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Introduction

Palermo, exalted for its beauty by the Arabs 1,000 years ago, in the thirteenth-century site of the court of Frederick II, Holy Roman Emperor, and one of the major cultural centers of Europe, today enjoys quite a different fame. Capital of the mafia, a national symbol of venality and corruption in local government, Palermo, Italy's sixth largest city, is balanced precariously between Europe and Africa. Behind the façade of a prosperous modern metropolis, the crumbling slums, narrow twisting alleyways, and dank courtyards of the old city harbor conditions of housing, health, and sanitation more reminiscent of a Cairo or a Calcutta than of a major European city. Life in Palermo is a perpetual drama, from the daily torment of the city's chaotic traffic to the routine collapse of yet another *palazzo* in the old city to the periodic breakdown of basic services like garbage collection or public transportation to not infrequent outbursts of mafia warfare, which leave the city's streets strewn with bullet-ridden corpses.

In the face of all this, local government looks on in total impotence, more concerned with factional struggles over the distribution of key patronage positions than with the increasingly dramatic conditions of life in the city. Probably the major policy issue confronting local government in Palermo is the *risanamento* ("urban renewal") of the old city, devastated by the Allied bombing raids of 1943 and dealt a further blow by the earthquake of 1968. Until 1976 the progressive disintegration of the old city proceeded, despite endless electoral promises, undisturbed by any attempts at public intervention, with countless historical and architectural monuments allowed to deteriorate beyond hope of restoration. Crumbling buildings were propped up precariously by long iron bars installed across narrow alleyways, and entire streets were walled off to prevent the evicted inhabitants from reentering condemned dwellings or children from playing in the heaps of rubble from the *crolli* ("collapses") that have become an

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everyday fact of life in the city. In 1976–77 national and regional funds totaling over U.S. $740 million were allocated to Palermo for the *risanamento* of the old city and related public-works projects, and the city was caught up in a heated political debate over how the money should be spent. Five years later, nothing had changed except that the old city had deteriorated still further, and the value of the original funds had been decimated by inflation. Not a lira had yet been spent; only at the end of 1980 were the initial technical proposals for the first phase of the *risanamento* even presented to the City Council.

Related to the failure of local administrations over the past thirty years to deal with the restoration of the old city is the desperate shortage of low-income housing in Palermo. Although several large public-housing projects have in fact been built since the mid-1960s, their allocation has traditionally been reserved for electoral purposes. Thus, in 1975–76 it required a mass protest movement on the part of residents of the old city to compel the city's administrators to assign several blocs of apartments that had been standing empty for months. Even where low-income residents have succeeded in obtaining public housing, they often find themselves banished to concrete deserts without basic infrastructures like water, electricity, and sewage lines or social services like schools, clinics, pharmacies, and the like.

Although the failure of public policy in Palermo is most evident in low-income neighborhoods, the quality of service delivery throughout the city is abysmally low. Public-service agencies have tended to function more to mobilize votes for local politicians than to maintain acceptable conditions of urban existence. The most glaring example is the city's garbage collection agency Azienda Municipalizzata Nettezza Urbana (AMNU). By the end of 1976 the sanitary conditions of the city had deteriorated to such a level – with garbage often lying uncollected for weeks or even months at a time in some of the poorer neighborhoods – that the local magistrate initiated an official investigation of AMNU, threatening its administrators with charges of criminal negligence, and of having exposed the city to the risk of a major epidemic. Not only do public services function sporadically and inefficiently at best but at times factional struggle within and among the governing parties becomes so intense that elective bodies and other public agencies are reduced to total immobility for extended periods of time. Thus, for example, the administration of the Province of Palermo virtually ceased to function from June 1975 until the end of 1976, and the Banco di Sicilia, the island's major credit institution, remained without a regularly elected president and *consig-*

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lio d'amministrazione for a decade from 1969 until 1979 – both because of a bitter internal power struggle within the major governing party. Finally, the most telling indictment of local government in Palermo came in the mid-1960s, when, after a series of scandals related to the building boom sweeping the city and the simultaneous outbreak of a full-scale mafia war for control of the construction industry, the Italian Parliament created the so-called Antimafia Commission, which undertook an in-depth investigation of the activities of the municipal administration, revealing far-reaching collusion between city administrators and powerful mafia interests.

Yet, despite scandals, administrative paralysis, and the progressive degradation of the conditions of urban life resulting from them, the residents of Palermo have since 1952 regularly elected city governments controlled by the Christian Democratic Party (DC). In 1975, when virtually every other major Italian city turned to the left, electing local governments controlled by Communist-Socialist coalitions, and again in 1980, Palermo not only returned the Christian Democrats to power, but gave the party ever larger electoral margins. Given the undisputed failure of local government not only to provide essential public services but even to guarantee the functioning of normal administrative activities, how can the unbroken electoral success of the DC over the past thirty years be explained? By what means, despite its dismal record of performance, has the DC succeeded in generating and sustaining a solid electoral base in almost every sector of the urban population? Why have opposition groups critical of the DC's thirty-year record of misgovernment proven unable to mobilize mass support for an alternative? This last question assumes even greater relevance in a country like Italy, which boasts the world's largest nonruling Communist Party (30% of the vote in 1979), a party with formidable organizational and mobilizational resources. How can one explain the failure of the Communist Party in Palermo to attract a mass following, especially among the urban poor, who have paid the highest price for the catastrophic conditions of urban life that successive Christian Democratic administrations have bequeathed the city?

At the most general level, political scientists and others have sought explanations for political behavior like that observed in Palermo in the phenomenon of "clientelism." Until recently the bulk of the literature on clientelism consisted of anthropological studies of patron–client relationships in small rural villages.[1] From the anthropological perspective, clientelism refers to a particular kind of interpersonal relationship, based on the direct exchange of favors between two actors:

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[It is] a special case of dyadic (two-person) ties involving a largely instrumental friendship in which an individual of higher socio-economic status (patron) uses his own influence and resources to provide protection or benefits, or both, for a person of lower status (client) who, for his part, reciprocates by offering general support and assistance, including personal services, to the patron.[2]

The defining characteristics of the patron–client relationship are reciprocity, inequality of status, and the personal, enduring nature of the relationship, a kind of lopsided friendship. What distinguishes clientelism from other forms of exchange relationship is its asymmetrical nature. In a patron–client relationship power is unidirectional, the creation of a bond of personal obligation being used by the patron to subordinate the client to his will.[3] The key to such a relationship is the concentration of critical resources in the hands of a few, so that the client, in order to enjoy access to the protection and material resources controlled by the powerful, has no alternative but to return loyally the benefits received.

Given this general definition of clientelism as a direct exchange relationship between two actors of unequal status and power, it is necessary to distinguish between the traditional patron–client bond based on the economic position and personal prestige of the individual notable and clientelism as a system of gaining and managing political power on the part of a mass-based political party. Political science research has focused on the latter phenomenon, the political machine, both in its classic form in American big-city politics of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and as a major instrument of mass mobilization in the present-day politics of many developing nations.[4] In countries where patron–client ties were already deeply rooted in traditional social structure, the introduction of universal suffrage and competitive party politics transformed these preexisting influence hierarchies into effective channels for the delivery of votes from the newly enfranchised lower classes. In its early stages political clientelism takes the form of competing cliques of traditional notables, each with his own personal following and personal ties to those in positions of political power. The machine as a political institution comes into being only when the organizational superstructure of a modern mass-based political party is substituted for the personal influence networks of the notables. At this point the party organization itself assumes the role of patron and the resources of the state take the place of the personal economic and social power of the notable. Although with the emergence of the machine the forms of political organization undergo a radical transformation, the nature of political support remains unchanged. The role of the traditional notable is

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now performed by the party secretary, mayor, or parliamentary deputy, but politics continues to be rooted in the exchange of the vote for short-term individual benefits rather than in broader appeals of program or ideology. (This process of transformation of the clientelism of the notables into the mass patronage of the party machine in the specific case of southern Italy will be described in detail in Chapter 3.)

One of the central concerns of much of the literature on clientelism has been to identify the conditions under which clientelistic systems of power are likely to emerge and to perpetuate themselves, or, from the opposite perspective, the circumstances under which the mass support for political machines might be expected to break down. Political scientists and other students of clientelism have explained the maintenance of political machines primarily in terms of a constantly expanding flow of resources over time.[5] The assumption has been that any political system relying predominantly on short-term material incentives for popular support is by definition engaged in the wholesale squandering of public resources. It follows, then, that clientelism carries with it the seeds of its eventual demise; either the exhaustion of the available resource base through patronage spending or the onset of economic crisis for reasons external to the system itself will irrevocably undermine the popular base of the machine.

Palermo constitutes an ideal test case for theories of clientelism focusing on the need for a constantly expanding resource base. For thirty years the DC has maintained power in Palermo in a situation of chronic resource shortage. Not only is the local economy characterized by severe resource constraints (see Chapter 2) but the flow of resources from the center, which many observers[6] have seen as the key to the enduring strength of clientelism in southern Italy, has been very limited in Palermo. Furthermore, in 1975 and 1980, in the midst of the most severe economic crisis of the postwar period, the Christian Democrats in Palermo actually increased their share of the vote.

Why do people continue to support the machine in a situation of economic crisis when, given the shrinking resource base, the prospect of personal benefit from the patron–client bond is greatly reduced? The case of the Christian Democratic machine in Palermo clearly demonstrates that the essence of clientelism lies less in the distribution of plenty than in the skillful manipulation of scarcity. The key to understanding the patron–client bond is that it depends not on a continuous stream of benefits, but rather on sustaining the expectation of rewards in the maximum number of people with the minimum payoff in concrete benefits. In a situation of resource scarcity like that of southern Italy and in the absence of a competing po-

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litical force that can offer concrete resources to replace those controlled by the machine, most people will continue to support the possibility, however slim, of immediate gain from the machine as opposed to abstract promises of long-term change. This reconsideration of the resource base necessary to sustain the machine is reinforced by detailed examination of the nature of the patronage resources upon which the DC in Palermo has depended. Although large-scale patronage hiring for local government jobs has, in Palermo as elsewhere, played an important role in the politics of the machine, this is not necessarily – as has been often assumed in other studies – the key to explaining mass support for clientelistic parties. On the contrary, as the research on Palermo demonstrates, a large proportion of DC patronage and, I would argue, that part which is most significant for understanding the nature of clientelistic power, is based on the discretionary implementation of the bureaucratic and regulatory functions of local government and implies no financial drain whatsoever on the public treasury.

It is thus not the quantity of available resources that is the determining factor for the survival of the machine, but rather the ability of the machine to control the channels of access to critical resources of all kinds, political and bureaucratic as well as strictly economic. Such concentration of power in the hands of a single party is particularly accentuated in a country like Italy, with its highly centralized administrative structure, extensive state intervention in the economy, unbroken domination of the central state by a single party since 1947, and intense politicization of the administrative apparatus. In a situation like that of southern Italy, where one-party domination is combined with public control of almost all relevant resources, there is no reason why economic crisis need necessarily spell the demise of the machine. Far from undermining mass support for the machine, economic crisis may, in fact, as in the case of Palermo, actually strengthen it, because, as the supply of available resources shrinks, the role of the dominant party as an obligatory intermediary between the individual citizen and the resources of the state is further accentuated.

Another major issue in the literature on clientelism is the question of who supports political machines and what kinds of benefits they receive in exchange for their support. The issue of the social bases of the machine has been addressed primarily from the perspective of the political participation of the urban poor. In works on both the big-city American machines of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and contemporary Third World (for the most part Latin-American) cities, the dominant assumption has been that the poor constitute the principal basis of mass support for political machines.[7]

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The case of Palermo unequivocably refutes that assumption. Although a significant proportion of the urban poor in Palermo do support the machine, the electoral base of the DC extends beyond them to embrace almost every sector of the city's population, with the middle classes constituting as important a source of machine strength as do the poor.

The question of the class basis of clientelistic power in Palermo is explored in detail in Part II of this book, which provides an in-depth analysis of the concrete patronage mechanisms linking the DC to each of the major social groups in the city – white-collar employees, the local entrepreneurial elite (including the mafia), the traditional middle classes (shopkeepers and artisans), and the urban poor. In addition to revising earlier notions as to the class basis of clientelistic appeals, this investigation of the social bases of the machine demonstrates that general terms like "clientelism" and "patronage" tell us very little about the actual mechanisms linking the machine to distinct social groups. The research on the DC machine in Palermo reveals the existence of a range of patronage resources much broader and more diverse than has been depicted in most studies of political machines, as well as a clear distinction in the forms of patronage the party employs in its relationship with each social group. Not only does patronage mean something very different for the city employee or building contractor than it does for the street-vendor or slum family, but, more importantly, as has been indicated above, the diversity of patronage resources available to local governments means that, with the exception of the white-collar middle class (predominantly public employees), support for the machine on the part of other social groups depends primarily on benefits that require no direct expenditure of public funds.

Chapters 7 and 8 of this study will, however, be devoted entirely to the question of the relationship between the machine and the urban poor, looking not only at the mechanisms by which the DC maintains support in low-income neighborhoods but also at attempts to mobilize the poor on an alternative basis. Cross-national research has recognized clientelism as one of the predominant forms of political integration of the urban poor, especially in developing countries. At the same time, clientelism has been widely regarded as a backward or aberrant form of political participation, in contrast to the "norm" of interest groups and political parties based on programmatic or ideological ties. Until recently support for political machines on the part of the poor was seen to a large extent as a reflection of the backwardness of the poor themselves – their "nonpoliticization," their social and economic marginality, their lack of integration into the dominant culture.[8] It has been argued, for example, in the Amer-

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ican context, that the poor, especially those from Catholic or peasant-based cultures, are more likely to hold a "political ethos" that is "private-regarding," in contrast to the middle class, particularly those of Anglo-Saxon Protestant origin, whose political ethos is founded on the idea that "politics should be based on public rather than private motives and, accordingly, should stress the virtues of honesty, impartiality, and efficiency."[9]

This kind of explanation of support for the machine, focusing on the distinctive characteristics of a presumed "culture of poverty" or on the "marginality" of the poor, was challenged during the 1970s by a number of new studies of the political behavior of the urban poor in several Latin American cities.[10] In contrast to the earlier literature, these studies emphasize the relationship between the poor and the larger political and socioeconomic context. In this view, the cultural values of the poor are no longer seen as the independent variable producing distinctively "backward" forms of political behavior. Instead, both the values of the poor and their political expression are explained as rational adaptations to external structural constraints, both economic and political. In those cases where clientelism constitutes the dominant form of political behavior among the urban poor, it is thus understood not in terms of the characteristics and values of those who support the machine, but rather in terms of the organizational choices of elites and of the presence or absence of alternative channels of demand making for the poor. As Martin Shefter put it in his study of the emergence of the Tammany Hall machine:

> Political machines did not simply reflect an underlying (and unambiguous) set of popular loyalties and preferences. Rather, dominant machines were *political institutions:* they succeeded in institutionalizing a particular pattern of such preferences, and in the process, other equally plausible lines of cleavage were organized out of politics . . . As a ruling *institution*, the survival of the machine . . . was contingent upon its capacity to channel and control the political behavior of its supporters, as much as to represent their preferences, and upon its capacity to engender an autonomous set of loyalties – loyalty to the institution itself – among its supporters.[11]

Although written with reference to the American experience of the nineteenth century, the above citation applies equally well to contemporary machines in southern Italy and other developing countries. In attempting to understand the political behavior of the urban poor, the critical question is not whether the poor are marginal or integrated, but on what terms their integration takes place. In contrast to cultural explanations of political behavior, an emphasis on elite organizational choice directs attention to the ways in which a political system is structured and how it distributes rewards as the

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critical factors in determining the responses of subordinate groups. What is seen by the poor as the proper scope of political activity, what alternative channels of political participation are available, and how these alternatives are evaluated in terms of potential costs and benefits, are not autonomous products of political culture. Demand making by the poor is strongly conditioned by the power of elites to set the parameters of legitimate political behavior. From this perspective, which the present study shares, the machine can best be understood as an effective and low-cost instrument for the preservation of the social, economic, and political status quo. By integrating the poor into the existing system with short-term individualistic rewards and the illusion of participation, the machine mitigates social and political conflict and impedes the organization of the poor along alternative lines. At the same time, the longer-term needs of the poor are not met, as the machine serves established economic interests at the expense of investment in substantive social policy.

The attempt to explain political participation in terms of the structural constraints, as well as opportunities, operating upon various social groups requires analysis not only of the linkages between specific social groups and the local political and economic context but also of the relationship between local power and the national political and economic system. One of the shortcomings of much research on local politics has been the assumption that either specific social groups or the local community as a whole can be studied in isolation. This study takes as its point of departure the opposite assumption: it is impossible to understand either the local economy or local politics outside the broader context of national politics and policy. In no case, and least of all in a highly centralized political system like that of Italy, is the local community a self-contained and self-sufficient entity; its behavior is shaped in innumerable ways by decisions made outside its boundaries and by the structural context within which it is embedded. The nature of these linkages in the southern Italian case is set out most explicitly in Part I of this book, which deals with the evolution of the "Southern Question," in both its political and economic manifestations, from 1860 to the present, with the economic structure of the southern Italian city, and with the development of Christian Democratic power, in Palermo and in the South more generally, during the postwar period. In Part II, devoted to the social bases of Christian Democratic power in Palermo, this theme is less evident, yet the dependency relationship binding the South to centers of national power looms in the background as a constant conditioning factor.

The linking of political behavior at the local level to broader struc-

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tural variables raises a more general theoretical issue of major importance for underdeveloped areas like southern Italy and those parts of the Third World where clientelism has become a leading form of political mobilization. Is there a distinctive political economy of clientelism? That is, is the emergence of clientelism as the dominant form of political organization linked to an underlying structural context of resource scarcity and economic dependency? If it can be ascertained that clientelism tends to thrive in a particular socioeconomic context, it must next be asked what relationship exists between political power and economic structure once the machine is firmly established. Some scholars have argued that the machine is a transitional form of political organization, rooted in the early stages of capitalist development, and that it will inevitably give way to more modern forms of politics as economic development proceeds.[12] Is politics a relatively passive reflection of economic structure, as this argument suggests, or, once in place, can a given political structure assume an active role in shaping economic variables in such a way as to perpetuate the bases of its own power? More concretely, must clientelistic regimes submit to the inevitable verdict of autonomous processes of economic development, or can such a regime, through its control of key levers of power, impede those processes of development that would eventually undermine the bases of its support?

Southern Italy provides an ideal terrain for investigation of the relationship between clientelism and economic development.[13] Not only has clientelism dominated local politics in southern Italy since Italian unification in 1860 but the national government as well has been controlled since 1947 by a party that has transformed the Italian state into a huge patronage machine.[14] At the same time, the Italian government has since 1950 promoted a massive developmental effort in the South, which was and remains one of the most backward regions of Western Europe. The intimate interpenetration of politics and economics in southern Italy – and the ways in which it shapes future prospects for both economic and political change – is one of the major themes of this book. The failure of development in the South and the persistence of clientelistic power are two faces of the same coin.

The research on the bases of Christian Democratic power in Palermo, which constitutes the bulk of this study, provides substantial evidence in favor of the hypothesis that clientelistic politics may be most firmly rooted precisely in situations of resource scarcity and that, once installed, political machines may be able to secure such a monopoly over the channels of access to critical resources as to become almost immune to political challenge from within. Yet the case

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