

Sevgi Günay, MSc.
Universiteit Leiden
Departement Bestuurskunde
Pieter de la Court Gebouw
Wassenaarseweg 52
2333 AK LEIDEN
Tel: 071 527 5694
sgunay@fsw.leidenuniv.nl

NIG Annual Work Conference 2008
Panel 1: Public Values, the Next Step

Paper Title:

**When “Ideal” Meets Reality: Clientelism and Weberian Values –
Understanding the Conceptual Misfit**

Paper Abstract: (718 words)

This paper will aim to carry the general inquiry on the study and the implementation of public values to a new frontier by bringing back the concept of clientelism into the discipline.

Clientelism is the general name given to personal (yet sometimes anonymous) and informal networks of exchange whose sole function is to (re)produce effective ways of promoting the interests of patrons and clients. Clientelism, in its most basic form, resembles a transaction (Zwart, 1994). The exchange involves reciprocity and voluntary participation, but also a degree of exploitation (Kaufman 1974). The logic of exchange between patron and client(s) dictates asymmetric but mutually beneficial and open-ended transactions (Roniger 1994: 3-5; Kitschelt 2000: 849).

In the context of public administration, clientelism translates into the practice whereby politicians and/or bureaucrats, instead of serving the wider collective interest, give in to particularistic demands and distribute divisible benefits (namely public resources, i.e. public contracts, administrative jobs, state aids, local infrastructure investments, etc.) to individuals or groups of individuals in exchange for political support or power (Roniger 1994; Kitschelt 2000; Piattoni 2001, Günay 2007).

Normatively speaking, clientelism falls beyond the graces of ideal public order because its practice is assumed to be “at best para-legal and probably always somewhat immoral” (Blondel 2002: 241). More specifically, the study of clientelism is important for the study of public values because the nature of patron-client relationship challenges the norms of Weberian ideal-type bureaucracy.

Following Weber (1964), the nature of relationships in modern administrative systems can be identified as “legal-rational.” An administrative system which is permeated by patron-client networks may physically resemble a Weberian type by the way its body is organized along the lines of vertical hierarchy, division of labor, and specialization. However, as we learn from Weber, an “ideal-type” would be an empty shell without the legal-rational authority in which it is embedded.

In contrast with the ideal-type of bureaucratic conduct, clientelism is highly personalistic and exists without a formal contract. In bureaucratic clientelism, the rules of the “rational” game are bended towards achievement of the clientelistic deal between the patron and the client(s). According to Weber’s model, in recruitment and promotion of public administrators merit and expertise (should) triumph over political alignment, personal connections, kinship networks, or ethnic background. However, the logic of clientelism dictates that the patron (e.g. a high ranking bureaucrat looking for employment for his client) should do whatever in his power to keep his promise to the client regardless of what merit or expertise the client has to offer to the public agency. From Weber’s point of view, the bureaucrat (the patron) defies the rational authority not only by basing his selection of personnel on the wrong criteria. The clientelist bureaucrat also challenges the separation of the ownership of the means of production or administration from the officials holding office (Weber 1964: 331) and the manner by which all administrative decisions and rules are produced (that is to be documented in writing, even in cases of “oral discussion” (Weber 1964: 332). By ignoring legal-rational public values and abiding by the rules of clientelist exchange, he treats the “office” as his own personal property by giving it to whomever he wants, and he ignores to document an administrative decision by sealing off an informal, personal (off-the-record) deal with the client.

As vividly put by Robert Merton, “[clientelism] violates the code of selecting personnel on the basis of impersonal qualifications rather than on grounds of party loyalty or contributions to the party war-chest; bossism violates the code that votes should be based on individual appraisal of the qualifications of candidates and of political issues, and not on abiding loyalty to a feudal leader” (Merton, 1976: 23). In a nutshell, “the norms of rationality, anonymity, and universalism are largely absent from the patron-client nexus” (Lemarchand and Legg 1972: 151).

Accordingly, this paper will present a conceptual (comparative) inquiry into the values or rules of the game that govern public life in two cases of administration: a Weberian ideal-type and a clientelistic one. In doing so, it will ask the following questions: How different is a clientelistic bureaucracy than an ideal-type Weberian bureaucracy? What are the differences between the values and principles governing the two types of administration? What do clientelistic practices stand in terms of public values like functionality, efficiency, equality, accountability and democracy?

Works Cited:

- BLONDEL, Jean (2002). “Party Government, Patronage, and Party Decline in Western Europe,” in Richard Gunther et.al. (eds.) *Political Parties: Old Concepts and New Challenges*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 233-256.
- GÜNAY, Sevgi (2007). “Clientelism in Modern Bureaucracies,” unpublished M.Sc. Thesis, Leiden University, Department of Public Administration, Leiden, the Netherlands.
- KAUFMAN, Robert R. (1974). “The Patron-Client Concept and Macro-Politics: Prospects and Problems,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 284-308.
- KITSCHOLT, Herbert (2000). “Linkages Between Citizens and Politicians in Democratic Polities,” *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 33 No. 6/7, pp. 845-879.

- KITSCHOLT, Herbert, and WILKINSON, Steven (2007). "Citizen-Politician Linkages: An Introduction," in Kitschelt and Wilkinson (eds.) *Patrons, Clients, and Policies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-49.
- LEMARCHAND, Rene, and LEGG, Keith (1972). "Political Clientelism and Development: A Preliminary Analysis," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp.149-178.
- MERTON, Robert K. (1976). "The Latent Functions of the Machine," in Alexander B. Callow Jr. (ed.) *The City Boss In America: An Interpretive Reader*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 23-33.
- PIATTONI, Simona (2001). "Clientelism in Historical and Comparative Perspective", in Simona Piattoni (ed.), *Clientelism, Interests, and Democratic Representation*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-30.
- RONIGER, Luis (1994). "The Comparative Study of Clientelism and the Changing Nature of Civil Society in the Contemporary World," in Luis Roniger and Ayşe Güneş-Ayata (eds.), *Democracy, Clientelism, and Civil Society*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, pp. 1-18.
- WEBER, Max (1964). *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. (Translated by A.M. Henderson and T. Parsons). New York: The Free Press.
- ZWART, Frank de (1994). "Early Transactionalism: Comparing Robert K. Merton and Fredrik Barth on Politics," in Jojada Verrips (ed.) *Transactions: Essays in Honor of Jeremy F. Boissevain*. Het Spinhuis, pp. 177-187.