage in, as 'wrong' or 'undemocratic'. Instead, we need to investigate these practices, analyses why residents choose to take part in them and what value they may bring. This approach to decolonising the study of democracy aligns with calls to look at actual practices at the state–society level in urban studies. South African scholars (Parnell and Robinson 2012, 596) have noted the dominance of an Anglophone focus within urban theory and the tendency to overlook the fast-growing cities of the global South where practices involving informality, religion or traditional authority are central to legitimate urban narratives. This paper is in line with a growing call for an understanding of urban change, political process and power relations that explicitly draws on analyse beyond formal state structures (Meth 2013, 270). Thus, as Koelble and Lipuma (2008, 21) argue:

> Rather than approach democracy from the standpoint of the Western model, the process needs to be reversed through a meticulous political anthropology of the ways in which the governed would like to be governed and the ways in which governance currently takes place.

A decolonised perspective on clientelism allows us to see clientelism, as applied in a democratic context, as more like behaviours of interest groups; a form of political influence and lobbying. Many of these behaviours are arguably democratic, even if they are not well suited to 'deepening democracy' or dealing with historical and entrenched forms of socio-

economic inequality. They are nonetheless the rational choice of many citizens when engaging in state–society relations, and should be analysed as such.

Note

1. Porto Alegre instituted a City-wide participatory budgeting process that allowed citizens to make spending decisions for over 10% of its annual budget. At its height, over 1.3 million people would participate in meeting and assemblies to decide the budget (Ackerman 2004).

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