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The institutionalisation of 'noise' and 'silence' in urban politics: Case studies from East Africa

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Abstract

Africa's rapidly-expanding cities are sites of political mobilisation and incubators of social and institutional development. This paper draws on a comparative study of the capital cities of Rwanda and Uganda, exploring the contrasting ways in which forms of popular participation in urban affairs are institutionalised through informal political processes. It argues that in Kampala the regular mobilisation of urban social and economic groups into protests and violent riots has institutionalised a politics of 'noise'. In Kigali, by contrast, processes of collective mobilisation that involve structured activities and community 'self-policing', which are equally political but comparatively 'silent', have become institutionalised. The paper explains the persistence of differential patterns of state-society interaction in these cities, considering the tacit norms of negotiation in place in each case and the incentives for both governmental and urban social actors to continue adhering to them. It thus explores mechanisms of localised 'path dependence', through which informal institutions become self-reinforcing in particular contexts.

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1. Introduction

This paper explores institutional development and continuity in the sphere of African urban politics. The case for the importance of institutions in development has been powerfully articulated (North 1995; Rodrik 2007; Olson and Kahkonen 2000). Moreover, calls to 'repoliticise' development discourses (Ferguson 1994; Harriss 2001) coincided with efforts to think institutionally about the politics as well as the economics of development (Hall and Taylor 1996; Pierson 2000b). This paper contributes to these debates by focusing on the urban political arena, a distinct socio-political space that was at the heart of mid-20th Century debates in political science[2] but has been relatively neglected in the development literature, despite its importance for development both within and beyond cities.

Through a comparative case study approach, the paper analyses how very different forms of urban participation in political affairs have been *informally institutionalised* in Uganda's capital Kampala and the Rwandan capital Kigali. Rather than answering the question of why contrasting patterns of politics emerged in these cities in the first place – which would require much deeper historical analysis than there is space for here – it focuses largely on the processes through which different patterns of behaviour are perpetuated, thereby becoming informal institutions (or social norms). Almost half a century ago, Barrington Moore noted the 'widespread assumption in modern social science that social continuity requires no explanation' (Moore 1966: 485-6). This assumption is arguably still widespread. The present paper builds on the evolving literature on institutional continuity (Ikenberry 1994; Pierson 2000b) but through the lens of informal institutions, which are considered in relation to continuing debates about power (Scott 1990; Lukes 2005).

In engaging with debates on institutionalisation and power, it proposes a simple heuristic dichotomy between 'noise' and 'silence' to encapsulate the degree to which overt protest is practiced and accepted as a form of recurrent state-society interaction in a given context. Being concerned with *mechanisms* of causality, the paper employs a 'process-tracing' approach (King et al 1994; George & Bennett). It explores how some of the most important forms of collective political activity in these cities reproduce norms of 'noise' and 'silence' respectively, and in so doing problematises dominant conceptions of urban political 'participation'. It argues that in Kampala the regular mobilisation of urban informal groups into protests and riots has institutionalised a politics of 'noise', which serves certain functions for both political elites and ordinary city-dwellers. In Kigali, by contrast, urban 'participation' often takes the form of the mobilisation of city-dwellers into orderly, structured activities and 'self-policing' communities. These have become institutionalised through comparatively 'silent' political processes. The prevalence of either 'noise' or 'silence' in many respects reflects an absence of opportunity for 'voice' in its idealised form (i.e. through formal institutions for political engagement). The question addressed is therefore why and how in the absence of effective voice the extremes of 'noise' and 'silence' prevail in different contexts.

The paper begins by discussing institutional theory and what a focus on the city level can contribute to analyses of informal institutions, before considering the role of power and agency in processes of institutionalisation. Empirical material is then presented, focusing in part on the politics surrounding urban marketplaces. In cities characterised by low levels of industrialisation, where much of the urban population seek livelihoods through informal petty

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[2] The 'community power' debates focusing on 'elitism' versus 'pluralism' were deeply rooted in the urban context (Hunter 1953; Dahl 1961).

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trade, engagement between vendors and the authorities often constitutes a critical site for the evolution of norms of state-society interaction. The politics of 'noise' in Kampala is examined through struggles over marketplaces from 2006-2010, followed by an analysis of the post-election riots that shook the city in April and May 2011. For Kigali, the relative absence of 'noise' is examined both through the controversial re-organisation of market trade over the same period and a broader analysis of community activity in the city. The final section concludes and offers some thoughts about why an understanding of informal institutional continuity matters for development theory and policy.

2. Informal institutions and urban politics

Cities and the 'institutional turn'

An institution can be thought of as 'a set of humanly devised behavioural rules that govern and shape the interactions of human beings' (Lin and Nugent 1995: 2306-7), formed 'to reduce uncertainty in human exchange' (North 1995: 18). While it may be broadly true that 'we are all institutionalists now' (Pierson 2000b: 493), two points are of particular interest here regarding the discourse on institutions and development. The first is that debates have tended to focus on formal institutions. Although leading theorists such as North have long pointed out that '[f]ormal rules are an important part of the institutional framework but only a part' (North 1993: 18), the majority of 'new institutional' literature has in reality focused on formal issues such as constitutional law and the codification of property rights (North 1990; Brett 1999).

The second point is that institutional debates have tended to focus on the national scale. New institutional economists have largely concentrated on the national legal environment, and to the limited extent that informal institutions are taken into account it is usually with reference to 'social conventions' conceived of (often implicitly) at the level of the nation-state (North 1995; North et al 2009). Classic comparative historical institutionalism (e.g. Moore 1966; Skocpol 1979) has also been overwhelmingly focused on 'Efforts to fully comprehend how *large-scale* political structures get "fixed" and reproduce themselves' (Ikenberry 1994: 30; emphasis added). The fixation of the discipline of political science with nation-states (Magnusson 1996) has contributed to this pattern.

Attention both to informal and local institutions has, however, admittedly been increasing in recent years (Helmke and Levitsky 2004). In Development Studies and especially with respect to Africa, there has been a growing focus on the importance of informal institutions and their relationship to formal ones (Chabal and Daloz 1999; Bratton 2007; Meagher 2008; Olivier de Sardan 2008). However, to the extent that this has translated into a geographic focus on particular localities, most of the attention has been on rural areas; for example in relation to traditional chieftaincy in Africa and tribal and village panchayats in India (Bardhan 1993; Ntsebeza 2004; Ananth Pur 2007).[3] While there has been an outpouring of literature on the urban 'informal economy' (e.g. Peattie 1987; Guha-Khasnobis et al 2006), attention to informal *political* institutions in cities has lagged behind. Political organisation in the informal economy is starting to be explored (Lindell 2011), but the association of cities with formal governmental and legal institutions has led to assumptions in the broader literature equating the urban with the formal when it comes to politics.

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[3] There are some exceptions, such as Beall and Ngonyama (2009)

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In fact, African cities are replete with what Olivier de Sardan terms 'practical norms' of behaviour: informal, pragmatic 'subterranean regulations' that often contradict formal rules, but if adhered to increase one's chances of maintaining a stable and secure livelihood (Olivier de Sardan 2008). Cities are sites of heterogeneity, population density and intense economic specialisation; consequently they are institutionally complex, as early scholars of the urban condition realised (Park 1925; Wirth 1938). Power-brokers in the form of urban association leaders with personal links to politicians, or key players in particular ethnic and clan networks, are critical for survival in the city; urban-dwellers require knowledge of the rules by which these locally-rooted informal power structures operate. These are 'informal institutions' just as much as, for example, a rural village chieftaincy. Moreover, as sites of regular political interaction where state-society relations are particularly intense, urban areas yield great potential for the study of the *processes* through which informal political behaviour becomes institutionalised. It is to these questions of institutional evolution and continuity that we now turn.

Tracing urban institutional development: 'constant causes' and human agency

A focus on processes of institutionalisation does not necessarily imply deeply historical research; in fact the material to be presented here is largely drawn from very recent times. This can be justified by means of the distinction made by Stinchcombe (1968) between 'historical causes' and 'constant causes'. Seeking historical causes helps determine (as far as is possible) an 'original' moment in which an institutional trajectory was generated. Yet this can only be part of a causal explanation of contemporary behaviour; equally important is to 'explain continuity in activity in terms of the ongoing presence of a set of pressures and incentives' (Ikenberry 1994: 30). The idea of 'path dependence' is important here, highlighting how institutions that come into play as a result of contingent historical events can come to be *self-reinforcing*. A central premise is that 'once a country or region has started down a track, the costs of reversal are very high' (Levi 1997: 28) and 'increasing returns' systems kick in; in other words 'the *relative* benefits of the current activity compared with other possible options increase over time' (Pierson 2000a: 252).

Accepting the importance of path dependence is not, however, the same as an unquestioning assumption of 'social inertia', which Moore rightly argued 'obliterates the fact that [social and cultural continuity] have to be recreated anew in each generation' (Moore 1966: (486). Human agency is therefore central to the perpetuation and reproduction of informal institutions. On the whole, the 'new institutionalism' has treated institutions as rules or norms that 'structure', 'govern' or 'constrain' human action (North 1995; Lin and Nugent 1995; Hodgson 2006; North et al 2009), and agency as playing out *within* these constraints. The approach taken in this paper, however, accords with Giddens' (1979: 255) argument that 'the reflexive monitoring of action both draws upon and reconstitutes the institutional organization of society'. This implies more attention to social action as a factor in the reproduction of institutional matrices; after all, 'institutions do not just work 'behind the backs' of the social actors who produce and reproduce them' (Giddens 1979: 71).

The issue of agency in the reproduction of institutions raises questions of power. Informal institutions are arguably reproduced and reinforced by the powerless as well as the powerful, even if they are not in the former's immediate interests. They may take on 'functional' qualities over time as they become 'locked in', because 'social adaptation to institutions drastically increases the cost of exit from existing arrangements' (Pierson 2000b: 492). The

relatively powerless may therefore continue adhering to, and thereby reinforcing, existing norms that are seemingly detrimental to them, even in the absence of overt coercion. Whether this happens because they are deceived as to their 'real' interests, or because they find it expedient to conform but are actually resisting internally, has been a subject of much debate. James Scott argues that 'public transcripts' of obedience to authority are always accompanied by 'hidden transcripts' of rebellion that are 'essential to any dynamic view of power relations' (Scott 1990: 9). Steven Lukes, however, maintains that there is a 'third dimension' of power whereby the powerful can shape the 'perceptions, cognitions and preferences' of the powerless so that the latter do not rebel even internally but 'accept their role in the existing order of things' (Lukes 2005: 28).

In fact, there is reason to suppose that both these forms of acquiescence exist, and can coexist simultaneously within the same population; a point acknowledged by Lukes in the second formulation of his thesis (Lukes 2005: 131). The relevant point here is that both Scott's covert 'arts of resistance' and Lukes' internalised consent result in compliance without overt conflict or protest – in other words, a politics of 'silence' – which further entrenches existing norms. These mechanisms are particularly pertinent to the context of Kigali, as will be illustrated in this paper. In some other contexts where power relations have evolved differently, and where there is less scope for the powerful to exercise either total domination or 'three dimensional' power, state-society conflict is overt and may be expressed through a politics of 'noise'. In a partial reversal of Scott's thesis, rebellion and noise itself can come to form part of the 'public transcript' of state-society engagement in such contexts; a point that will be made in relation to the case of Kampala.

A focus on power and agency means considering the different ways people *participate* in political life. The concept of participation tends to be associated with normative agendas of deliberative democracy and empowered participatory governance (Robinson 1998; Fung and Wright, 2003). Yet there are other forms of participation that have very little to do with democracy as we understand it. Huntington (1968) pointed out that 'Broadened participation in politics may enhance control of the people by the government, as in totalitarian states, or it may enhance control of the government by the people, as in some democratic ones' (Huntington 1968: 35). Participation took place under the aegis of communism in the Soviet Union as well as through participatory budgeting in Brazil (Souza 2001), for example. Normative conceptions of participation can therefore obscure the participatory nature of certain political systems; contemporary Rwanda is a country in which the mass of the population very frequently participate in public affairs in ways that differ significantly from dominant civil society-centred conceptions. While many would dispute any characterisation of Rwandan society as democratic, it would be almost absurd to deny that it is deeply participatory. Stepping back from the normative and taking a broader view of participation is important for understanding what the most important forms of political engagement are in different contexts.

Huntington exhibits some of the tendencies of earlier modernisation theorists by focusing on the 'level' of institutionalisation (Huntington 1968: 12) as if it is a linear, progressive process, rather than the processes through which different forms of participation may be institutionalised. This paper attempts to address this and the other gaps identified in the literature above. It takes a subnational lens on institutionalisation, using the city as the unit of analysis due to the fact the processes under consideration relate to specifically urban issues and are linked to policies emanating from city authorities. Path dependent institutionalist explanations have generally reflected the previously highlighted preoccupation with 'grand

structures' and the nation-state. This paper instead explores how different actors contribute to the institutional 'lock-in' of different forms of participation in particular urban localities, exploring how social norms are perpetuated through localised 'constant causes'.

3.   The popular politics of noise: Kampala

Uganda's country-wide civil war ended in 1986 with the coming to power of Yoweri Museveni and his National Resistance Movement (NRM), which is still in power today and has generally enjoyed both widespread legitimacy at home and successful development co-operation abroad. Impressive levels of economic growth have prevailed, and the capital city Kampala made an impressive recovery after decades of decay. A celebrated decentralisation programme (Hansen and Twaddle 1998; Asiimwe and Musisi 2007) and the gradual opening up of multi-party political competition brought a measure of democratic politics to the city. Despite this, the central government has exhibited increasingly authoritarian tendencies since the turn of the millennium, and many consider Museveni's rule to be highly autocratic (Rubongoya 2007; Tripp 2010).

Against this backdrop, Kampala has evolved into a hive of political activity and popular mobilisation. While there are elections at various levels, the real 'participation' in Kampala's politics is arguably found elsewhere: in the marketplace protests, sporadic riots, appeals by particular urban groups to the President to overturn the City Council's decisions, and other informal but highly public and disruptive processes that characterise the city's political life. In some respects, these dynamics are characteristic of many African cities and emerge from the experience of recent moves towards democratisation combined with a highly informalised urban economy. This, however, does not explain why they persist in Kampala but not to anything like the same degree in, for example, Dar es Salaam or Lilongwe – or indeed Kigali. Moreover, even if historical factors help explain the origins of urban political culture in a given country, the *perpetuation* of certain forms of political interaction needs to be sought in more contemporary, and more local, dynamics. We turn now to empirical material that highlights some of the mechanisms through which Kampala's politics of disruptive informal participation has been institutionalised.

The urban informal economy and 'parallel participation'

Research conducted in urban marketplaces illustrates some of the ways in which Kampala's politics have become characterised by what can be termed 'noise'. Markets are among the city's most highly politicised spaces and have proved extremely difficult to manage.[4] Struggles over the city's largest marketplaces – including Owino market, which with over 7,000 vendors and an average daytime population of around 50,000 is East Africa's largest[5] – have been a particular feature of urban politics since 2006. Kampala's Mayor from 2006-11, Nasser Ntege Ssebaggala, built his popular appeal around being the son of market vendors with an agenda to empower them to take control of their own markets,[6] which were previously controlled by the city authorities. However, he soon dramatically reneged on this promises, negotiating the lease of some of the city's largest markets to private companies with close links to political elites for 'redevelopment'. Several were even leased to a company

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[4] Interviews with Raphael Magyezi, Uganda Local Government Association, 02.02.09, and Dr. Stephen Mukiibi, Makerere University, 10.02.09
[5] Interviews with Godfrey Kayongo, Chairman of Owino Market Vendors Association, 13.10.09
[6] Interview with Dr. Sabiti Makara, Makerere University, 23.09.09

owned by the chairperson of the NRM's own entrepreneur's league, and Mayor Ssebaggala was accused of taking large bribes from companies awarded market leases.[7]

The case of Kisekka market, another large marketplace of almost 6,000 registered members devoted to the sale of mechanical goods and spare vehicle parts, is particularly interesting in terms of how local political processes unfolded. The leader of a small marketplace association in Kisekka arranged, without consulting most vendors, to sell the lease to a retired army Colonel, John Mugyenyi.[8] Mugyenyi announced that he would take control of four acres of the market for redevelopment and leave 2.5 acres for the vendors to manage themselves, which turned out to be a 'trick', part of a deal struck between Mugyeni and the market association leader: it later transpired that the total area of the market was only 3.7 acres.[9] When the vendors discovered details of the 'fraudulent' sale of the market,[10] they arranged a meeting and decided that the small group of people involved in the sale should leave. They locked the latter's stalls, forced them out and took their complaint to the City Council, who ignored their pleas. Indeed the majority of market vendors suspect that Mugyenyi had already bribed City Council staff to ignore the matter.[11]

It was after the City Council persistently turned them away that vendors decided they 'had no voice' in relation to formal state structures and resorted to riots. The first of these was in July 2007, with vendors burning tyres along the roads around the market and causing major disruption. The police entered and violently quelled the riot, but vendors' calls for more control over the market were left unaddressed. Consequently, a second riot later in the year broke out that was so violent Uganda's Inspector General of Police came down personally, and after this the central government announced that it would follow up the vendors' complaint. This was a key point in a more general shift by the government to a discourse of 'vendor empowerment', another U-turn that saw President Museveni declaring his support for vendors developing markets themselves. However, Mugyenyi and the City Council managed to stall proceedings and three more days of riots followed in February 2008, after which there was a formal investigation that came out in the vendors' favour.[12] But then entrenched interests in the City Council found yet further ways to obstruct the handing of the lease back to the vendors, resulting in further riots in 2009. After pressure from the central government, Mugyenyi eventually renounced his lease.[13] At the time of research in January 2010, the vendors considered that things were 'finally going in the right direction', but also noted that 'things are moving very slowly! It's been three years already. People rarely give us time.'[14]

The interesting point about this sequence of events is not that there was corruption and elite collusion in the sale of the market lease, or that vendors were angry about it, neither of which is surprising. The point is the way in which rioting became almost the 'normal' mode of political interchange through which a large group of urban-dwellers participated in engagement with the state. As it became evident that rioting was more effective than complaining to the City Council, there were clear incentives to riot; yet at the same time, rioting was not effective *enough* to end the matter once and for all, causing incentives for

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[7] 'Ssebaggala, Lukwago clash over Nakasero Market', *The New Vision*, 03.04.07
[8] Interview with Kisekka Market Office Managers, 18.01.10.
[9] Interview with Kisekka Market Office Managers, 18.01.10.
[10] Kisekka Market 'Sold Fraudulently', *The New Vision* 22.08.08
[11] Interview with Kisekka Market Office Managers, 18.01.10.
[12] 'Kisekka Market Vendors Oppose Lifting of Caveat' *Daily Monitor* 25.03.08; Interview with Kisekka Market Office Managers, 18.01.10.
[13] 'UPDF officer gives up Kisekka market bid', *The Observer*, 17 June 2009
[14] Interview with Kisekka Market Defence Secretary, 18.01.10

more riots to win further attention and concessions. The government's decision to respond with both fire power and public rhetorical interventions in vendors' favour was a way of both subduing and conciliating them without actually giving too many concessions. Vendors' expectations that government would respond only to riots, and government expectations that a limited response would suffice to placate the vendors, have *both* perpetuated rioting as a form of political dialogue.

Limited rioting and limited response have thus been, in a sense, institutionalised; they form part of the 'rules of the game' of state-society interaction in the marketplace. The most important way in which this group of urban dwellers have participated in politics is arguably through this disruptive 'parallel participation', rather than through formally institutionalised democratic channels. Patterns of behaviour of this nature are by no means limited to Kisekka market. Riots and violence also characterised efforts to privatise various other markets, including Owino in 2009. In the same year the infamous 'Buganda riots' broke out across the city[15] for entirely different reasons but reflecting a similar frustration at the limits of non-violent 'voice' among city-dwellers and eliciting a similar carrot-and-stick response from the government.[16] Moreover, even when urban groups have not resorted to violence, the use of parallel channels of political engagement that bypass formal engagement with the City Council – often in the form of direct public appeals to the president with undertone of *potential* violent protest – are a recurrent feature of political 'participation' in Kampala. This has been particularly evident with respect to the engagement between the state and the city's 40,000 motorcycle taxi drivers (Goodfellow and Titeca 2011). 'Noise' has become a central component of the 'public transcript' in the city.

The storm after the calm: Uganda's 'walk to work' protests

Kampala is both the capital city and by far the largest urban area in Uganda, where national politics often plays out and can be difficult to separate from the specific dynamics of the urban setting. Indeed, institutionalised urban political dynamics often feed into events considered 'national' in significance. Consequently the analysis of events of national importance that play out in the city can be enhanced by considering them in relation to urban 'public transcripts' of the kind noted above. This section explores how urban dynamics not unrelated to the above events have been reflected in (and perpetuated by) the post-election events that shook Uganda in 2011.

Uganda's presidential election in February 2011 was, to the surprise of many observers, one of the most peaceful and smoothly executed in the country's history, without the widespread violence and intimidation deployed by government forces in 2001 and 2006 (Kobusingye 2010). However, the peaceful atmosphere surrounding the elections did not last long. In mid-April, amid dramatic rises in food and fuel costs arguably linked to President Museveni's lavish election campaign,[17] the opposition leader Kizza Besigye orchestrated a campaign to take to Kampala's streets. Angered about what he perceives a third 'stolen' election,[18] he announced a series of 'walk to work' protests, in which Ugandans were encouraged to travel to work on foot as a protest against the rising price of fuel. During one of the first protests, in

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[15] '500 Suspects Held, 14 Dead in City Riot', *The Monitor*, 13 September 2009.

[16] Tripp (2010) analyses Museveni's 'carrot-and-stick' approach to retaining power more generally.

[17] Opposition leaders claim that prices have literally trebled since the election (Olara Otunnu, interviewed for NTV Uganda, 20.04.11, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=33u_jawhlRk&feature=uploademail)

[18] Despite the lack of violence, accusations of vote-buying were rife in relation to the 2011 campaign ('Was the election rigged?', *The Observer (Uganda)* 27.02.11).

which Besigye walked peacefully to work in Kampala along with other opposition leaders and a small number of followers, attempts by the police to stop the demonstration resulted Besigye being shot and injured by a rubber bullet and briefly detained.[19]

On April 18 protests resumed, with the opposition vowing to continue the protests every Monday and Thursday. Besigye was arrested again, this time in an alarmingly violent fashion as he was bundled onto a van and forcibly restrained, all in front of the television cameras.[20] The police battled with protestors who were preventing vehicles from driving past, resulting in 98 arrests.[21] As a third round of protests loomed, again Museveni began to employ the carrot alongside the stick, making a public display of opening a savings and credit organisation for motorcycle taxi drivers in Kampala, who clearly numbered highly among the protesters.[22] In the weeks that followed Besigye was unrelenting and the protests continued, with the result that he and other opposition leaders were re-arrested every few days. Eight people had been killed amid escalating violence by May 1.[23] The biggest demonstration of all took place on May 12 when Besigye, who had been in Nairobi receiving medical treatment, deliberately planned his return to Kampala for the same day as Museveni's official inauguration. As jubilant crowds followed Besigye's car from Entebbe Airport to Kampala, the police unleashed tear gas, water cannons and live bullets, injuring scores of supporters and resulting in several further deaths.[24]

The events surrounding the 'walk to work' protests revealed interesting informal institutional dynamics. They may have marked a new low for Museveni's government; yet the comparisons made by many observers with Idi Amin do not bear much scrutiny. The government stopped short of arresting Besigye permanently on spurious charges, and even as the police unleashed brutality on inauguration day, Museveni was careful to use his swearing-in speech to promise to address food and fuel prices.[25] Moreover, as prominent political commentator Andrew Mwenda notes, 'Idi Amin's crimes were largely committed in the dark'. Amin's State Research Bureau would pick people up at night, out of sight, so even while there were disappearances, 'there was always that lingering suspicion that he may not have done it.' (Mwenda 2011). By contrast, the violence of the Museveni regime in 2011 was carried out in the most public manner imaginable, in front the press and television cameras.

This degree of repeated, public violence seems quite unnecessary; why did the government persist in allowing Besigye to begin protesting and then lash out with conspicuous violence, while at the same time making public concessions? As Mwenda (2011) asks, why not place him under house arrest or keep him in jail? There were arguably informal 'rules of the game' underlying these events. The government's violent and public reactions were entirely characteristic of the politics of 'noise' already discussed; unlike Amin, Museveni may well have *wanted* people to see the government crackdown just as he wanted people to hear the concessions he had to offer. Besigye and his followers anticipated violent crackdowns, and Besigye sought to utilise the 'rules' to his advantage, constructing himself as a Martyr. Protest and response was part of the 'public transcript'. It had become informally institutionalised to

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[19] 'Besigye, 48 others injured in demos' *The New Vision* 14.04.11
[20] NTV Uganda report: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e86cSOHGnfE&feature=uploademail
[21] NTV Uganda report: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLTU2iUkSR0&feature=uploademail
[22] NTV Uganda report: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-bcgnImfeo&feature=uploademail
[23] http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13255025
[24] 'Besigye warns govt over "vicious unprovoked" attacks on Ugandans', *The Independent (Uganda)* 13.05.11 (http://www.independent.co.ug/?p1781=&option=com_wordpress&Itemid=331)
[25] 'Museveni promises to address walk-to-work demands', *The Independent (Uganda)*, 12.05.11

the extent that playing by different rules might generate dramatic and unforeseen consequences. Thus, unlike in states where disappearances and assassinations are routine, the character of authoritarianism in Uganda involves political interventions that both perpetuate 'noise' and help to keep Museveni in power by striking a balance between repression and concession. In many respects this is a perverse form of 'statecraft' that has evolved under Museveni's regime.

It was therefore always doubtful that the ongoing protests would escalate into anything like an 'Arab Spring'. The government and protesters were speaking to each other in a very different language from the state and societal forces locked in conflict to the North of the Sahara around the same time. While the protests did grow substantially in size as the dialectic between the state's violent response and Besigye's defiant protests continued, they then began to subside, as was the case with previous more localised waves of riots in Kampala. Indeed while this was clearly an extreme case even by Uganda's standards, the events can be thought of as a caricature of 'normal' politics in Kampala rather than something fundamentally different as was the case in North Africa. Subsequent developments seemed to underscore this: once the 'walk to work' protests lost their momentum in mid-May, Besigye shifted strategy and began what he termed a 'ride-drive-and-hoot' campaign, whereby residents of Kampala were encouraged to honk their car horns and blow on vuvuzelas continuously for up to twenty minutes every day at 5pm.[26] A clearer representation – or parody, even – of Kampala's 'politics of noise' can hardly be imagined.

The protests of April and May 2011 were, without doubt, events of national significance; yet they were not unrelated to the urban context and the localised dynamics of popular politics already discussed. The fact that many battles between police and protesters during the riots took place in Kisekka market, where the army was also deployed on a large scale on some days, is telling. So too is the effort by Museveni to win over the motorcycle taxi drivers during the period of rioting. The institutionalised patterns of behaviour that these events reflect were not only about Museveni applying the carrot and the stick. They indicate a sort of call-and-response politics that was not just about the government calling and the public responding but also the converse, with government responding to the actions – or anticipated actions – of popular groups. In this way we see informal 'rules of the game', which are path dependent in that they have become self-reinforcing, structuring the behaviour of both government and popular actors and perpetuating the politics of 'noise'.

4. The popular politics of silence: Kigali

Rwanda's tragic post-colonial history, from the violent events of 1959-64 that caused several hundred thousand Tutsis to flee into exile, to the slaughter of over half a million (mostly Tutsi) Rwandans in the 1994 genocide, has been extensively documented (Prunier 1996; Uvin 1998; Des Forges 1999; Mamdani 2001; Straus 2006). In the wake of the genocide the victorious Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), a force composed predominantly of Tutsis who had grown up in exile in neighbouring Uganda (and therefore spoke English), consolidated control over the country with the support of donor allies including the US and UK. As in Uganda, economic growth soon recovered and remained robust. Despite widely acknowledge development successes and some generally positive assessments of the RPF's record (Kinzer 2008; Clark and Kaufman 2009; Ensign and Bertrand 2009) the regime has been subject to

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[26] 'Noisy city as hoot campaign begins', *Daily Monitor,* 24.05.11. http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/-/688334/1168330/-/c1fc02z/-/index.html

fierce criticism since its inception. Long-term observers of the region such as Mamdani (2001), Pottier (2002), Reyntjens (2004; 2010) and Lemarchand (2006) have lamented the government's dictatorial tendencies, miscarriages of justice and what they perceive as veiled ethnic exclusion.

Amidst the highly polarised debate on Rwanda, normative assessments of the government's response to the post-genocide context have prevailed over detailed political analysis exploring *why* and *how* Rwanda has evolved in the way it has. This has been addressed to a limited extent by the recent edited collection *Remaking Rwanda* (Straus and Waldorf 2011). There remains a need, however, to understand further how Rwanda's past informs its present and how patterns of behaviour are perpetuated. Rwanda, which for centuries before colonialism was among the most powerful Kingdoms in the Great Lakes region of Africa, so impressed its colonisers that they strengthened the Tutsi monarchy's indigenous institutions them through indirect rule (Chrétien 2003). Through colonialism Rwanda was thoroughly 'feudalised', with forms of forced labour becoming entrenched and the Hutu-Tutsi distinction coming to correspond to an increasingly rigid class divide (Newbury and Newbury 2000; Pottier 2002; Vansina 2004). Not only must the violent reprisals by the Hutu majority in the second half of the twentieth century be understood in this light; so too must contemporary Rwanda.

The way these historical legacies play out in Rwandan politics today is starting to be explored (Straus and Waldorf 2011). However, to the extent that there are examinations of the 'constant causes' of Rwanda's highly constrained political environment, they tend to be focused on limitations *directly* imposed by the state on NGOs and public discourse (e.g. Gready 2011; Waldorf 2011). The focus is generally on how the government 'prevents the public from expressing its interests' (Longman 2011: 27), instrumentalising both a history of hierarchical top-down government and the experience of the genocide to do this. Critically important though these top-down dynamics are, in Kigali a 'politics of silence' is arguably also perpetuated in ways other than direct and constant intervention by the state. A more systemic approach, which explores informal institutions and the way groups in urban society monitor and control the actions of themselves and others, indicates path dependent patterns of behaviour that should not only be analysed in terms of what the state is doing. As will be shown below, compliance in Rwanda is often secured without overt coercion; but simply to ascribe this (as many do) to a 'culture of obedience' in the country[27] is to fall prey to the fallacy that 'social continuity requires no explanation' (Moore 1966: 485-6). Most people in contemporary Kigali do 'participate' in the institutionalisation of 'silence', but how and why this happens needs to be interrogated, not assumed.

'Sensitisation' and the absence of 'noise' in Kigali's informal economy

An under-researched aspect of Rwanda's transformation has been the government's effort to re-engineer the urban realm both physically and socially, shaping the country's rapid urbanisation trajectory. Indeed, Kigali usually factors into analyses of Rwanda simply as an elite space from which government projects its power (Straus and Waldorf 2011: 7). Yet Kigali is not only home to elites, and consequently the question of why there is so little observable political conflict and expression of grievances against the state – usually rather common features of politics in large cities – merits consideration. While it is indeed the case that there are not many formal channels through which ordinary urban-dwellers can express their grievances (Longman 2011), why has a lack of voice not resulted in 'noise', as in

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[27] Such a 'culture' is suggested in some of the literature including Prunier (1996) and Straus (2006). It was also noted by various interviewees.

Kampala? The idea that this can fully be explained on the grounds that the state in Rwanda is more repressive is questionable, especially since riots and protests in Kampala have all been met with very violent state repression and this has not acted as a deterrent there.

In Kigali an aversion to protest and 'noise' has arguably become a social norm. The question is how this came about and is perpetuated. The sheer scale and intensity of the genocide presumably plays a role in its emergence (Waldorf 2011); but given the injustices that many authors claim are regularly perpetrated by the post-genocide government, and growing inequality,[28] there is need to account better for the continuing absence of protest over time. As Andrew Mwenda points out, many people state that 'the air in Rwanda is suffocating'; but if so it is not due to frequent displays of overt force and the kind of infrastructure associated with a 'police state'.[29] In fact, as of 2006 there was a force of only 800 police for all of Kigali (Baker 2007) – a remarkably small number for a city of over a million inhabitants – and their presence on the streets is notably lower than in surrounding capitals, including Kampala.

If not an omnipresent security and surveillance machinery, what does account for the continuing absence of 'noise' in Kigali? A number of social norms and practices are relevant. For example, the institutionalisation of certain community-based activities such as *umuganda*, the monthly community works day on the last Saturday of every month between 8am and 12pm, plays an important role. Nominally 'voluntary' but very strongly encouraged, this consists of activities such as building houses for genocide survivors and cleaning public spaces. Following this, all residents of the local community participate in a meeting. While this is in theory a time for people to raise issues of concern with local authorities, the fact that these meetings are relatively brief, have a largely predetermined agenda and involve hundreds of attendees means that more often they serve as occasions for local government to 'sensitise' local communities about development plans (Ingelaere 2011).[30]

The word 'sensitisation' to refer to the practice of educating the public about the government's vision crops up constantly in government discourses, but also those of civil society actors. Indeed, despite strong top-down overtones, 'sensitisation' and the heightened awareness of community that activities such as *umuganda* promote has 'horizontal' as well as 'vertical' effects. As a Rwandan researcher points out, 'people talk about all sorts of things on this day' and non-attendance means that 'you miss out on all the gossip and news'.[31] People in Rwandan communities depend on peer-to-peer exchange as well as the state for their understanding of the social and political changes the country is undergoing; they know each other's activities very well and *umuganda* has helped inculcate a culture of 'checking on your neighbour.'[32] In a sense these are processes of 'mutual sensitisation', reflecting a broader focus on having 'mindsets' appropriate for the 'New Rwanda'. For example the emphasis by the government on cleanliness and order in Kigali is, one local government official notes, about 'a mindset…It is a new idea, a new identity',[33] and one that to a certain extent 'society is beginning to internalise.'[34]

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[28] Rwanda's Gini coefficient increased from 0.47 around the turn of the millennium to 0.51 in 2006 (RoR 2007).
[29] Interview with Andrew Mwenda, political commentator, Kampala, 20.01.10
[30] These characteristics of *umuganda* were confirmed in various interviews with government and non-government sources in Kigali, November-December 2009.
[31] Interview with Rwandan researcher, Kigali, 18.11.09
[32] Interview with Rwandan researcher, Kigali, 18.11.09
[33] Interview with Bruno Rangira, Public Relations and Media Officer, Kigali City Council, 26.11.09
[34] Interview with official at the Rwanda Environmental Management Authority, 10.02.10. President Kagame in particular is said to have a particular concern with 'transforming mindsets' (Informal conversation with a

Even when the issue about which 'sensitisation' is taking place may be detrimental to the people involved, it is not immediately obvious whether this 'internalisation' involves actual changes to perception and preference as posited by Lukes or is underwritten by the covert rebellion of Scott's internal resistance. Changing 'mindsets' could either mean that genuine faith in the government's agenda is being instilled, or could indicate a numb resignation to the realities of power in Rwanda. When asked if urban-dwellers complained about a potentially disruptive government urban development programme, one interviewee simply responded with 'that isn't our practice'.[35] People accept this kind of programme and there is no overt tension, even though 'socially they cannot be happy', another suggested.[36] In these cases is therefore not inaccurate to state that the 'public transcript' is one of quiescence and when there are grievances they appear largely in 'hidden transcripts'. Most analyses only go so far – and indeed the relevance of Scott's theory to Rwanda has already been noted (Straus and Waldorf 2011). However, the focus on direct state actions to control public discourse has meant a neglect of the role of *self-reinforcing mechanisms* in perpetuating the 'politics of silence'. Such mechanisms may come into play either because resistance is internalised or because perceptions are actually changed. A brief examination of the market trading and informal transport sectors is illuminating in this regard.

While Kampala sometimes resembles an enormous marketplace, Kigali's markets are relatively few, small, and self-contained, having been reorganised in 2007. The issue of trade order is talked about not only in terms of safety and security but again 'as a mindset, an issue of perception.'[37] When asked if there were a sufficient number of markets in the city for traders to make a living and residents to purchase their needs conveniently, one non-government respondent nervously replied that it was 'a big big problem'. Only one market is now allowed per 'sector' of the city (with each sector containing approximately 30-40,000 residents), which means some urban residents had to travel up to four kilometres to purchase basics; moreover, the number of vendors allowed in each market is strictly limited, so many vendors lost their livelihood.[38] Despite this, it was said that 'no-one complained' when street trading was banned in the city.[39]

The fact that despite this 'big problem' there was relatively little by way of efforts to complain (rather than protests being vocalised and then suppressed) suggest vendors themselves understand the implications of making too much noise and play their part in minimising it. In contrast with Kampala, 'It's counter-productive if you try to confront the government directly', noted one NGO representative.[40] Another stated that 'the only way to survive is to be on the side of government'.[41] This is not to say that civil disobedience does not exist; it is rather that where there is disobedience it is 'silent' and this is, to a certain degree, strategic. For example when certain urban markets were closed and traders were moved to much less favourable locations, rather than protesting they simply took to the streets at night. Hundreds of 'night hawkers' gather at certain parts of the city around transportation

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government adviser, Kigali, February 2010), something evident in its most extreme form in the governments *Ingando* citizenship re-education camps for genocide perpetrators (Thomson 2011).
[35] Interview with statistician, Kigali, 16.02.09
[36] Interview with civil society source, Kigali, 17.02.09
[37] Interview with local government source, Kigali, 03.12.09
[38] Interview, independent development consultant, Kigali, 19.11.09
[39] Interview with civil society source, Kigali, 17.02.09
[40] Interview with international NGO representative, Kigali, 25.02.09
[41] Interview with local NGO representative, Kigali, 13.12.09

hubs at nightfall, though they frequently disperse as the police are constantly on their heels.[42] This, of course, suggests covert resistance of the kind discussed by Scott.

However, to an extent some people have also come to reject 'noise' on a deeper level. As one urban informal worker pointed out, the mobilisation of the urban informal economy into tightly-supervised associations is important to 'fight the thought' of conflict hanging over the city.[43] The government's attitude that 'If you understand something then you will do it better than if someone was to police you'[44] and its drive to sensitise the population on its development and national unity agendas may, in some cases, have changed 'mindsets' such that people are willing to make short-term sacrifices for the long-term vision. Interviews with people evicted from the city centre as part of the implementation of the city master plan indicate that *sometimes* this is the case.[45] As such, Scott's conception of the third dimension of power may have some force in Rwanda, even if there are clearly cases of covert resistance in other cases. A first concluding point to make about Kigali's institutionalised 'politics of silence' is therefore that even in the absence of 'noise' some people may resist internally to prevailing norms and others not. This is an obvious point that is entirely compatible with diversity in human character and motivation, but one that is missed in analyses that focus solely state power and see ordinary people as necessarily rebelling on some level against the institutions projected by it.

The more relevant point here, however, is that either way, ordinary people are involved in processes of institutional continuity. Rwandan politics is not 'silent' because it is constantly and flawlessly policed, which would be beyond even the capacities of the powerful, highly organised RPF; but because (whether internally rebelling or not) people understand the *value* of silence. There are arguably cyclical call-and-response mechanisms at play here, as in Kampala. Societal actors respond to the government's constraints on political space by remaining outwardly obedient, channelling any subversive behaviour or rebellious thoughts secretively. Government, for its part, responds to the very silence and secrecy of actual or perceived underground political activity with paranoia, reasserting its grip on civil society and reminding people of the importance of deference to its political and developmental vision. These are *institutionalised patterns of behaviour involving multiple societal agents* rather than simply reflective of RPF omnipotence.

5. Conclusions

In both cities discussed here, mechanisms through which informal political institutions have become self-reinforcing show that the agency of societal actors, and not just that of the state, matter. What happens in Kampala is not only the 'instrumentalisation of disorder' (Chabal and Daloz 1999) by elites but also its instrumentalisation by non-elites, who have come to believe that maximising 'noise' and taking an issue 'to the street' are relatively easy ways to elicit some kind of government response in their interests. Meanwhile, in Kigali we see not only an instrumentalisation of deep structures of social control by elites but the perpetuation of these structures through popular practices by non-elites. Most urban social actors may be relatively powerless in both cities, but they are by no means entirely passive in relation to the ongoing institutionalisation of certain patterns of behaviour.

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[42] 'Kigali's Night Market And Its Evasive Hawkers', *The New Times* 24.06.09
[43] Conversation with motorcycle taxi driver, Kigali, December 2009.
[44] Interview with local government source, Kigali, 03.12.09
[45] Interviews with residents of the Batsinda housing project, Kigali, December 2009

Thinking about the interplay of structure and agency does not, therefore, just mean structures inherited form history and the agency of elites, but also the constant *remaking* of structures through the agency of both elites and non-elites. Understanding social and political behaviour requires attention to the continuous nature of institutionalisation and the role of multiple agents within this process. Relatedly, to reduce the difference between the two cities to the 'level' of authoritarianism neglects the importance of difference *forms* of authoritarian behaviour and how they are institutionalised. Besides, while there are grounds for arguing Rwandan regime is more autocratic, the difference is not of a sufficient order to explain these widely diverging outcomes: both regimes were classified as 'closed anocracies' by Polity IV (2009), and 'semiauthoritarian' by Freedom House (Tripp 2010: 20) at the time much of this research was undertaken.

An appreciation of 'constant causes' of institutionalised behaviour, and the degree to which it is path dependent and resistant to change, has important implications for development policy. Due to a range of socio-economic similarities between the two states, people sometimes see Kigali as a sort of 'proto'-Kampala that will surely be as disorderly as the latter ten years down the line.[46] This reflects a more general assumption that institutions in developing countries – and especially African ones – tend to converge; hence the tendency to pathologise 'African politics' and 'continentalise' problems faced by African states (Bayart 1993; Bates 2008). The policy implication would therefore be that the same set of policies is suitable for all poor, developing African states. However, as this exploration of informal institutionalisation at the urban level has shown, norms and patterns of behaviour tend to be extremely persistent; where they differ substantially between two cases, they are likely to continue to do so. Having different informal institutions 'locked in' means that incentive structures are different, and the idea that standardised governance or development programmes will apply similarly regardless of these differences is deeply misguided.

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[46] Interview with Rwandan government official, Kigali, 18.09.09

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