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As other writers have pointed out, the African population wanted to exercise as much choice as possible in seeking opportunities to improve its standard of living. "Migration was a way to acquire improved bargaining power in a series of different but connected socio-political struggles: against state control and against the control of senior family members." The laws, regulations and restrictions that colonial governments used to try to control their subject populations were so complex that they provided numerous loopholes which Africans could exploit.

In fact, Tornimbeni concludes that colonial regulations had the effect of shaping choice rather than restricting it. Given that all colonial governments tried to restrict free movement of population, migrants had to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of staying put, moving internally or migrating abroad. Moving was usually possible but it brought with it a change in status which could be advantageous or disadvantageous according to a bewildering variety of circumstances.

The significance of this paper for understanding present day Mozambique is that, for the ordinary African worker and his family in the colonial period, the state as such had no real existence. Numerous ties of marriage, family, ethnic identity and economic opportunity created transnational and cross-border networks that meant far more than a notional belonging to a colonial state. This paper comes close to suggesting that it may be misleading to think of the disintegration of the state as a phenomenon occurring in post-colonial Africa because the state as such has never really existed in the consciousness of the bulk of the population. Here the links between pre- and post-independence Africa are disconcertingly close. As Tornimbeni says,

although it is undeniable that the recent history of people's movements, and of conflicts and state interventions, has its own modern characteristics, it is equally important to stress that current socioeconomic patterns in central Mozambique call for an analysis of the historical process that developed or consolidated them in the past.

Modern & Post-Modern Patrimonialism¹

Nuno Vidal

This paper discusses the Angolan political system after independence. Its characterisation confronts two interpretative perspectives or what is here called modern and post-modern patrimonialism, each will now be exposed.

Modern Patrimonialism

A recent but influential framework of political analysis has been developed in African Studies, mainly through the works of Jean-François Médard, Jean-François Bayart, Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz.² According to these authors, in post-independence African countries (sub-saharan, excluding South Africa), political systems were subjected to a specific patrimonial dynamic, whereby ties of distributive interdependence are forged between rulers and ruled. The specificity of this form of patrimonialism is essentially related to the prevailing identity within these societies. In short, the artificial division of African territories during colonisation was not overcome after independence, and the new states amalgamated, without effectively blending, the existing identities of a sub-national dimension. This hindered the rise of a significant national feeling or collective consciousness. Other sub-national forms of identification prevailed such as region, sub-region, religion, ethnicity, sub-ethnicity, extended family or even race. Ties of preferential solidarity based on these micro-identities prevailed, supplanting solidarities of a universal nature (such as citizenship) or a horizontal type (such as classes)

that were supposed to have emerged with the new independent nation-State.

Reflecting the fragmented identity, the solidarity and the lack of strong national consciousness, an ever growing proportion of public or state resources were personally appropriated and distributed to benefit unofficially oneself and one's original communities. The criteria for socio-economic success were not those of meritocracy or productive effort, but preferentialism and favouritism according to micro-identity solidarity. This brought a mentality of a *rentière* type whereby favours, goods and profits were expected in exchange for support along micro-identity lines. Generally speaking, capital was not re-invested in the manner of a modern socialist or capitalist economy, which would have involved concern with increasing productivity and production. Instead, capital was utilised to feed and enlarge support networks.

Legitimacy of rule and political representation became related to the bettering of conditions within the group to which one belonged. Loss of political legitimacy occurred when rulers stopped fulfilling their sectarian obligations rather than when they ceased to work for the public good.

Informal ethical or normative principles, generally shared by all layers of society, enforced this type of distributive relationship between rulers and ruled linking the top and the base of a patrimonial pyramid, the centres and peripheries, the urban and rural areas.

According to these authors, as a rule, the administrative structure of these countries was based on that of the Colonial State (typical of a 'modern' bureaucratic State) and the political system had to invent its own *modus operandi* combining a more or less modern political structure and a patrimonial logic. As a rule the dilemma was overcome through the subordination of the modern structure to the patrimonial working logic, independently of the nature of the regime (civil or military) or the political model (socialist or capitalist). Thus, the patrimonialism arising in the post-independence era derives from a singular combination of 'traditional' (pre-colonial) patrimonial legitimacy and 'modern' political structures such as the state and all its ancillary organisations, leading to a new form of patrimonialism – here called modern patrimonialism.

Post-modern Patrimonialism

However, in Angola (and that might also be the case with the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria), patrimonialism underwent different dynamics. The ties of distributive interdependence that would have been the foundations of patrimonial networks, did not consolidate but were instead diluted. From the end of the 1970s and throughout the 1980s, the distribution of resources went down drastically and the networks shrank and became fragmented, with the bottom rungs being the first to be neglected. Despite the level of resources available, there was a growing tendency to withhold resources at source and to divert ever-greater sums of money as one went up the networks by those with a privileged or primary access to the state's resources, neglecting dependants more and more. Contrary to the expectations of modern patrimonialism, the extensive patrimonial networks that linked members of very different socio-economic status, gave way to the very restricted patrimonial networks of ruling elites and their entourages with a similar socio-economic status.

According to a modern patrimonial model, the problem with such an attitude was that the ruling elites would be destroying the basis of their own power. However, even at a political level, countries such as Angola seem to exhibit a different reality, revealing a scenario without any profound changes: whether in the political landscape (with basically the same elites ruling from independence until today, spanning two different administrations – those of Agostinho Neto and Eduardo dos Santos); or whether in the basic patrimonial organisational principles that guide the whole social organisation. This seems to be also the case of former Zaire, simply illustrated by the substitution of Mobutu by Kabila and the substitution of Kabila by his son Joseph, which as is known, in no way changed the working logic of the socio-political system in that country, especially at the level of power relationships between rulers and ruled.

Relational notions such as political accountability or political representation became diluted and lost a great part of their meaning. Political participation and intervention of the populace was considerably diminished especially given the incapacity to exchange votes for favours.

The best designation for this attitude of political and economic neglect of the 'ruling elites' *vis-à-vis* the 'masses' is that of *l'Afrique inutile*. This term

was applied by William Reno to the cases of Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia and former Zaire, comprising "regions and peoples that are best governed lightly, if at all, rather than waste scarce revenues in attempts to control them".³

In face of a breakdown of distributive links between rulers and ruled, the informal ethical principles, that were supposed to enforce some distribution linking the top and the base of patrimonial hierarchy gave way to a pragmatic and flexible morality according to which the ends – survival for the majority, enrichment of the minority – justified the means. This gave rise to a kind of 'free-for-all' in all layers of society, in which all became involved in practices of 'total assault' on all available state resources. Within such a pragmatic morality, practices prevail that were considered morally unacceptable by the 'public morals' of the recent past, ranging from drug trafficking, gun-running, the trade in endangered species, petty theft and organised crime, to downright theft from the state coffers.

Faced with an 'anything goes' type of morality, the civil juridical order was completely ridiculed by the greater part of the population that saw it merely as a possible source of exploitation. As a rule, the law represented a source of income for those in a position to 'sell' the non-fulfilment of legal obligations, and a source of expenditure to all those who needed to fulfil them.

Finally, and again contrary to a modern patrimonial perspective, in countries such as Angola, the dilution of distributive links between rulers and ruled made it increasingly difficult for there to be any operative combination of a modern political structure with the workings of patrimonialism. Patrimonialism evolved into an extreme form and there was a growing distance between political practices and the action of a modern state.

In the case of Angola (which seems to be paralleled by the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone) the exercise of sovereignty is confined to the capital city, and to the main provincial towns. There is no effective border control, nor is there adequate control over the territory or over part of the population. Even natural resources are, to a significant extent, beyond government control. The pursuit of private, sectarian interests reaches extreme levels and there is almost complete disregard for public welfare and

for territories and populations belonging to *l'Afrique inutile*.⁴

The generalisation of a pragmatic morality with total 'assault' on resources, facilitated above all the destruction of the state's bureaucratic and administrative system – a process started by the huge 'army' of civil servants forgotten on the edges of the distributive system.⁵ In sum we are presented with a massive misappropriation of state or public assets for private purposes and benefit, that is an extreme form of patrimonialism.

The question is therefore to understand why the dilution of the distributive ties, which were supposed to be the basis of the patrimonial system, lead not to its destruction but to an extreme form of its development? In the case of Angola, the answer seems to lie in three main factors.

The first factor, basically consists in the growing insularity and autonomy of the economic and political power of the rulers and, conversely, the extreme dependence and loss of economic and political power of the ruled. It comprises two elements:

a. On the one hand, the main sources of revenue were progressively reduced to the oil rent and (during the Cold War) to the economic benefits derived from international diplomatic alignments with the USSR (access to loans, credit, arms and so on). The 'external' nature of this kind of income facilitated its autonomous and insular management (cash accounts restricted to the top of the apparatus, mostly kept in foreign banks). The same seems also to be applicable to other 'enclave economies' such as Nigeria, Democratic Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone.⁶ For the 'ruling elites', such insularity gave them economic independence and allowed them to ignore practices of surplus extraction from the productive effort of the general population. This contributed to the ever-increasing generalisation of a *rentière* mentality, which contributed to the drastic drop in internal production and productivity. For the 'ruled masses' this meant, in the medium term, an extreme economic fragility due to two main sorts of reasons. Firstly, the total assault on the available resources did not solve their economic problems because there was increasing restriction in terms of quantity and access to resources for those who were not at the top of the system. Secondly, the informal economic sector (which started to develop as an alternative to the formal sector) did not provide sufficient socio-economic support or welfare policies, thereby aggravating the economic condition of the population. Therefore, the

economic negotiating power of the masses fell drastically, as their economic importance decreased within the patrimonial system.

b. On the other hand, the phenomenon also included the process of closing off the formal political system. Concentration of political power in the presidency and its close entourage reached extreme levels and the political system became insulated from any effective participation on the part of the population, whose political intervention was limited to personal and informal mechanisms. However, such informal mechanisms became practically ineffective because the population lacked any economic and political importance within the patrimonial system. Economically they were not a source of income, politically they had no votes to exchange for benefits.

The second factor was the cumulative dynamics of patrimonialism in face of a growing economic scarcity, meaning that the dilution of distributive links between rulers and ruled led to a process of reinforcement of patrimonial characteristics at the economic, political and ethical levels.

- At an economic level, the growing neglect of distribution intensified the recourse to the vertical, preferential and sectarian solutions. This phenomenon is easily understandable because, in cases where the distributed resources diminish and patrimonial networks contract, the preferential and sectarian ties of each individual gain in importance when seeking access to scarce resources. Therefore, a context of growing scarcity of resources favours the reinforcement of the patrimonial logic.⁷

- At a political level, contrary to what might be expected, the rulers' neglect of their distributive 'obligations' did not awaken any form of class consciousness within the population. On the contrary, what divided them (several forms of micro-identity) became accentuated and what objectively united them (economic condition) was ignored. This made it impossible for them politically to mobilise and organise into groups that could identify themselves horizontally as classes. This is also understandable because, in a society dominated by the informalisation and personalisation of all social relationships (where nothing is solved by institutional means without a personal influential contact) there emerges a feeling of collective helplessness.⁸ In the face of growing living difficulties such feeling brings about an increasing resort to the same old micro-identity channels and to the same old political practices of informalisation and personalisation. This

inhibits the appearance of an alternative logic of citizenship and social class. Thus, a context of growing social fragmentation favours the reinforcement of the patrimonial logic.

- At an ethical level, the breaking of distributive links and the consequent flexible morality of a 'free for all' type intensified the working logic of patrimonialism because it reinforced social fragmentation and economic scarcity.

a. On the one hand, in spite of the objective drop in distribution, the freedom to seek solutions to problems through the 'right' connections and 'by all possible means' (informal or illegal) creates the impression that 'the opportunity is around the corner' and 'everything is possible', that 'it's all a matter of playing by the (informal) rules and a bit of luck', resorting to *my* schemes, *my* protectors, *my* connections as commonly heard in Angola. This reinforces the individual belief or illusion in the effectiveness of sectarian relationships, which spreads a culture of expedience and of the schemer, meaning nothing more than the massive increment of short-term individualised solutions, leading to more sectarianism and more preferentialism. As a result, the social tissue becomes ever more fragmented, the population more divided, vulnerable and marginalised from the processes of political decision and actual power. Also, in the long-term, the public dimension is almost completely destroyed.⁹

b. On the other hand, in objective economic terms, the freedom afforded by preferential, personal and sectarian solutions by all available means is an obvious illusion; indeed, for the overwhelming majority of the population, the activities allowed through this kind of freedom were just a way of miserable survival. The material benefits to which people had access decreased dramatically, as did living standards over the last twenty-seven years (post-independence). As an example, the thousands of small traders (informal/illegal) acting in Luanda and in main provincial towns, whom the IMF and the World Bank wanted to see as the genesis of an entrepreneurial class, are in reality (and in majority) no more than a mass of people living in extreme misery by any standards, fighting desperately for physical survival, able only to provide, in most cases, a single daily meal for their families, and highly unlikely to survive any form of epidemic for lack of means to access the required treatment.¹⁰

Moreover, the precarious, unstable and insecure framework for their economic activity developed an 'aiming low' mentality: 'the situation is bad for most people, there are people worse off than us, I'd better make the most of what I have and not take any risks, because failure means total disgrace'.¹¹ The fear of change increased as did the fear of taking risks. Short-term goals prevailed, as did the concern with day-to-day survival for most of the population.¹²

In this way, the generalised assault on all available resources by all possible means, did not solve the problems of scarcity and economic vulnerability of the majority of the population; indeed, it just made them worse.

The third and final factor to explain this ever reinforcing patrimonial dynamic is the war.

In a system where preferential solidarity based on several forms of micro-identity criteria prevailed, where the state was the arena for rival groups vying for patrimonial appropriation of resources, the existence of a civil war reinforced all the previously expounded dynamics through more economic scarcity and more social fragmentation.

On the one hand, it reinforced economic scarcity absorbing resources, destroying infrastructure, and disrupting production throughout the country, thereby reinforcing the economic dependency on oil revenues (managed with autonomy at the top) and consequently the economic autonomy of the rulers and the vulnerability of the ruled.

On the other hand, it intensified micro-identity political alignments with the two contenders. The civil war gained stronger ethnic overtones strengthening the identification between the Ovimbundu and UNITA, which was seen as a threat to the socio-cultural identity of the elites in power, and what can be called the Creole/M'Bundu culture at the heart of the MPLA. The stronger the guerrilla activity of UNITA (particularly acute during the eighties), the stronger was its identification with the Ovimbundu¹³ and the stronger was the threat to the Creole/M'Bundu culture, thus providing the MPLA with far more support than would otherwise have been the case. This was particularly clear during the electoral campaign in 1992, when UNITA's menaces to the 'urban' way of life and to the Creole/M'Bundu culture proved once again crucial to the union of the MPLA's big family (as used in an official slogan). This was also the main factor allowing an ambiguous process whereby

it was possible for the government to alienate (economically and politically) the majority of the population but without entirely losing its political support (at least of all those who identified with the Creole/M'Bundu culture and who feared UNITA). This is absolutely crucial to understanding not only the relationship between rulers and ruled, and the legitimacy of rule in Angola, but also the relationship between sub-divisions within the ruling elites at the core of the MPLA, establishing an implicit pact of silence in the face of that common threat.¹⁴

Thus, the war became an important support to the reinforcement of the patrimonial working logic and to the structuring of the political system itself, and the same phenomenon may also be the case in the wars raging in Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Congo.

In sum, we are presented with a cumulative patrimonial dynamics reaching extreme levels in its development.¹⁵ This reinforcing process led to a new dimension of patrimonialism. It differs from 'modern patrimonialism' not only in quantitative terms (extreme development of patrimonial characteristics) but also in qualitative terms (near-total breakdown of political, economic or ethical interdependence links between rulers and ruled), representing an unaccountable form of patrimonialism or what I call post-modern patrimonialism, not only because it comes after 'modern patrimonialism' but also because of the similarity that exists between its functioning and post-modern currents of thought.

Although there is no actual post-modern theory or 'school', rather a collection of remarks that have been classified as such, it is still possible to provide a very general definition of the post-modern intellectual movement, through looking at some of its propositions such as: the abandoning of modernist assumptions of a rational unified subject in favour of a social subject who is culturally plural and fragmented in identity; the relativism of truth and knowledge according to context along with the plurality of interpretations and plurality of meanings; the break from macro-interpretations of society (so-called *grand narratives*) and from unifying and simplifying macro-structural entities such as the modern 'nation-State' and its legal-bureaucratic rationality; the move away from any macro-intelligible structures and projects such as the modern notions of development and progress, which are taken to be relative and subjective (conditioned by specific cultural environments),

