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Madame Lucy P. Mair

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LUCY P. MAIR
London School of Economics

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The word clientship calls for some definition. In some societies it is a relationship involving very specific obligations, those of the client being more onerous than those of the patron. It can be described in this way in Ruanda, where more than one writer has interpreted it as a form of oppression. I would rather see it as a relationship of mutual advantage, though, since it is essentially one between unequal partners, the advantages are unequally distributed. I would also question the assumption that it is forced upon the client by the patron. If, as appears to have been the case in Ruanda, it was impossible for a member of the lower stratum to exist without the protection of a patron, this was de facto, not de jure; it was the result of the total political situation, and it seems to have been almost equally necessary for a good many members of the upper stratum to attach themselves to patrons. In other societies the making of a specific clientage relationship was a matter of choice, and it was often chosen by people who saw in it the way to social and political advancement.

Perhaps one might offer a minimum definition of clientship as “a relationship of dependence not based on kinship, and formally entered into by an act of deliberate choice”.

It is my contention that such relationships are at the basis of the development of the kind of power which we associate with the office of chief, and, as the organization of government becomes more complex, with the type of political system that we call the state.

No doubt this proposition should involve me in a definition of the state. In his recent volume on the Acoli, Girling\(^1\) maintains that the distinction between states and stateless societies is meaningless, with the implication that every political system is a state. He further says that the Acoli have had states as far back as their history can be traced.

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On his showing it would be interesting to discuss whether the Acoli have or have not enough of the characteristics usually associated with the state to fall into this category. I think the distinction is still a useful one. For the purposes of my argument I still find useful as a description—not a definition—of a state type of political system that used by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard twenty years ago to characterise their "Type A" societies. These, they said, were "societies which have centralized authority, administrative machinery and judicial institutions . . . and in which cleavages of wealth, power and status correspond to the distribution of power and authority".

This gives me a starting-point for my present argument, since it is my contention that clientship can develop in the presence of quite small inequalities of wealth, and that the loyalty of a client to his patron gives the latter the power, independent of entanglements with competing structural groups, which is essential to the appearance of an authority overriding all of these.

This can be seen at a very simple level. One example is the difference in the clan organization of the eastern and western areas of the Gusii country as described by Philip Mayer.\(^2\) The western, lower-lying section is divided according to a classic pattern between six tribal territories. In each there is an "owning" clan, on which immigrants have been grafted by classic processes of fictive adoption. Among the six western tribes the "owning" lines claim no superiority in rank or power over the "adopted" lines with whom they share their territory. Each is autonomous and seeks the mediation in disputes of its own elders.

In the seventh tribal area, Getutu, the original owning clan of Nyakundi has maintained itself as an entity distinct from later immigrants. These have not been "naturalized" by any myth of adoption, and all must look to the authority of Nyakundi elders for the peaceful settlement of disputed claims. The reason for this, as Mayer interprets it, lies in the location of Getutu on high ground out of reach of Maasai and Nandi raids. Refugees from the other tribes fled to Getutu and there attached themselves to leading men—that is elders of wealth above the average—offering services in return for protection. Women refugees were taken as wives and enabled the Nyakundi clan to multiply at a great rate. But the status of the men is more significant for the present argument. A single man would receive bridewealth cattle from his protector, and in virtue of this would be known as a "bought person" (this did not imply slave status). "Bought persons" could never establish an indefeasible claim to live in Getutu, though

they were safe as long as they remained loyal to their protectors. They did not constitute a lower class in the sense that they were expected to treat all Nyakundi with deference. But they had a peculiar political function. When a Nyakundi elder sought to enforce the payment of a debt he sent a body of his “bought persons” to collect from the recalcitrant debtor. Thus, if there was resistance which led to fighting, the fighting did not involve hostilities between the “real sons” of Nyakundi, for whom the ideal was to live in amity. This ideal, be it noted, could not have been contemplated but for the presence of the “bought persons”.

Another example of clientship in politics on a very small scale is that described by Jean Buxton among the Mandari. Here again, the original client is a refugee, and as Godfrey Lienhardt has pointed out, essentially a kinless man. Just as the picture of the Gusii refers to events of an era before the pax Britannica, so here, although one gathers that the Mandari envisage the possibility of new clients appearing at any moment, the observable fact is that certain persons are the clients of the petty chiefs because an ancestor became so on some occasion vaguely located in the past. Some are said to have been found wandering in the bush; in these stories the chief takes the initiative in offering his protection, an element which emphasizes the reciprocal advantages of the arrangement. There were formal ways of symbolizing the client’s wish for protection and leaving the chief to take the first explicit step. Different reasons were given for the appearance of clients. Some were survivors of famines, epidemics or war; some had had to leave their own people because of a quarrel or had committed an offence; some had lost the contest for a headmanship.

Clients built their houses in a ring around that of their protector and so formed a defence against surprise attack. An individual client was obliged when called upon to go with his protector on a journey as bodyguard, porter and cook, to take messages for him, to wait on him at council meetings, to work on his fields. When there was fighting between the chiefdoms the clients were employed as spies, and to-day they are expected to report to the chief any evidence of disloyalty within his domain.

The client is not wholly dependent on his protector, nor is he expected to be continuously at the latter’s disposal; he has his own fields and stock. Moreover, protection is not limited to permission to settle. The protector has the same obligations of vengeance, and of support before the courts, to a client as he has to his own kin. A favoured client can exercise a good deal of influence through his control of

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access to his master. The sanction for generous treatment is the desire of the chief to attract a following. It is regarded as entirely permissible for a client to transfer his allegiance. At the same time this could be regarded as a treacherous act, and in the past clients who were suspected of this intention were sometimes killed. This was the essential inferiority of the client’s status; the chief would avenge him against outsiders, but there was nobody to avenge him against the chief. In the last analysis the diffuse sanctions of a reputation for fair dealing as a chief may have been a better protection for the client than anything he himself could do.

We know very much less of the status among the Shilluk of the “Reth’s people”, who came to be regarded as one lineage despite the diversity of their origins. Their ancestors were war captives, homicides, or men who had been possessed by the spirit of Nyikang, the half-divine ancestor incarnate in every Shilluk king. Also some were just poor men who saw a better future in service to the Reth than in tilling their own fields. The last category at least illustrate the point that in some cases clientage may be a humble man’s voluntary choice. The bang Reth lived around the royal palace. It was their duty to defend the Reth against the attacks of rivals, and it seems that sometimes, if a lineage engaged in a feud were intransigent in refusing to accept compensation, he could put pressure on them by mobilising his people on the other side.

But, as I indicated earlier, it is among the Interlacustrine Bantu that clientage is most fully developed. Their rulers depended for the maintenance of their authority and extension of their power on subordinate chiefs who were bound to them not by kinship but by clientage, and who indeed were necessary to them for support against the rivalry of their lineage mates. Every ruler had his client chiefs, and these had their own clients.

It was only in the Tusi kingdoms of Ruanda and Urundi that a chain of clientage stretched from the ruler to the humblest peasant and apparently embraced the entire population. Even here, however, the relationship was initiated by an act of deliberate choice.

The peoples for whom we have information on this subject are the Ganda, Soga, Nyoro, Ankole and Ruanda (with a little supplementary detail about the Rundi). All these can be described as stratified societies in the sense that the total population can be divided broadly into two classes. For the Ganda and Soga the classes are “chiefs” and “peasants”, and the essence of this distinction is between persons with the right to allocate land and persons who depend on them for land to cultivate. For the Ankole and Ruanda the classes are distin-

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guished by names of ethnic significance (Hima and Iru in Ankole, Tusi and Hutu in Ruanda). These are divisions, in terms of traditions which are probably historically true, between conquerors and conquered; they also divide those who live by the possession of cattle from those who can at best acquire very limited rights in cattle. The Nyoro come in the middle; here the upper class no longer own cattle, and in fact their superiority now rests on their control of land, but they still think of themselves as an aristocracy of cattle people.

Patron-client relationships may link members of the upper and lower classes, or they may link members of the upper class; very rarely they may link members of the lower, as in Ruanda, where some Hutu had their own clients.

In the most superficial descriptive terms the obvious distinction between types of patron-client relationships turns on the question whether they are created by the transfer of cattle. This does in fact correspond to more significant differences in the nature of these societies and their problems. It is a truism that pastoral peoples are more warlike than agricultural ones, and this is sometimes interpreted as meaning that dependence on agriculture makes people pacific. It might be truer to say that it offers less incentive for warfare; the raiding of cattle is the easiest form of plunder in the world, and this to some extent explains the turbulence that seems to have characterized both Ankole and Ruanda in the recent past. Certainly it is clear that in the nineteenth century this region was the scene of intense competition in empire-building, in which the Ganda took as active a part as the pastoral peoples, and that the Ganda themselves were torn asunder by the "religious wars". Nevertheless one does not get the impression that the protection against physical violence obtainable through clientage was as significant in Buganda as it seems to have been in Ankole and Ruanda.

In both these territories the relationship was created, as are so many social relationships among pastoral peoples, by the transfer of cattle. In Ankole the ruler, the Mugabe, alone had clients, and all his clients were Hima. They entered into this relationship by an act of homage which included a gift of cattle, but for any Hima other than the Mugabe to receive such homage was tantamount to a rejection of the Mugabe's authority, and was practicable only for people on the fringe of the territory which he controlled.

As Oberg reconstructs the picture, the client relationship was entered into voluntarily and could relapse or be renewed. It was initiated by an offer of service and a gift of cattle to the Mugabe. The

offer of service involved, essentially, an undertaking to join in war expeditions when called on and to present to the Mugabe a share in the spoils of any raid organized as a private enterprise. The client was expected to repeat periodically the assurance of his loyalty expressed by a gift of cattle.

For him the advantage of the arrangement was his claim on the general protection of the military strength of Ankole against attacks from outside, and on immunity from revenge raids not authorised by a judgment of the Mugabe. If a client lost all his herd in a raid or an epidemic, he could expect the Mugabe to give him cattle to start a new one. He received his share of cattle captured in raids in which he fought as part of the Mugabe's forces.

In this description the entry into the client relationship seems to be synonymous with recognition of the Mugabe's political authority. If this is so it must have been in practice obligatory on all Hima living in territory that was indisputably his. One can hardly imagine a polity in which people who accepted the obligations implied in clientship were interspersed among others who did not. But one can readily imagine that on the periphery of his domain clients might disregard their obligations. Since this implied that they did not consider the Mugabe's protection worth having, such men must have contemplated either attaching themselves to a neighbouring ruler or building up an independent following of their own. But since there was some latitude in the obligations of a client—in assiduity in visiting the Mugabe and offering him gift—there was room to distinguish between those who found it worth while to stand high in his favour and those who did not.

In comparing African political systems as we know them from ethnographic accounts, we are in the difficulty that we cannot know how far the contrasts that we see are matters of historic fact and how far of the selective interests of ethnographers and their informants. The contrast between the voluntary nature of clientship as described by Oberg among the Ankole and its obligatory nature as seen by Maquet in Ruanda is a case in point. In Ruanda, as seen by Maquet, the whole population were linked by patron-client ties, and this in spite of the fact that there were elaborate military and political administrations, high posts in which were, of course, allotted by the king to his own immediate clients. A difficulty in Maquet's account is the absence of detail on judicial processes, which are mentioned only enough to indicate that they existed.

As Oberg shows us Ankole, only persons appointed by the Mugabe as tax-collectors were entitled to make demands on the property of Iru peasants. In Ruanda it would appear that a Hutu had no rights at all to secure possession of property except in so far as these were guaranteed by his patron. In Ankole a Hima who killed
an Iru was not required to pay compensation; in Ruanda it seems possible that a lord would avenge the killing of a Hutu client, as he certainly would that of a Tusi if called upon to do so.

From Maquet's description of Ruanda the essentials of the patron-client relationship were the same whether both parties were Tusi or one Tusi and one Hutu. The actual services demanded of a client must have varied to some extent with his status. If the great lords, clients of the king, were called upon for menial services, they doubtless sent their own clients to perform them. The humblest type of patron whom we can conceive would have only one client, a sort of general-purpose man.

As elsewhere, clientage is thought of as relationship freely entered into for the sake of the advantages which it is expected to bring. The stereotyped form of words from the would-be client to his chosen patron is: "Give me milk; make me rich; be my father." Here the client did not bring gifts, but the patron gave him one or more cows to herd—a way of creating a social bond that is common among East African cattle people. The client had the right to their bull calves, to their milk and that of their female offspring, and to their meat and hides when they died. It was also possible, apparently, for a Tusi client to secure clients for himself by placing in their care the offspring of the cows received from his lord. But none of these female animals became the property of the client.

While the link created by the transfer of cattle had both symbolic and material significance, the reciprocal obligations of lord and client were much wider than those involved in the custody of cattle. The client was liable for personal service when called upon—to attend on his lord on journeys, at war and when visiting the court. Clients were employed as messengers. Each client of a chief was responsible for maintaining a portion of the reed fence which surrounded his homestead. Hutu clients tilled their lords' fields. Some were made responsible for domestic duties such as cooking and brewing.

The lord on his side was expected to be a generous protector, to give his clients material help at need, to avenge a homicide if the client's lineage was not strong enough, to care for his widow and young children if they were left unprotected, to speak up for him if he was involved in a case in the king's court, and to pay any fine which he might incur there.

Although this relationship was initiated voluntarily, it usually became hereditary. Maquet does not mention any question of change in a client's position on the death of the lord, but he says that on the death of a client the lord could take back his cattle. Also he could

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apparently override the lineage choice of successor and himself appoint another member to the position. (This seems to be the clear meaning of Maquet’s statement; i.e. it is not a matter simply of transferring the custody of the cattle to some other member of the lineage. It is possible that in some cases the clientship cattle constituted the major part of the client’s substance. But it would be interesting to know whether the “designation of another heir” in fact implied that succession to lineage authority could depend on the wishes of the lord.)

Evidently the patron-client relationship linked descent groups as well as individuals, though at the same time it was possible for young men as they grew up to choose where they would offer their services. One man could be the client of many lords, and if necessary would send some other member of his family if called upon by more than one at the same time. In cases of divided clientship it seems clear that no one patron could intervene decisively in the choice of a successor.

This system created a series of links of personal dependence running right through the society. Under it, every individual, or at least every household head, had his place on some line of relationships of superiority and subordination created by the transfer of custody of cattle. Yet one cannot say that the status of client, or even that of lord, is an index of higher or lower rank in the society as a whole, since nearly all Tusi were simultaneously lords in some relationships and clients in others. Indeed the system has very little bearing on what has been classically regarded as the stratified structure of Ruanda society, namely the division into the cattle-owning Tusi and agricultural Hutu who could herd but could not own cattle, and the recognition throughout the society of the superiority of all Tusi to all Hutu.

In the predominantly agricultural societies, notably Ganda and Soga, clientship in the sense of a specific personal relationship embraces only that minority who choose to seek advancement by attaching themselves to persons in authority. Among these two peoples, and also in Bunyoro, the territorial subordinates of the hereditary rulers were personal followers appointed to their posts as a reward for services. The client relationship there was not a necessity of survival for the weaker members of society, as Maquet represents it, but the key to advancement in status. Paradoxically enough, however, it is in these societies that a relationship analogous to that of patron and client divides the whole population into upper and lower classes. This arises from the fact that territorial authorities traditionally had the right to allocate land, and that large numbers of persons preferred to apply to a chief for land rather than keep to land in which they had a claim by virtue of kinship. All persons living within the area of authority of a chief had the same obligations towards him, and all
persons everywhere had to render these services to some chief; it would be as accurate to call them the political obligations imposed on all the population as to call them personal services to a particular individual. But the Ganda word for seeking land from a particular chief—and analogous words in neighbouring societies—does imply the making of a personal relationship of clientage. And the traditional division of Ganda society into "chiefs" and "peasants" was in essence a division into those who had the right to allocate land and those who had to apply for it. This is why, at the time of the Uganda agreement, the chiefs were so appalled at Sir Harry Johnston’s plan to disregard their rights over land; it would have obliterated the essential basis of the distinction between social classes. At that time they were not in a position to calculate the economic advantages that they were later to gain from the freehold ownership of land. It is interesting that, under an arrangement which seemed at first to have changed the whole basis of land holding, the relation of landlord to tenant is still conceived as one of political authority; the landlord is described by the same word as a political chief and the distinction between landlord and tenant is still fundamental in the stratification of Ganda society.

If, however, this relationship is to deserve the name of clientship it should perhaps be called passive clientage—I am not proposing that this should become current as part of standard terminology—and thus distinguished from the more active relationship of personal service through which people in these societies secured advancement in life. This relationship does not seem to have been initiated by any formal act. We read of ceremonial declarations of loyalty when a man was appointed to a chiefship, but this event comes nearer to the culmination of the relationship than to its inception. Moreover, it might not even be voluntarily initiated. I mean by this that the Kabaka and leading chiefs of Buganda had the right to claim as their servants boys and girls from the children of their subjects. It was also possible for a father to send a son to join the chief’s retinue, thus securing favour for himself and a prospect of future advancement for the boy, from which his relatives might profit. The stories, like all such stories, tell how promising youths were recognised by their patent merits, promoted to more and more responsible service and eventually perhaps commended to the Kabaka. No doubt other factors helped to attract the chief’s attention in one direction rather than another. Clientship in this case is the principal avenue of social mobility. It does seem to be the fact that in Buganda it was far more important than descent as a means of attaining high status, and also that the most important political positions were not claimed by particular descent groups.

In a comparison of Buganda with Ruanda from this point of view we see that in both cases the ruler had his subordinate authorities,
appointed at his choice, whom we may reasonably call client-chiefs. In Buganda those who were given authority over large areas had their own subordinates chosen by themselves, who might even follow their patron if he was transferred to a different chiefship. Apart from this there was no system of what might be called "private clientship"; only persons appointed by the Kabaka had the right to allocate land and the authority over peasants that went with this right, and all such authority was exercised in the last resort on behalf of the Kabaka. In Ruanda any man with cattle in excess of the needs of his own household could build up a client following. If we are to count all Ganda peasants as clients of chiefs, we can say that they have to become so because in a subsistence agricultural economy nobody can live without land to cultivate. But in Maquet's analysis the client must have a lord, not because he needs cattle, but because he needs protection.

I have suggested that one should expect greater turbulence among pastoral peoples, and this may be in itself a reason why Ruanda clients sought the protection of other men than the territorial representatives of the king. There are questions to be asked about the relationship between the king and lords with numerous clients. The Ruanda army system, which allocated the whole manpower of the country to specific fighting and herding units (without of course requiring them to be on active service all the time), must have provided a powerful obstacle to attempts to carve out independent principalities, though perhaps not to fighting as part of the contest for power between chiefs or lords. The small amount of data on Urundi so far published by Trouwborst has several references to fighting between chiefs, and indeed can be read as suggesting that support in fighting was a client's main duty, though one of his case-histories refers to chiefs who were deposed as a punishment for fighting, and another to a chief sent by the king to settle a dispute between two others. A man who had been a direct client of the king of Urundi recalled many wars against rebellious chiefs. There are of course also references to rebellions in the traditions of Ganda history. The consolidation of central authority and establishment of the "King's Peace" in Western Europe is one of the most interesting of historical themes; but we shall never be able to trace its counterpart in the region of the Great Lakes.

Fallers' discussion of the position of client-chiefs in Busoga starts from the point that is also my starting-point; the need for any ruler, of however small a state, to be able to count on a following whose primary loyalty is to him and not to any one section of the society (in African conditions a lineage). He also shows, however, that in the

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2. L. A. Fallers, Bantu Bureaucracy.
small Soga kingdoms offices which were originally filled by clients chosen for their personal loyalty came to be regarded as the lineage property of their descendants. Nevertheless, these headmen's lineages recognise their origin in a client relationship; the claim to political authority in itself distinguished them from the field of equal competing vengeance groups.

Clientship, then, is a basis of social differentiation in two different ways. On the one hand, it creates formally recognised relationships of superiority and subordination, defined by other criteria than seniority. On the other, in some societies it is the main channel of social mobility. But the reason why I think it is interesting is that it seems to be impossible to build up predominant power at one point in a society unless the aspirant to power has a following of people who are more closely bound to him than they are to other members of the society. At the stage where the rewards of loyalty are small, such a following can only be built up from people who have nowhere else to turn—the kinless or those whose kin have rejected them. As power grows, the service of its holder becomes more attractive and the field of clientship expands.