

PATRONAGE AND BUREAUCRACY IN COMPLEX SOCIETIES:
SOCIAL RULES AND SOCIAL RELATIONS IN AN ITALIAN UNIVERSITY

Introduction

Patron-clientelism has been the subject of considerable interest in the social sciences since its initial recognition in the 1960s. So much so, in fact, that it has been elevated from a topic of marginal significance to one of major theoretical debate (Wolf 1966; Blok 1969; Kaufman 1974; Gellner and Waterbury (eds.) 1977; Schmidt *et al.* (eds.) 1977). Interest in 'patronage' as a specific type of social formation was pioneered largely by social anthropologists, many of them working in Europe and the Mediterranean (Campbell 1964; Pitt-Rivers 1961; Kenny 1960). As a result, much information has been generated about the structure and mechanics of patronage in those typically small-scale agrarian and developing societies which anthropologists have studied, but relatively little about the operation of patronage elsewhere. While the ethnographic detail from these studies has helped bring some clarity to the analysis of patron-clientelism, the plethora of interpretations coupled with the lack of any consensus concerning a definition of what actually constitutes a 'patron-client' relation, has left the issue to date disrupted and confused (Gellner 1977).

One perennial problem is the question of why patronage emerged as part of the moral and cultural climate in some societies, but not in others. The common explanation usually equates its occurrence with an arrested process of development and the failure on the part of the nation-state to penetrate local communities. The theory is that a weak state coupled with powerful local magnates

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provides conditions that are ideal for the emergence of influential power brokers and middlemen, who have replaced the old landed gentry in their traditional role as local patrons (Boissevain 1977: 82; Silverman 1965: 188). Hence, many traditional studies focused on patronage as a form of 'brokerage', postulating the idea that patron-clientelism acts as a mediating institution linking peripheral rural communities to urban centres and the resources of the nation-state.

According to one set of theories that has emerged out of this approach, patronage represents an early phase in the development of nation-states, but should wither away with the growth of government and the steady process of community-state integration.

From the literature, however, three things are clear: first, the hierarchical, particularistic, and diffuse social arrangements which anthropologists call 'patron-client relations' exist to some extent in all societies, whatever their degree of complexity or industrialization. Secondly, though this may be the case, they are infinitely more pervasive in some societies than in others - particularly in Latin America, Southeast Asia and the Mediterranean (Roniger 1983: 63). Thirdly, there is little evidence in any of these societies of any direct correlation between development or expansion of the state sector and the decline of patron-clientelism. Indeed, patron-clientelism appears to have grown and sometimes is so diffuse that it has become, to quote Roniger, 'part of the central model of structuring some main aspects of the societal order such as the flow of resources and the process of interpersonal and institutional exchange and interaction in society' (ibid.: 63-4). In other words, patronage in these societies is a major principle of social organization - both conceptually and institutionally. So apparent was this of the Mediterranean that Davis in his book *People of the Mediterranean* was forced to conclude that 'patronage is the bedrock of political life in most of those Mediterranean communities which anthropologists have studied' (1977: 147).

Ethnographic evidence corroborating this came from a host of anthropological essays and monographs written between 1960 and 1980 (Kenny 1960; Pitt-Rivers 1961; Campbell 1964; Cutileiro 1964; Bailey (ed.) 1971a; Schneider and Schneider 1976; Silverman 1975; Gilmore 1977; White 1980). The problem in the 1980s, however, is not lack of information about the many new varieties of patronage that have evolved in towns and small-scale communities across the Mediterranean, but the relative absence of ethnographic information about new forms of patronage in other social contexts - particularly in urban, complex and industrial societies. If patronage is to be understood in terms of its role as a community/nation-state mediator, how does one explain its occurrence *within* the institutions of the modern nation-state. Using a case-study from Italy, this paper demonstrates that patronage not only exists but thrives within the apparatus of the modern nation-state, particularly in its bureaucratic institutions.

The reason for the lack of ethnographic study into this realm of the modern state is not difficult to fathom, given that bureaucratic organizations are not a likely choice of fieldwork

location for anthropologists. While patron-clientelism may not be 'illegal' in some societies, it is not really legal or legitimate either. Even when it is officials themselves who are the key actors in patronage systems (which is often the case), patron-clientelism as a system or as a model of behaviour is rarely officially recognized, sanctioned or condoned. As Gellner has argued (1977: 3-5), though patronage is often most prevalent as an 'ethos', unlike, say, feudalism, it does not have its own pride or morality. Typically, therefore, it stands outside the officially proclaimed morality of any society. However, there is often a large disparity between official and unofficial morality.

The development of patron-clientelism inside modern bureaucratic organizations is of anthropological significance not only because little is known about it, but more importantly because it presents an important theoretical challenge. Theoretically, bureaucracy and patronage are opposed and antagonistic modes of organization: one is associated with legal and rational norms, adherence to formal rules, objective, universalistic values, and impersonal, impartial conduct; the other is associated with behaviour that is personal, partisan, subjective and particularistic (Weber 1948: 299). Whereas patronage appears closer to feudal-type relations, bureaucracy, in theory, is closer to modern capitalist relations. As 'ideal types', therefore, they are incompatible - though at the empirical level this is not necessarily the case.

Given that bureaucracy has expanded, not diminished, in the past decade and that patronage is still in all probability the 'bedrock of political life' in the Mediterranean, how have these forms of organization been reconciled within the institutions of the modern nation-state? What hybrid forms of clientelism have developed inside the organizations of complex, advanced industrial societies, and how has patronage survived the advance of bureaucracy?

These are the broad questions addressed in this article. To answer them the article examines patronage as it operates within the context of one particular institution of the modern nation-state: an Italian state university.¹ Focusing on one specific example of how patrons operate in the university, the article describes and then attempts to analyse the pattern of social relations that have evolved there. The hypothesis is that all organizations (particularly bureaucracies) tend to be structured according to certain sets of cultural rules and values, but that it is the covert and implicit (i.e. informal) rather than the formal and explicit rules that often constitute the major code that structures university relations. These rules, however, are not always easy to interpret, particularly to outside observers (who are more likely, as a result, to fall foul of them). Indeed, even 'insiders', as

¹ For an ethnographic comparison, see Boissevain's account (1974: 147-63) of patronage in a Sicilian university. His transactionalist perspective provides an interesting contrast to the theoretical approach adopted in this paper.

the case-study will show, are not always as conversant with the unwritten code as they should be. University patron-clientelism belongs to one such set of rules. The aim of this article is to decipher these rules so that otherwise inexplicable and irrational behaviour can be seen in its social and conceptual context as in fact highly explicable, logical and rational. What follows, therefore, is an ethnographic description of patronage in operation inside one particular university in central Italy. For the sake of anonymity, the town shall be called 'Vicenzo' and all names mentioned are pseudonyms. Fieldwork in this town was conducted in two periods from 1981 to 1983 and from 1985 to 1986. The situation which the university was described by numerous informants, students as well as lecturers and secretarial staff, but the case of one group of foreign language teachers (*lettori*) perhaps illustrates most cogently the way university patronage works.

The Case-Study

At present, there are an estimated 1,600 foreign language-lectors (*lettori*) working in Italian universities, over half of them teaching English. Several years ago, their position was radically altered when legislation was passed by the Italian government that in effect prohibited these *lettori* from renewing their contracts after six years of service. This meant that as of the following year, most of these 1,600 employees would be sacked from their posts. As many were married to Italians and had long before made Italy their permanent country of residence, this prospect caused considerable alarm. From their viewpoint, there seemed to be no real reason for the law other than as an expedient designed to protect the universities (and beyond them the state) from having to accept legal responsibility towards its employees: legally, lectors had become reclassified from salaried state employees to 'self-employed free-professionals' - a status similar to that of plumbers and private electrical contractors. They claimed they were university dependants just as lecturers and university ancillary staff, but the new classification meant that they no longer had entitlement to university pensions or social security benefits.

In reaction to this, a group of *lettori* from one faculty went to lobby their *preside* (dean). The *preside*, after listening to their case, regretted the matter but said it was a government decision and that nothing could be done about it. He then defended the government by remarking that *lettori* were only 'auxiliaries' to the courses anyway and could not, therefore, expect the same treatment as proper university staff. The *lettori* disputed this classification of their role on the grounds that it was *they* who in fact took most of the lectures and seminars, designed the courses and set the exams. Taking this to be a challenge, the *preside* asked whether this were really true. The *lettori* said that it was, surprised that he should ask, since it was common knowledge in the university that they were used in this way. His next question was

a trap, for he asked pointedly whether they were in that case suggesting that their head of department was employing them in breach of contract. This was the case and, as it later transpired, he knew it to be so, but he dared them to state it publicly in the meeting. They did, and the meeting ended with polite smiles and handshakes and vague promises about 'seeing what could be done'. What was done, however, was something rather different from what they had expected.

A few hours later, the delegation was summoned before the head of department, who upbraided them for their stupidity. In her view their actions amounted to treachery, to a stab in the back, and she warned them that if it was 'trades-unionism' they wanted to play they should not expect her to play fairly. If it came to legal action she would simply lie, but she warned them that in any dispute her word was worth more than theirs, since *she* had the support of the university behind her, not they. However, she challenged them in derisive tones to go ahead and try.

As if to underline their inferiority still further, she told them they were naive to go to the dean 'behind her back' (as she perceived it) - first, because he was her 'friend' and had telephoned her immediately afterwards to tell her what had happened (and, she implied, to warn her that if she could not keep her department under control there would be trouble), and secondly, because there was nothing in what they said that he did not already know. His cordiality and surprise at hearing their news was all feigned, and his advice on the phone was to sack any *lettori* that caused problems - and that she could easily do, as they were in no way indispensable to her. She reminded them that their jobs at the university were discretionary on her whim and protection and that to remain employed they merely had to please her and refrain from rocking the boat. They were not indispensable to the course either, since she could replace them with 'idiots off the street' if need be. Finally, she dismissed any threat of industrial action on the grounds that she was immune to it because she could not care less about the course or the students: if need be, she would simply suspend classes for a term or a year.

A few months later, most of the *lettori* had either lost their jobs or resigned and, as promised, all English classes in the faculty were suspended for that year.

Bureaucracy and the Demise of Patronage

This incident is an example of a social phenomenon not uncommon in Italy. The questions are, how does one explain it, and is there a pattern? Had the *lettori* infringed some invisible code of practice, and if so, how could they have avoided all this? The rest of this article addresses itself to this problem. The event is significant not because of the issue that generated the conflict nor because of the questions it raises about corruption or morality, but rather because it reveals important points about the university system of

patronage and the pattern of behaviour that it generates. It also provides clues to the theoretical problem of why patronage exists at all in a modern bureaucracy whose formal organizing principles are supposed to be the very opposite.

According to Marx and Engels, as well as Weber, feudal-like relations and paternalistic clientelism were destined to shrink in all modernizing societies with the advance of modern capitalism and its rational bureaucratic institutions (Marx and Engels 1968: 44ff; Weber 1964: 329-41; Weber 1968: 223ff). For Weber, legal-rational bureaucracy lies at the root of the modern industrial state and is indispensable to it. The growth of bureaucratization, 'based upon an impersonal bond to the generally defined and functional "duty of office"', he predicted, was inevitable in all industrial societies (Weber 1948: 299ff; cf. Warwick 1974).

Similar arguments about the inevitable decline of patron-clientage in the face of 'modernization' continue to be raised by anthropologists despite limited evidence to support this view (Boissevain 1975; Theobald 1983). Indeed, far from withering away with the advance of the modern state, there is copious evidence to suggest that patron-clientelism has not only survived but has adapted itself very successfully to the new social conditions brought about by bureaucracy. Traditional patrons such as local landlords, priests and doctors, no longer able to monopolize the channels of communication between community and nation-state, have seen their role taken over by new social actors such as political party bosses, local government officials and state employees themselves. Paradoxically, patronage seems to have developed its most elaborate forms inside precisely these and other modern bureaucracies (Weingrod 1968; Blok 1969; Allum 1973; Lemarchand and Legge 1972; Abercrombie and Hill 1976; Zuckerman 1977; Ionescu 1977; Graziano 1977; Kenna 1983). The interesting question is not so much how patronage manages to flourish inside bureaucracies when in theory they are antagonistic modes of organization, but what sort of sociological and psychological framework facilitates and structures these sets of seemingly contradictory relationships? What are the cultural *rules* that govern behaviour inside these bureaucratic organizations?

The Italian university, like many bureaucratic organizations, is a highly complex social environment with its own specific sets of rules, regulations, traditions and meanings. It is a social system: by no means a closed system, but one sufficiently insulated from the rest of society that it has been allowed to develop its own peculiar *modus vivendi*. To understand how the system works and what factors shape university behaviour, it is first necessary to understand something of the character of the university and the context in which these rules operate.

The Feudal Character of University Relations

Italians often boast that unlike Britain or Germany, where university places are limited, in Italy anyone can go to university. The

idea of the élite university, they claim, has been replaced by the revolutionary idea of a 'mass university' which in theory was one of the great achievements of the 1968 movement. On paper this is all true, the result being that Italy has some 800,000 university students and a relatively higher graduate population (2.8%) than in Britain.² In practice, however, little of any substance seems to have changed as a result of the great student influx. Lessons and courses are still conducted as before, only now they are held in swollen lecture theatres with inadequate seating facilities (one of the criticisms that prompted the wave of student protests in 1985). Student-staff relations have grown more anonymous, lecturers more lofty and remote, and the inadequacies and chaos created by the situation provide a perfect smokescreen behind which the ancient structure of power, manipulation and élite-formation has again consolidated itself.

Sociologists sometimes call the Italian university system an 'industry for mass scholarization', but the analogy is misleading. The view from the inside, as expressed by students and lecturers, is that the university produces little except mass mediocrity and the conditions for its own survival. (The 'best universities', they say, are those run either privately or by the Catholic Church.) Far from creating mass higher education, its functions were commonly perceived as reducing youth unemployment in the provinces and maintaining comfortable positions of status and power for established lecturers and professors (*docente*).

These individuals, they say, are the modern equivalents of the traditional landlords. Significantly, they are even referred to colloquially as *i baroni* ('the barons'). The analogy is an appropriate one, for just as feudal barons dominated a highly stratified social order based around status and property rights and the lord's personal jurisdiction over his tenants (Bloch 1961), so some modern university 'barons' occupy similar structural positions within their faculties. They too preside over a social hierarchy based on status, rank, power, and personal domination over subordinates, and just as feudal lords gave protection to clients in return for taxes, favours and personal loyalty, university professors are expected to 'protect' their supporters. Personal loyalty and obedience, in turn, is expected from the clients - as the case-study illustrates.

University *docente*, therefore, often treat 'their' departments as personal property or 'fiefdoms'. The system actually encourages high-ranking individuals to become power-brokers and patrons of weaker clients through the extraordinary degree of subjective, arbitrary, and unchecked authority over departmental employees that it grants them. The system therefore creates the role for modern patrons to fill. The separation between the individual and the office or rank he holds within the organization - a separation fundamental in legal-rational bureaucracy - not only fails to occur in the university, it is also not usually even *recognized* as a

² The Istituto Centrale di Statistica (ISTAT 1985) puts the exact figure at 773,411 for the year 1984-5.

necessary rule. The distinction is typically blurred, either because the formal rules governing conduct are ambiguous, or because they are simply ignored. University jobs therefore become part of the private spoils of power, and the notion of an 'impersonal bond to the generally defined and functional "duty of office"' an official myth.

Social identity within the university tends to be largely a matter of which departmental faction one belongs to (or is seen to belong to). Few people manage to remain immune or detached from the clientelist networks or factions: the individual alone, without a patron or interest group to protect him, finds it difficult to survive in the competitive university environment. When someone obtains a job as researcher or reader the question that is invariably asked, therefore, is 'who got it for him?' or 'what horse was he riding?'. The assumption is always that it is 'recommendations' (*raccomandazioni* or *una zeppa*), and behind-the-scenes string-pulling rather than merit that determines who gets the job.³ University staff are classified and identified according to their patron, and few posts are obtained independently of broker intervention.

At one job interview, for example, a foreign lector was surprised to find herself the only candidate for the post advertised. All the other applicants (and there had been many) had simply been excluded from the shortlist. The appointment had already been settled through behind-the-scenes negotiations. Interestingly, however, the bogus interview still had to be conducted. Furthermore, it was carried out with the utmost ceremony and formality - even though those present all knew that the 'selection' process was a charade and that the outcome was already fixed.

Why such concern is given to the 'appearance' of professionalism is explored below. The point to stress here is that for the 'beneficiaries' of such patronage this favouritism is seldom in their long-term interests, for the price paid for the job is eternal indebtedness, and loss of independence and professional self-esteem. The relationship compromises any individual who accepts the role of client, for he is then not only personally bound to his patron but also increasingly caught up in the web of power itself - which he cannot challenge for fear of sanctions and of denouncing himself.

Junior lecturers become embroiled still further as they progress up the career ladder, as patronage is also exercised through control over promotion and publications. Interestingly, it is usually the *docente*, not their subordinates, who try to portray the relationship as one of personal friendship and equality rather than power, domination and inequality. Typically, therefore, it is the *docente* who try to put the relationship on a more informal, moral footing, who decide to exchange the more personal *tu* for the more formal *lei* in address, and who couch the relationship in the

³ The colloquial phrase often used in this context is *Lui a preso una zeppa*, which generally means 'influential friends found him the job'; *una zeppa*, literally translated, means 'a wedge'.

language and idioms of 'friendship' (*amicizia*), 'favours' and 'mutual loyalty'. To find patrons adopting this strategy might seem rather surprising - almost a case of role reversal in fact, for it is normally the weaker party that courts the attention and 'friendship' of the stronger (cf. Pitt-Rivers 1961: 35ff; Campbell 1964: 223ff). The answer may have something to do with what Bailey (1971b) called the politics of reputation management and with keeping up with the times. Since the 1970s, it has become fashionable to do away with some of the traditional symbols of hierarchy and inequality in Italy - and university lecturers are as concerned about the public image they project as many other professionals.

Some lecturers do find clientelism offensive to their notions of merit and professional integrity, but they are a minority and seldom reach positions of influence. Clientelism seems to be so intrinsic to the functioning of the university system that, unofficially, it is more or less institutionally recognised and sanctioned, and anyone wishing to get up the career ladder soon learns (or not, as in the case of foreign *lettori*) to play the system by its own rules. Many are forced to adopt two very different public faces: one within the university, one for the world outside. For example, one head of department who played the role of a shrewd, authoritarian patron *within* the university still managed to maintain a reputation *outside* the university for being a '68 militant and supporter of the far-left 'Party of Proletarian Unity' (Pd'UP), which opposes patronage and authoritarianism. To classify this behaviour simply as 'hypocrisy' would be wrong, for it is too common a feature (perhaps even a survival strategy) in Italian professional life to be dismissed so lightly. The label 'hypocrite' is inadequate for understanding the logic and rationality that underlies such behaviour. That logic has to be understood in terms of the broader conceptual framework of which it is a part.

A Conspiracy of Silence?

Attitudes to work at the university are generally very negative, especially with regard to teaching (which is understandable, since little prestige is attached to it). In the competition for status and prestige, what counts most are bureaucratic power, publications and influential friends, not teaching skill or administrative efficiency. Indeed, the popular concept and practice of 'teaching' is peculiarly authoritarian and can be summed up as the 'knower' telling the 'non-knower' the facts of his discipline. The model is that of the traditional master instructing an apprentice. A 'good' lecturer, therefore, is an instructor, rather than an educator or facilitator, who behaves like a philosophical luminary imparting knowledge to assembled followers.⁴

⁴ Significantly, there is no 'teacher-training' to speak of in

Students are frustrated and disillusioned with the university's clientelist system, but most are resigned to it, accept it as the norm, and adapt their behaviour accordingly. Most see their degree mainly as a vehicle for social mobility and a higher-status job and have little interest in their studies beyond passing exams with minimal effort - even if it means cheating (which everyone does, they claim). This attitude is rational, given that clientelism may often pay greater dividends than serious study or merit. The system discourages students from being too independent, either intellectually or 'politically', for if teaching means the 'knower telling', then 'learning' means the 'non-knower getting to know what the knower has told'. The logic of this view is that if a student thinks something 'different', it may be interpreted as him not having learnt properly, and he could therefore be penalised in examinations if it pleases the *docente* to do so.

Typically, therefore, students get through degrees by cheating or other ploys, such as 'personal recommendation'. Even parents accept this and will often contact lecturers before exams to put in a good word, a bribe or a plea for their son or daughter. On one occasion, a *raccomandato* was passed with a distinction in an oral English examination. The student could barely string a coherent sentence together, yet his pass was justified by the *docente*, who awarded it on the grounds that his linguistic abilities were latent and his grasp of the language 'intuitive'.

The arbitrariness of the examination system makes clientelism virtually inevitable. Exams in most disciplines are oral rather than written, each lasting anything from three to thirty minutes, after which the examination panel immediately confers a mark (out of thirty). Generally speaking, the greater the number to be examined on the same day the more arbitrary the grading, since the process becomes strained to its limits. Furthermore, there are no explicit, objective or consistent criteria for judging a pass or a fail. With no written record of the examination and no independent external examiner's assessment, professors can reward or punish as they please. Assessment is therefore frequently impulsive, despotic and capricious, and students are noticeably timid and deferential in front of their lecturers for fear of incurring their wrath.

The content of modern university patronage may be different now from what it was in the past, but the structure along which it is patterned is much the same as the traditional patronage of rural Italy: an asymmetrical, hierarchical, dyadic relationship of domination and subordination shrouded in paternalism and sanctioned by idioms of family, friendship and loyalty (Silverman 1985: 89-98). Just as Italian peasant societies were dominated by a local élite which maintained its position through its monopoly over land, the means of production, the means of coercion and the means of 'orientation', so in the university, the *docente* élite are patrons

Italy. Furthermore, it is only in the last few years that most universities have begun Ph.D. programmes. Most lecturers are recruited by personal co-optation.

because they control the means of intellectual production (publications), coercion (examination results, grants, promotion) and orientation (or what is considered 'valid knowledge').⁵

Three Further Rules of University Clientelism

The rationale governing much of the behaviour of university personnel can be summarized in three cardinal principles or 'cultural idioms': *figura*, *omertà* and *legalità*.

1. *Figura*

In the competitive university arena, as in much of the Mediterranean, one of the most precious and jealously defended resources is personal reputation. In the university, as in Italian society at large, it is one's *figura* ('image') that constitutes the key component of reputation. As lecturers privately admit, what is important about their jobs *vis-à-vis* reputation is not what they *do*, but the image they present to the world beyond their department. It is of little interest to others whether someone actually works hard or cares about the job: far more important is that the appearance of these qualities is attended to, and that the impression of professionalism is cultivated for public consumption. As Italians say, what counts is that one 'cuts a good figure' (*fare una bella figura*). In everyday life, *figura* is a continual source of personal concern, to some extent similar to 'honour'. Like 'honour', it is a quality that has to be vigilantly watched and defended (cf. Davis 1977; Campbell 1964; Peristiany (ed.) 1965; Schneider and Schneider 1976).

But the paradox of this is that, privately, nobody is deceived by these contrived, formal public faces, yet publicly, within the university, the rule is that everyone must act as if they were. The dichotomy between 'public' and 'private' reality is sometimes stretched to almost schizophrenic proportions, i.e. privately everyone knows that Professor 'X' is incompetent and a fraud and that he may be breaking the law, but 'publicly' no one will say so, for that would transgress another rule - the unwritten code of silence. This is because everyone, to some extent, is implicated. The system may be cumbersome and 'corrupt' but it works, and many people have a vested interest in maintaining it. This emphasis on 'appearance' creates the cultural conditions for the second governing rule, *omertà*.

⁵ The notion of 'means of orientation' (i.e. religion, knowledge, ideology) is taken from Blok 1974: 34-8.

2. Omertà - Conspiracy of Silence

Omertà is the code of secrecy traditionally associated with the Mafia, but the concept applies equally to Italian university academics. Indeed, many junior lecturers and students say that the *docente* are a kind of Mafia, that is, an organized system of power-brokers who, in their own way, construct clientele and carry out entrepreneurial activities to safeguard their interests. The rule-breaking collusion and patronage goes on at all levels and in most universities, as is testified by the frequent newspaper reports whenever a scandal is exposed (e.g. Anon. 1983; Ferrara 1983; Scalfari 1983).

The fact that professors shirk lessons, that junior researchers (or lecturers) illegally run their courses for them, that examination results are forged and that jobs are obtained by private deals are all spoken of as though they are regular events. University staff hold it to be self-evident that the payment of their salaries is often delayed for months - sometimes years - not because of bureaucratic inefficiency but because someone along the chain of payment is speculating on their wages and creaming off the accumulated interest. At the bottom end of the hierarchy, students hold it to be self-evident that other students will try and cheat to pass exams. The common strategies employed to this end range from bribery and coercion of examiners to employing someone to take the exam in their name or contracting another to supply them with a thesis to plagiarize. More common still, students will often hire someone to write their thesis for them (the going rate in 1984-5 was one to three million lire). None of these students ever suggested that to cheat in this way was in any sense 'morally' wrong.

The occurrence of these practices is no secret to the university authorities either: privately, many lecturers freely admit to knowing all this, but none will say so publicly. Ask them to do so and they will behave like the witnesses at a Mafia trial who 'saw nothing' because they were 'looking the other way when the shots were fired'.

Rule-bending, clientelism and silence are the university's *modus vivendi*. To break this would mean rupturing the tissue of a system that has been based on these practices for decades, if not centuries. Few junior lecturers would contemplate risking this, for even if they had the will to do so, it is unlikely that anything would come of it, apart from their own downfall. The attitude, therefore, is better to remain silent than to upset the system - however imperfect it may be.

Vital to the survival of the system is that the pretence of *bella figura* and the code of *omertà* are rigorously maintained. Any breach of these would threaten the whole system of clientelism, and since collusion and malpractice extend right up the chain of patronage within and beyond the university, indicting one university could have serious ramifications for others and for their political patrons beyond. To prevent this happening the *docente* - who normally behave in a highly individualistic way - have developed an acute sense of group identity in the face of a perceived mutual threat.

Here the fission-fusion principle operates: faced with a collective enemy, they close ranks (hence the head of department's confidence about always being able to rely on the university's support) - which also helps to explain the conspiracy of silence.

3. Legalità

The third principle governing university behaviour is *legalità* - an obsessive preoccupation with legality and form. Knowing that the system is held together by the precarious bonds of mutually sanctioned silence and co-involvement in practices which they would rather not admit to, and knowing that the centripetal forces of self-interest and fear may be inadequate to suppress the tensions generated by the system itself, many *docente* are highly wary of the law.

Interestingly, it is not fear that the truth might be *discovered* by the authorities or by political enemies - for university malpractices have been written about in the popular press recently (e.g. Mariotti 1986) - but fear instead that someone from the inside might break the conspiracy of silence and make public denunciations before the authorities. That would be far more serious, for were it to happen the authorities would be compelled (however reluctantly) to act, or to be seen to act, for their *figura* would be under the spotlight and they would then be threatened with a loss of face if they did not do something.

University clientelism is therefore a kind of open secret. As long as nobody openly denounces it, those who know and are in theory responsible can officially feign ignorance. Legally and politically, they are 'covered'. But if denunciations are made public, the machinery is kick-started into motion; the problem has slipped into the open where it becomes out of control, and the authorities must then carry things through to their logical conclusion. Each chain in the link, and each of these bureaucratic organizations, is itself compelled to proceed further, for they too are bound by a matrix of social rules which govern the public and professional conduct of their individual members.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that patronage in Italy, far from being rendered obsolete with modernization, has flourished under the conditions generated by modern state bureaucracies. It also shows *how* patronage has been able to survive in these conditions and the specific form it has taken, a pattern modelled on the traditional forms of clientelism that existed for centuries in the small-scale rural communities of central Italy. Yet although similar in structure, the rules and logic governing this type of patronage are slightly (but not fundamentally) different. The consequences of these rules were seen vividly in the conflict situation

generated by the *lettori* who were ignorant of them. What the subsequent analysis showed was that these rules constitute a highly structured and interrelated set of ideas, norms and principles, each one supporting the other, and all supporting a complex hierarchy of clientelism and power. It is not the university's formal bureaucratic rules so much as these informal ones that give form and meaning to social relations and behaviour within the university.

In other words, there is a conceptual structure that organizes and legitimates the pattern of patronage found in the university. It is the systemic nature of patron-client relations rather than the manipulations of scheming entrepreneurs that is being stressed here as the key to understanding university relations. It is important to stress the systemic and structural aspect of patronage for this is all too often overlooked or dismissed. Michael Korovkin's recent study (1988) of patron-clientelism in Italy, for example, concludes by suggesting that the patron-client tie is a free and voluntary relationship entered into for mutual benefit. The argument is that patrons and clients are a 'sort of loosely organized team...both involved in a rather well-concerted effort to exploit the nation-state together', and that patrons are a kind of totem which their clients are proud to be associated with, as it allows them to manipulate the nation-state (*ibid.*: 123).

In most instances of patronage in Italy, the only sort of choice clients have is between alternative patrons. This is not a real choice because they cannot choose to opt out of clientelist relations at all, and contrary to Korovkin's view, clients do not have much leverage over their patrons. The relationship is only of advantage to the client if he is rewarded by the patron for his loyalty and continued subordination, but this is hardly 'teamwork', for as White remarks: 'A patron distributes rewards, not to the most needy, but to those who can do most for him' (White 1980: 162). Far from being 'proud' of their association with powerful patrons, clients are more often humiliated and frustrated by it. Even the patrons themselves are caught up in a system they neither invented nor can easily alter or control; they are merely its more privileged custodians who play out, with varying degrees of success and imagination, the roles the system allocates to them.

In identifying the conceptual structure behind the university system of patronage and analyzing its cultural features, one begins to see the logic and rationality beneath the otherwise inexplicable behaviour of university lecturers and their students. The unspoken set of rules and conventions surrounding the idioms of 'appearance', 'secrecy' and 'legality' - coupled with an ethos that is the very opposite of the Weberian legal-rational ideal-type - are the keys to understanding the university system of patronage.

One study of an Italian university may not be sufficient grounds upon which to make large generalizations, but it does at least illustrate something of the mechanics of modern patron-client relations and how they operate. It would be wrong to think that all universities in Italy follow an identical pattern, but it would also be equally unrealistic to assume that the university is unique in this respect. Patron-clientelism is endemic in Italian society: it exists in trade unions, private industry, the church, in most

if not all the political parties, and in all government ministries. It is the major factor in Italian government and politics (Sassoon 1986: 8-9). Whether this can be blamed, as White (1980), Sassoon (1986) and Allum (1973) argue, on the Christian Democrats - Italy's political rulers since 1944 - is debatable, though it is significant that the university is generally spoken of as a Christian Democrat patrimony, and most university appointments involve party political mediation.

People in Britain would call much of Italian university behaviour 'corruption' - which perhaps reveals more about the British value system than that of Italian university personnel. 'Corruption' is, after all, a culturally relative term. More significant, however, is that few of those involved in rule-breaking and clientelist malpractices actually see this kind of behaviour as 'corrupt' or wrong. Since the expectation is that everyone else is cheating or playing the same game (or would be stupid not to), they have no moral scruples against doing so themselves. 'Sincerity' in Italy is not always given the positive evaluation that it receives, for example, in Britain and the United States. People who are frank and emotionally honest in their professional dealings (in the sense of following the correct rules, speaking out against their infringement, expressing indignation at the behaviour of a patron) are more likely to be considered as at best indiscrete and naive, at worse gullible and bad mannered. Rule breaking may be 'contrary to the law', but in Italy this does not necessarily mean a great deal, for as the popular saying goes, 'the law is for idiots' (*la legge è per i fessi*), or 'for every law there is a way round it' (*fatta la legge, trovata l'inganno*). In this respect, university personnel are merely echoing the diffuse cultural attitudes of contempt and distrust for the law and the state common throughout Italy.

Clearly there is a large gulf here between 'formal' and 'informal' behaviour, between 'public' and 'private' presentations of the 'self'. Likewise, there is a corresponding gulf between professed universalistic, legal-rational rules and the more disguised, personalistic and vernacular rules that are seldom explicitly defined. In each case, there are two systems pulling the individual in seemingly contradictory directions. Perhaps it is this dichotomy that is the real organizing principle of university life. Undoubtedly it helps us understand the logic of university behaviour and its apparent double standards.

In saying that there is a logic and a set of rules governing key aspects of social behaviour at the university, no attempt has been made to explain their origin: that would require a historical analysis beyond the scope of this paper. How to classify this kind of professor-subordinate relationship is another problem this paper has not addressed: is it a bureaucratic or a patron-client relationship, or simply a class relationship? Certainly we can detect elements of all three at work. But the peculiar character of social behaviour inside the university seems to stem from a highly specific blend of impersonal bureaucracy and disguised patronage. The effect of this is, as Lemarchand and Legge observed (1972), that in its actual operation the system swings back into the clientelistic mould of its predecessor. The result is a hybrid situation in which

clientelism resuscitates itself in the traditional interstices of modernizing polities.

But this is not unique to Italian universities, or to Italy, however endemic the practice of clientelism may be. To some extent, all bureaucratic organizations in the Mediterranean seem to evolve practices and 'ways of doing things' peculiar to themselves that are not always strictly consistent with the formal rules laid down by statute. Similarly, most tend to adopt different codes of conduct for behaviour inside and outside the organization. In other words, most are 'two-faced'. The more power they have the more this tendency is likely to be reinforced, in which case the final rule is not so much 'keep within the law' as 'make sure you are not caught breaking it'.

C.N. SHORE

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