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Religious Clientelism

A theory

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Abstract

In today's political science scholarship, the concept of clientelism often evokes an image of voters selling their votes to the highest bidder, where a substantial focus lies on the material nature of the exchange between patron and client. What remains scant is a theory of clientelism where non-material incentives are included as part and parcel of the client's calculus in the exchange relationship between patron and client. In this paper, I present a theory of clientelism where non-material incentives, such as religious goods of salvation, form the larger part of the vote choice of the client-voter. I build this theory on empirical evidence collected through extensive fieldwork, from the perspective of the client. The inclusion of non-material incentives is activated through the inclusion of social identity of the actors (religion). I argue that religion, as a social identity, operates at two separate levels simultaneously – i.e., both at the collective and the individual level. At the collective level, religion provides a social identity to clients through which they relate to others in their spiritual community as well as the overall social life in a village. As such the individual belongs to a community of like-minded people bound by the spiritual connection to a common leader and congregation – where the connection to the individual leader remains centre stage. At the individual level, religion serves as an individual belief system. By this, I mean a private sphere through which individuals situate themselves in relation to the collective and make sense of the world. It also relates to the supernatural, addressing questions pertaining to life after death, the meanings associated with different aspects of life and the like. It is this function of religion, as both social identity and belief system in one that enables non-material goods to be part of the reciprocal exchange relationship between individuals and their patron, including, but not limited to, the exchange of their vote. At the collective level, it delivers the vote, at the individual level, it allows for the personal, private goods of salvation, spiritual guidance, and blessings.

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Introduction

In an attempt to refine the concept of clientelism and to better understand clients in developing democracies, in this chapter I present a sub-type of clientelism that takes into account non-material exchanges between patrons and client, activated through the inclusion of social identity of the actors (religion), in relation to clients' voting behaviour. I argue that religion, as a social identity, operates at two separate levels simultaneously – i.e., both at the collective and the individual level. At the collective level, religion provides a social identity to clients through which they relate to others in their spiritual community as well as the overall social life in a village. As such the individual belongs to a community of like-minded people bound by the spiritual connection to a common leader and congregation – where the connection to the individual leader remains centre stage. At the individual level, religion serves as an individual belief system. By this, I mean a private sphere through which individuals situate themselves in relation to the collective and make sense of the world. It also relates to the supernatural, addressing questions pertaining to life after death, the meanings associated with different aspects of life and the like. It is this function of religion, as both social identity and belief system in one that enables non-material goods to be part of the reciprocal exchange relationship between individuals and their patron, including, but not limited to, the exchange of their vote. At the collective level, it delivers the vote, at the individual level, it allows for the personal, private goods of salvation, spiritual guidance, and blessings.

The chapter is set up as follows. I first present a brief overview of the clientelism literature, showing the differences between the classic and modern schools. This is followed by an explication and elaboration of the sub-type religious clientelism, detailing the actors involved and the social identity of religion. This is followed by a differentiation of two points of the existing theory – the exchange itself and the presence of trust.

The Study of Clientelism

Political clientelism is founded on the reciprocal relations between patrons and clients. It refers to a form of *personal, dyadic* exchange relationship often rooted in obligation between two parties (patron and client) of *unequal power* (whether this power be social, political, economic, or religious). Research on clientelism has swung from one extreme to the other: from explaining the complex intricacies of personal relationships to generating parsimonious models of citizens' voting behaviour. At the outset, clientelism was developed as a conceptual tool for understanding traditional societies (as is evidenced by the initial anthropological and sociological case studies) in which patron-client relationships were observed as social structures and as a tool for investigating interpersonal relationships, "*how persons of unequal authority linked through the ties of interest and friendship, manipulate the relationship to attain various ends*" (Weingrod 1968). Overall, the scholarship examined the clientelistic alliance from an understanding of the actors involved, considering the complexities of reality within which actors operate, what Mayer terms "multiplexity" (1966). This concept included paying attention to various strands of an individual's life, for example, their social networks as well as their political networks and the interplay between the two (Sprinborg 1979). This scholarship is rich with case studies offering thick descriptions of the social relationship in various contexts.¹ The focus largely remains on the social function of the relationship and power relations, wherein much of this work delves into finer details of the basic tenets of clientelism, explicating various aspects of the *relationship* itself. On the one hand, there

¹ For detailed case studies spanning various continents, see Landé et al. 1977 and Eisendtedt and Roniger 1983.

is Alvin Gouldner's work on reciprocity, concluding that reciprocity functions as the foundation for the stability of systems – in this case as the building block of human relationships (1960). On the other hand, there is the work by George Foster, who, through his ethnography of a Mexican village, proposes dyadic contracts between patron and client to be the basic building block of social structure, explaining human interaction (1961). This school of thought is known as the "classic school of clientelism."

Parallel to these developments, political science adopted the concept as a means of explaining how politicians and political parties garner votes from their constituents, i.e., the linkages between politicians and citizens in which the political exchange is centre stage and tested every four to five years during elections (see Kitschelt and Wilkson 2009, Piattoni 2001, Stokes et al 2013). This analysis of clientelism in the context of voting shifted the unit of analysis from individual actors (the patron and the client) to political parties and states (where these act as new patrons in relation to citizens), and generally the field as a whole adopted a political economy/rational choice interpretation of clientelism (Piliavsky 2014; 7). Clients are viewed through an economic lens, where clients "sell" their votes in exchange for a material benefit, and where clientelism is "best thought of as an incentive system – political currency with which to *purchase* political activity and political responses [votes] (emphasis mine)..." (Souraf in Weingrod 1968). Over the past two decades, there has been a renewed resurgence in scholarship on clientelism, broadening the methodological base to include studies based on large-scale quantitative data, surveys, and experiments (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007, Brusco et al 2004, Stokes et al 2013, Wantchekon 2003). In spite of this empirical advancement, theoretically, the economic understanding of the actors remains dominant; the individual actors are seen to operate through the cost-benefit analysis of material gains. This economic understanding of the client is illustrated both by the language used to describe actions, where voters are said to "sell" and politicians to "buy" votes, as well as by the definitions of clientelism offered in the literature. While Stokes defines it as "the proffering of material goods in return for electoral support" (Stokes 2007:605), Kitschelt and Wilkinson offer the following definition "the direct exchange of a citizen's vote in return for direct payments or continuing access to employment, goods, and services (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007:2). Another indication of this strong marketized understanding of clientelism is the language itself, where clientelism is synonymous with vote buying, turnout buying and abstention buying (Schaffer 2007, Nitcher 2008, Gans-Morse et al 2014, Weghorst and Lindberg 2013). This strand of research is known as the modern school of clientelism. This economic understanding of the citizen, as incentivised through material goods, can be explained by two potential reasons. The first reason is the general desire for parsimony found across political science. The second explanation for the economic understanding of clients is the field's implicit neoliberal assumptions, that are closely tied to modernisation theory, where the focus has largely remained on the material progress of nation states (REF from rel and pol articles). Seen through the lens of modernisation theory, clientelism is a phenomenon that would eventually dissipate once a society began to modernise (Hilgers 2011, 570, Kaufman 1972). This expectation, however, has not been met. Instead, as research on the subject has increased, it has become apparent that clientelism is not confined to a certain evolutionary continuum of states' development but is a phenomenon found in both developing and developed countries and at different levels within societies and in various forms (Piattoni 2006, Landé 1977, Kaufman 1974, Johnston 1979, Stokes 2005, Nitcher 2005). The forms of clientelism vary from the basic understanding of how political systems work to secondary concepts such as pork-barrelling and special interest politics in a Western country such as the United States (Hopkin 2006:3). As van de Walle aptly summarises "clientelism exists in all polities. The form it takes, its extent and its political functions vary enormously, however, across time and place" (2000:50).

The table below gives an overview of the shifts in understanding between the two schools – classic and modern -- in relation to the basic tenets of clientelism and also highlights the lack of conceptual congruity. The concept, and the implications it has for the actors within the relationship, changes meaning dependent on who uses the term – i.e., anthropology versus political science usage. For example, when political scientists first applied the concept wholesale from anthropology to analyse politics, they shed the importance of social relations, thereby robbing the concept of the thick description and complexity that was previously inherent in the concept. Therefore, it is imperative to define clearly what one means by clientelism before its application as a framework of analysis. ²

TABLE 1. CORE ATTRIBUTES OF CLIENTELISM

Quality	Classic	Modern
Affective/instrumental balance of relationship	Higher ratio of affective to instrumental ties	Lower ratio of affective to instrumental ties
Type of exchange	Diffuse/non-material	Tangible, material
Resource base	Local, personal	External links, office-based
Duration of bond	More persistent	Less persistent
Presence of trust/loyalty*	Very likely	Less likely
Quid pro quo	Not likely	Very likely

Both classic and modern schools of clientelism focus on different aspects of the patron and client. The classic school hones in on the social aspects of the relationship whereas the modern exclusively focuses on the electoral side, where economic aspects are the overarching understandings of the client, what Nichter (2011) refers to as relational clientelism or electoral clientelism. The modern school does not consider the long-term social bonds explored by the classic school, which limits us from achieving a full picture of the reality within which actors exist. That is, too little attention is paid to the interplay of how long-term social identities, combined with actors' short-term strategies in lieu of material incentives, play out in the electoral arena. This leaves out deeper social structures such as context, traditions, and the actors' expectations from their decision-making – limiting our analyses to a rational actor/cost-benefit framework (Köbis, N.C. et al. 2016) ³. This chasm has drawbacks – because it views the patron and client as operating in hypothetical surroundings, where social relationships are separate from their electoral decision making, hence not reflective of how politics works in day-to-day-life.

Recognising the inherent nature of the patron-client bond as instrumental (as the relationship ultimately is centred on an exchange), James Scott proposed a model of clientelism that would also account for the inclusion of non-economic ties outside the political arena what he terms "affective" ties (1972). These can vary from landlord-peasant relationships to social bonds shared between schoolmates. He proposes a spectrum model in which both economic and non-economic considerations of the client are part of the analysis. Depending on where the relationship measures on this scale, the core elements of the relationship will alter.

² This observation is well explicated by Weingrod (1968) who points out the importance of defining what is meant by the term, highlighting disparities between the two disciplines of political science and anthropology. Both disciplines use the term for different means and by doing so their assumptions may also be misinterpreted if a clear definition of terms remains absent. Scholars such as Nichter (2012) try heeding this advice by separating relational clientelism from electoral clientelism, however, the treatment is limited to the division itself instead of any elaboration of the overlaps that exist between the two.

³ Köbis, N.C., van Prooijen, J.W., Righetti, F. and Van Lange, P.A., 2016. Prospection in individual and interpersonal corruption dilemmas. *Review of General Psychology*, 20(1), pp.71-85.

At one end of this continuum one might place patron-client bonds, which, in addition to their instrumental [economic] character, are reinforced by affective [non-economic] links growing, say from the patron and client having been schoolmates, coming from the same village, being distant relatives or simply mutual love (1972:99).

To illustrate this; in the above example, the patron and client are connected via three separate points on the non-economic side of the continuum – schoolmates, village membership, distant relatives – i.e., various social bonds – friendship, village belonging or blood ties, whereas on the economic part of the continuum there is only one point of contact– i.e., as politician and citizen. The "affective" ties weigh heavier than the instrumental in this case, which directly impacts the *type* of exchanged goods. The duration of the bond can also determine the presence of loyalty between the parties. This affective part not only affects the *type of good* exchanged, but also affects the presence of trust.

Although Scott offers a model that considers factors that are more representative of the complexity of human decision-making, he does not offer any form of typology. Instead, he provides us with a sliding spectrum scale on which different levels of the affective and instrumental would produce different results. Explaining the variety of patron-client ties with such a model is useful for generalisations but does not allow an analysis of the same type of clientelism across contexts, i.e., one in which the core elements of clientelism remain constant, therefore enabling comparisons across contexts. The typologies that offered remain limited to geographical contexts (Lemerchand 1972)⁴.

The latest call for a more inclusive model of clientelism comes in the form of an edited volume from the social anthropologist Anastasia Piliavsky (2014). Not only does it highlight the discrepancy between theory and empirics that results from analysing citizens through an economic lens, but it also highlights clientelism as "a political form in its own right", specifically in the region of South Asia (2014:4). The presence of this volume in itself emphasises the need to reframe and re-gear our questions from "why doesn't clientelism disappear" to trying to understand how clientelism works on the ground and to tease out the mechanisms through which clientelism operates and survives.

Adding to this call of regearing questions from "why" to "how" the focus of this dissertation is on understanding how one form of clientelism, religious clientelism, functions on the ground. To my knowledge this form of clientelism, and how clients within it think about it and experience democracy, has thus far remained unexplored. Thus, the theory presented in this chapter is the product of an inductive process through which empirics from fieldwork are drawn upon to help refine existing theory – resulting in the presentation of a sub-type of clientelism. Typologies are a form of classification, but they are generally conceptual and multi-dimensional (Bailey 1994). Although the term "conceptual" emphasizes the non-empirical nature of typologies, this one rests on empirical evidence. On the ground, religion was part and parcel of the clientelistic relationship observed between patron and client and presented a type of clientelism centered on the exchange of *non-material* goods, including supernatural goods, such as salvation and prayers. As such, the theory presented below is an attempt at a more inclusive model of clientelism that highlights aspects of client

⁴ Lemerchand offers a chart of typologies of clientelism limited to the context of Africa in which each type is differentiated on the following basis; the occupancy of role sets between patron and client; the underlying motivation driving the relationship; currency of exchange (i.e., the *type* of exchange) and finally, the base values of differential control over resources (1972:73).

identity (both in the social realm and at the individual level) in concert with their economic outlook in relation to these identities.

Religious clientelism

Building on the classic school of clientelism, I present a new type of clientelism rooted in religion and politics – religious clientelism. In it, patron and client are connected through both a social and political bond where the former precedes the latter. On the social plane they share the identity of religion – both as a collective social identity and as an individual, private identity for clients, who also act on religion as a personal belief system. Through the religious tie, individual *non-material* goods become available (including but not limited to supernatural goods such as salvation), simultaneous to a political relationship. To illustrate this, if a local priest runs for local office, how would this affect the voting decisions of the members of his congregation, and in fact, others within their vicinity?⁵ Despite the predictions of secularisation theory, that religion would fizzle out as nation states modernise, religion still plays a major role in the lives of individual citizens, where it evokes a strong brand loyalty among believers, especially in the context of developing countries (Wald and Wilcox 2006, Grzymala-Busse 2012, Esmer and Pettersson, 2007; Bartels, 2010). In such contexts, where religious leaders run for office and are active politicians, and their followers are potential client-voters, the concept of religious clientelism can help tease out the underlying mechanisms that drive the political behaviour of individual citizens. Furthermore, it can help us understand under what conditions citizens in a clientelistic relationship would prioritise *non-material* goods over material goods, especially in the case of clients casting their votes for their patron. This sub-type can further our understanding of the multitude of linkages between citizens and politicians and help grapple with clients' complex behaviors, from the bottom up – i.e. through the clients' perspective. Specifically, it can shed light on why voters accept an exchange in which tangible material incentives do not dominate the exchange between patron and client. Instead, non-material, diffuse incentives are preferred and prioritised by the clients. In short, religious clientelism can help tease out "the mechanisms by which symbols, traditions, rituals, and myths influence social and political interactions" especially regarding non-fungible identities such as religion. As Johnson points out, "this specification of mechanisms is critical for cultural accounts, which have tended to under-specify mechanisms" (cited in Grzymala-Busse 2012:426).

As George and Bennet tell us, in order for a refinement of theory to occur, one must work with specific characteristics of a concept that are elaborated upon or refined (2004:63). To this end, I focus on two essential features of the extant scholarship of clientelism – the *exchange* and presence of *trust*. Before differentiating between these two aspects, I describe and elaborate the following core elements: those who constitute the actors in this relationship and religion as the basis of a social bond – i.e., religion as an identity.

i) The actors

To reiterate the definition of clientelism, I borrow from James Boissevain. Clientelism is:

founded on the reciprocal relations between patrons and clients. By patron I mean someone who uses his influence to assist and protect some other person, who then becomes his 'client', and in return provides certain services to his patron. The relationship is asymmetrical, for the nature of the services exchanged may vary considerably. Patronage is thus the complex of

⁵ One pertinent example is the Lutheran minister Khader El-Yateem, a Palestinian American running for office in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, one of the most divided and most conservative neighbourhoods in New York City. See Radiolab podcast *Father K*.

relations between those who use their influence, social position or some other attribute to assist and protect others, and those whom they so help and protect (emphasis mine, 1966:18).

The basic tenets of religious clientelism are its individual actors; the patron and the client. It is essentially an individual-level dyadic relationship in which both actors exercise dual roles. The patron is both a religious leader and a politician. The client is a disciple and a voter. The relationship includes the religious institution where both congregate. The patron's influence/power stems primarily from two aspects: their role as both religious leaders and active politicians. As spiritual leaders their primary role is to provide spiritual guidance through example and teachings, access to the practice of day-to-day religion, and, ultimately, the insurance of salvation. They provide their clients with access to the *batin* (hidden, inside) realm of religion through their spiritual power – which is inherited and legitimated through their lineage. On a worldly plane, i.e., *zahir* (apparent, outside), they provide their clients with access to a variety of things including protection. The patron in religious clientelism is not the political party (Nichter 2010, Ayuero 2001, Stokes et al 2013). Instead, the patron is an *individual* with no rigid affiliation to any political party. They are religious leaders who also contest political office.

The second actor in the dyadic relationship, and the one of main interest to this dissertation – is the client. In the following section, I elaborate on the various characteristics of the client. Before elaborating on any other characteristic, I would like to point out that the client in religious clientelism is identity rich. First of all, the client in religious clientelism is not limited to the low-income voter, whose vote is bought through the exchange of material goods (Ayuero 2001, Brusco et al 2004, Finan and Schethter 2012, Kramon 2009, Stokes et al 2013). Instead, the overall clientele is heterogeneous and comes from various socio-economic, ethno-linguistic, sectarian, and tribal backgrounds. Different permutations of these characteristics dictate the function that the clientelistic bond plays for them. For example, at one end of the spectrum, there is the client who is a poor farmer. For her/him the relationship serves a number of functions in his day-to-day life on both the spiritual and worldly planes. On the religious plane, the relationship dictates how the client can be a good believer through religious rituals such as prayers, dietary restrictions, exercising care for one's community, and paying respect to elders. This day to day guidance, together with their identity as disciples, helps provide psychological rewards of peace of mind and a sense of control over their worldly situation (White, Shariff, and Norenzayan 2019:7). In short, the relationship helps reinforce a bond with the supernatural – acting as a coping mechanism with worldly matters. On the worldly plane, the client may use this bond to solve worldly problems, such as contacting local authorities, conflict resolution, or even help with resolving a matter with local law enforcement. On the other end of the spectrum, there are clients who are well off, such as local landlords who employ members of the local population and maintain thousands of acres of land. Such a client will have access to his/her own networks, assets, and resources.⁶ For them, on the spiritual plane, the supernatural goods of peace of mind and psychological goods of insurance of salvation will be present. On the worldly plane, however, the relationship will function as a collective identity that provides social standing, protection of the patron and an added layer of insurance – especially in the case of conflict (such as land squatting issues). This is especially so in areas in which the state lacks the provision of the public good of law enforcement and where even the local superintendent police officer has been appointed through the consent of the local patron-saint.⁷ The holistic nature of the relationship, and the benefits that it provides to even the well-off client, is best underscored through an example of exclusion,

⁶ Interview with R4122015M45 Sindh, Karachi, November 2015.

⁷ Interview with R6-20190429-M-63-Sindh, Karachi, 2019

whereby a local landlord was ousted from the congregation and the landlord's status as a client-disciple was revoked through public announcement. Within the community, word quickly spread of a social boycott against the individual disciple and the members of their immediate family. Members of the community stopped communicating with them, refused to intervene to provide any form of help, and removed themselves from any public association with the former disciple-client. This resulted in a social boycott and ostracization, where any work the client tried to perform in this context was limited to their own devices. In close-knit communities, social boycotts can spell doom for an individual actor. Even the richer client will be subjected to the same demands and expectations as any other client – i.e., both implicit and explicit expectations between client and patron.

Secondly, pertaining to the number of linkages between patron and client, clients are linked to their patron on two planes – both religious and political. As such, there is a simultaneous and symbiotic exchange relationship that includes both a social relationship and a political exchange. On the religious plane, the client has sworn allegiance to the patron and seeks spiritual guidance from them. This reinforces the asymmetric character of the relationship, with the client in an inferior spiritual position in which the relationship centres on the iterative, and reciprocal, face-to-face interaction between both patron and client – cementing the personalised bond between the two. This relationship is part and parcel of the client's cultural and traditional heritage within which belonging is symbolised by the relationship itself and not limited to attending the place of worship and the social interaction with members of the congregation.

*"You don't have to be religious to be a disciple, it's just a way of being a good person and the social aspect, i.e., the collective identity of being a disciple, remains paramount. You go there (the shrine) you meet the local people, they are in the 1000s not 100s. You have some chit chat and socialise."*⁸

In modern clientelism the client is tied to the patron on one plane – the political bond, with social bonds absent.

Thirdly, there is a clear hierarchy between client and patron, which effectively hinders the client's ability to go 'patron shopping'. In religious clientelism there is a clear asymmetry of hierarchy between the two actors – rooted in unequal access to spiritual enlightenment, due to which clients seek out patron-saints. As such, the client is not able to use their vote as a form of currency to flatten the hierarchy between themselves and their patron-saint. There are two dimensions to the relationship whereby the religious linkage supersedes the political, and thus the currency gained by the client in the form of a vote is limited. In fact, due to the religious bond between the two, switching patrons carries with it extreme social costs because of the sworn allegiance to the patron as a spiritual leader. To borrow Anna Grzymala-Busse's phrase, in this case, religion as an identity it is not fungible, you cannot leave without incurring a disproportionate social cost and the psychological burden of damnation (2012). The social cost is demonstrated by the case of social boycott (given above), and the fear of damnation is best illustrated through the vignette below, wherein a disciple confronted his spiritual leader and challenged his ability to provide spiritual advice because he himself was *not following the advice he gave his followers*.

Client: "why should I listen to you? You yourself are not doing those things that you tell us to do. In fact, you are indulging in things that you yourself say are not permitted for us" (the patron is widely known to be an alcoholic). How can you then be a spiritual advisor?"

⁸ Interview with R4122015M45Sindh, Karachi, November, 2015

Patron: "Let us light a fire here." (So they light a small bonfire. The patron tells the client-disciple to bring some water, and as there is no fresh water around, he tells him to fetch some from the sewer and throw it on the fire. The client did as he was told; he threw the pale of sewage onto the fire, and the fire went out.) The patron-saint turned to the client and said "You see what just happened here? No matter how dirty I am, at the end of the day, I am still the one that will save you from the fires of hell and provide you salvation in the afterlife."

On the contrary, in the modern understanding of the client, the assumption is that the asymmetry between the patron and client is flatter because of the client's ability to vote, where the vote in itself is perceived as a form of currency, which the patron needs in order to gain political office. Therefore, the client has a strong bargaining chip with his/her patron (Hicken 2011). In fact, some scholars argue that the power asymmetry may be reversed, with the client as principal and the patron as agent (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007). This lack of hierarchy and the client's agency is what effectively enables the client to go patron-shopping – i.e., to exchange their vote for the best material inducement offered, or in the words of Herbert Kitschelt and Steven Wilkinson, a situation in which clients are "willing to surrender their vote for the right price" (2007:2). This is not the case for the religious client-voter in a personalised relationship with his/her patron.

Finally, my definition of client also includes brokers. They are representatives of the patron and act as mediators between the patron and the client/citizen. The broker in religious clientelism wears two "hats". The first hat is that of client/follower (because he/she too follows the patron on grounds of religion). This effectively means that these brokers do not have control over resources (such as blessings, spiritual guidance etc.), nor can they exercise discretion as to the distribution of goods and services. The second hat they wear is as a representative of the religious leader. The broker in his/her role representing the patron deals with all non-religious issues pertaining to the client-voters' day-to-day life, what may be labelled worldly matters, such as land issues and conflict resolution at different levels (from family disputes to village level disputes). This is unlike the typical broker found in much of the scholarship, such as brokers in Argentina's Peronist party, who not only act as party representatives that are socially embedded and mobilise the local voter, but also have discretion over the distribution of goods and hold final say over who gets what in the relationship (Ayuro 2000, Stokes et al 2013). Therefore, we treat the brokers primarily as clients, and not as a third party in the relationship (I elaborate on them in the section below). To reiterate, apart from the spiritual bond, clients are also tied to their patrons in the political sphere, where they vote for them, i.e., the dyadic aspect remains central. Furthermore, the broker, in their capacity as client, is on a lower rung of the hierarchy in relation to the patron on the religious plane due to his/her role as client-follower. Also, the broker in religious clientelism shares the same type of loyalty tie with the patron on the religious plane as the citizen/follower. In fact, the nature of the bond is not limited to the religious following as the political bond is viewed as part and parcel of the religious following itself.⁹

The unit of analysis is at the individual level and the *dyadic* aspect of the relationship with the voter remains central. There is a clear hierarchical aspect whereby the patron enjoys superiority in terms of both religious and political power over the client. The patron and client maintain regular *face-to-face* contact through the congregation, the shrine, and the community interaction of the client-disciples.

Finally, the client in religious clientelism ranks the *non-material* religious good higher than the material good that may be in play. To fully understand and differentiate between religious clientelism and standard models

⁹ See empirical section from fieldwork.

of clientelism, we first need to elaborate on the inclusion of social identity in the clientelistic equation generally, and specifically the role of religion as an identity.

ii) Religion as social identity

It is widely recognised in political science that individuals have multiple social identities, whether this be religious, tribal, clan, ethno-linguistic, or national, and that these can be activated towards various political ends (Bates 1983; Laitin 1986; Posner 2005; Young 1979). The affective linkages we foster in our daily lives come from these identity "hats" we as citizens wear in our day to day life, where each "hat" serves different purposes and elicits different preferences and expectations from each web of relations. More importantly, as social identity theory points out, not all "hats" carry equal weight and as such not all identities are equal, some are stronger than others (Hogg 2006)¹⁰. It is this saliency that affects actors' preferences (whether these preferences are economic, social or political). Generally, in comparative politics, religion is grouped within the umbrella of ethnic politics, where ethnic identity is defined as "a subset of identity categories in which membership is determined by attributes associated with, or believed to be associated with, descent (described here simply as descent-based attributes)" (Chandra 2006).

Such a grouping treats religion as any other identity, be it tribal, clan, or national, in which the main focus is on the mobilization potential of the group identity in the political sphere. Although this serves to further our understanding of political mobilization, where one group identity enables the delivery of votes, it limits our understanding of the identity cleavages. It overlooks the strength of one identity relative to another. This stems from an underlying assumption that these identities serve similar functions and generate similar expectations/preferences among citizens (see Chandra 2004, Posner 2005). That said, there are a handful of studies that attempt to differentiate between identities and how these differences affect people's preferences – some using evidence from experiments (McCauley 2014, Posner 2013, Barr and Serra 2013)¹¹. Using experimental evidence John McCauley shows how changes in the saliency of ethnicity and religion are associated with policy preferences at the individual level, where ethnic identity elicits the demand for club goods, whereas when religion is made salient, in otherwise identical individuals, they prioritize behavioural policies and moral probity (2014). Daniel Posner uses evidence from a list experiment that helps disentangle how class and ethnic identities elicit divergent public and private behaviour, where social pressures from ethnic identity elicit public expressions of allegiance with the ethnic group, but privately, the individuals highlight their material, class interests (2013). In the context of clientelism, this differentiation between identities is imperative because of the direct effect it has on the preferences and expectations of the client-voters.

Building on a combination of this emerging literature and my own fieldwork, I argue that the client-voter who shares a *personalised* religious linkage with their patron ranks this spiritual bond as their highest social identity relative to other identities such as kinship, clan/tribe, and ethnolinguistic ones when their religious leader contests political office (see model below). This is because, in such relationships, clients share more than one bond with their patrons – in this case it is both a religious and social bond. As Legee et al. (2002) tell us, unlike other identities, "religion adds both a transcendent and immanent supernatural dimension to

¹⁰ Hogg, Michael A. 2006. "Social Identity Theory." In Peter James Burke, *Contemporary Social Psychological Theories*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, pp. 111–36.

¹¹ Barr, Abigail and Danila Serra (2007) "Externality and framing effects in a bribery experiment" Centre for the Study of African Economies University of Oxford, August, 2007

identity, norms and boundaries" (in Wald, Silverman and Fridy (2005:45) and the effect of this spills over into the overall clientelistic relationship.

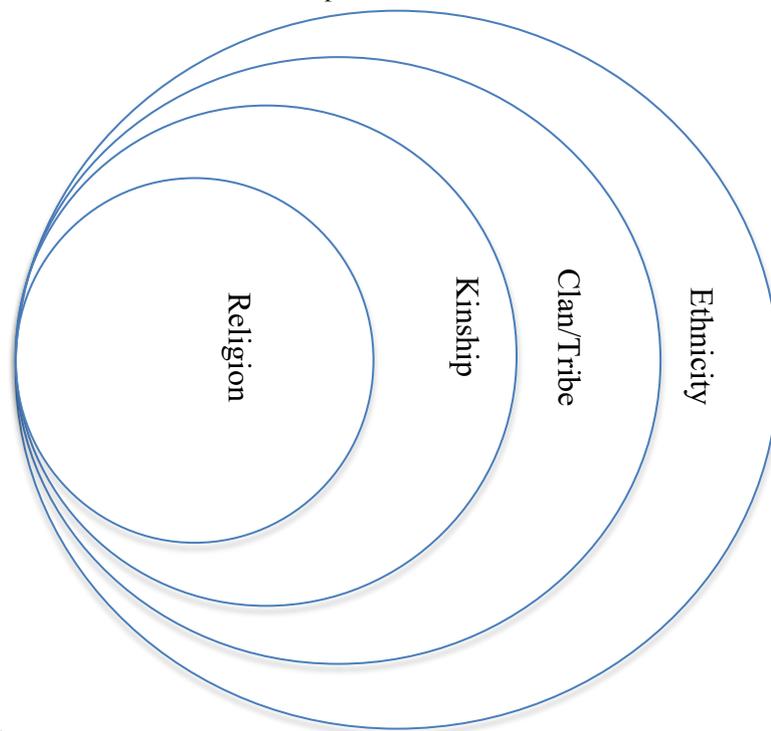


FIGURE 1

The model above depicts how a client-voter ranks their identities in relation to each other at the individual level. Many of these identities, such as the social and religious ones, can overlap. This ranking is activated dependent on the situation at hand.

All relationships in life serve different roles. The relationship between parent-child, teacher-student, and then the one between murshid [spiritual guide] and his murid [disciple]. There is a ranking... our relationship with our pir (spiritual guide) is ranking highest in the relationships we have.¹²

As the above quote makes clear, the client-follower has an internal ranking that is activated in relation to the social situation they find themselves in. Identities are not static but in constant movement, and thus different identities affect our behaviour depending on the situation at hand. This aspect of religion as an identity and social bond is further enhanced in the context of religious societies.

In the context of religious societies, such as Muslim majority countries, religion not only permeates one's everyday life but also plays an integral part in daily life (Alatas 1963). One example is the Islamic call to prayer, the *aḏān* – five times a day, reminding of God's presence the duty to offer prayers. Religion also pervades the everyday language, from greeting each other – *Salam Alaikum* (peace be on you), *Khuda Hafiz* (Godspeed), to the invocation of divine intercession during casual conversation, where *InshAllah* (God willing) will be added to future planning, as well as invoking God's protection from the proverbial evil eye – through the expression of *Mashallah* (may God protect you), resulting in an implicit presence in one's overall

¹² Interview, Multan, R7

milieu. Over and above the linguistics and religious symbolism permeating society, the central role of religion in the life of a client-follower is highlighted by the extent to which it adds or subtracts to social standing and acceptance as a member of society. An example is in the case of client-follower and patron-saint, where having a spiritual leader creates a space of acceptance as a member of society. However, without a spiritual leader, one are considered orphaned, or more cynically, fellow villagers will consider that you have the Devil to guide you in both this world and the hereafter – making one unattractive for both the group as well as one's own kin.¹³ In this sense, religion permeates society, and offers one, in the words of Clifford Geertz, "depth".

Unlike other identities, religion is a cross-cutting identity (Fineraas and Henrik 2012) and, as pointed out by Ibn Khaldun, one that can both restrain people and help unite them (in Gellner 1981:19). At the group level, religion can encompass a variety of identities, including ethnicities,¹⁴ tribes, and kin. By ethnicity, I mean ethnolinguistic group, with tribes falling under this umbrella and kinship representing a smaller division within the tribe. Furthermore, unlike other identities, it has a transnational character. This enables religion to be found across various geographical contexts bringing together people from very different backgrounds.

More uniquely, as an identity, religion operates at two levels simultaneously – both at the collective/public and individual/private levels. At the collective level, it operates as a social identity, where it helps create a network of relationships with other client-followers through daily interactions both within and outside of the religious institution, such as interactions with villagers that share the same spiritual leader, where day-to-day activities and reciprocations create horizontal linkages between the followers and as such further embed this identity as a social one. As such, in a shared religious community, "[p]eople become empowered, they develop the capacity to act in concert" (Legee and Kellsted 1993:9). At the group level, this social identity fulfills the psychological need to belong. As a group identity, it exerts similar social pressure on the individual's behaviour, where the individual's preferences and expectations are, at least publicly, driven by the pressures exerted by the group as a whole. This is especially so due to an individual's need to belong (Baumeister and Leary, 1995, Hogg et al 2008). The social desirability bias that shows up in public versus private expressions of an individual's preferences and expectations in other identities are mitigated in the case of religion because of the access to God. In other identities, in the private sphere, an individual may renege on their publicly expressed preferences about material interests versus interests offered in line with the group identity (Posner 2013). However, in the case of religion as an identity, the preferences and expectations expressed publicly also remain constant in the private sphere because of the external enforcement of God, where fear of a supernatural punishment may serve as a deterrent to counter normative behaviour, even in anonymous situations free from human social monitoring (Shariff and Norenzayan 2011). As Legee and Kellsted tell us, as a collective identity, this "sense of belonging to a sacred community can alleviate the free-rider problem and embolden individuals to act in ways that may appear individually irrational outside the religio-cultural context" (1993:132). This is well demonstrated in the social psychology literature where experimental evidence shows shopkeepers demonstrating increased pro-social behaviour when the Muslim

¹³ Fieldwork 2015 (this is an amalgamation of expressions from the fieldwork).

¹⁴ By ethnicity I mean "ethnolinguistic group" where "tribe," refers to subdivisions within that group linked to kinship and family groups, e.g., the tribes of Somroo and Lakhani are both Sindhi, but different clans/tribes within the same larger group of Sindhi. With respect to religion, I focus in particular on the effects of affiliation with the world religions of Islam and Christianity. Up to 95 percent of Africans are at least nominally associated with these broad religious identities (see World Christian Database 2010).

call to prayer, *aḏān*, is audible, compared to when it is not – i.e., when the *aḏān* acts a reminder of God (Duhaine 2015). In fact, as a social identity, religion can have a positive feedback effect at both levels, especially through the exercise of religious rituals. Furthermore, at the group level, it leads to synchrony, where engaging in action with someone else creates the psychological reaction of feeling fused as a group, while at the individual level, the same religious rituals provide the psychological goods of peace of mind and have the capability of making clients more generous and generate prosocial behaviour (Sachs 2009).

At the individual level, religion operates as a belief system for the individual client-follower, between him/herself, his/her spiritual leader (patron) and God, in which the patron serves as an intercessor between God and client. It is an iterative relationship in which the client prays to God and seeks favours via his spiritual leader. The identity operates to invoke the supernatural through prayer and other actions available to the client-follower, such as submitting to the spiritual leader as a token to partake in the spiritual aura of their leader, and through him, God's gifts. Furthermore, at the individual/private level religion as an identity provides a framework for the nature of one's existence – that is, how to lead a life, but also deals with death and the hereafter (Hogg et al 2008) – taking into account the uncertainties that individuals grapple within their daily lives, and provides a sense of security to the unknown, providing a cognitive safety net relative to other identities in which religion helps make sense of the material world as well as the spiritual.

Finally, at the individual level, elements of religion, such as a believed association with God, can create feelings of positive self-regard, which not only enhances a client's self-image but also has the effect of amplifying their overall standing in the society they live in (White, Shariff, and Norenzayan 2019:7). The figure below summarises how religion as an identity operates at both the individual and collective levels.

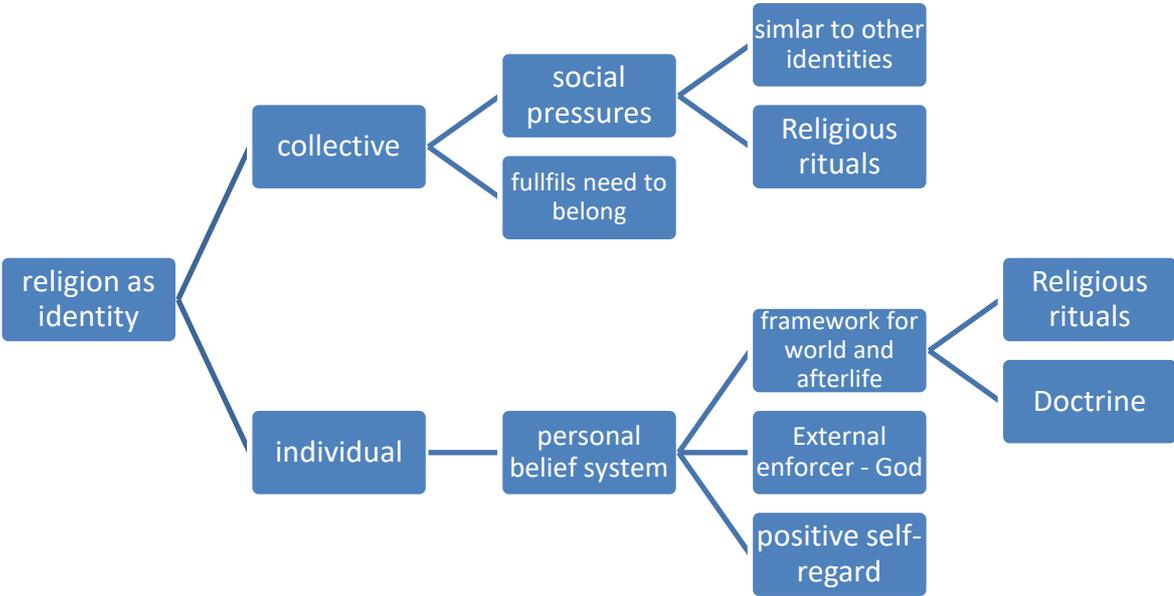


FIGURE 2. HOW RELIGION OPERATES AT TWO LEVELS SIMULTANEOUSLY

In relation to an individual client-followers' other identities, religion ranks higher than other identities due to its nature as a high-stake trade-off of eternal reward and punishment and its potential to withstand the secular onslaught that would eradicate other communal identities (Grzymala-Busse 2012:424). Understand-

ing the ranking of identities has two main advantages. First, it can inform us of the expectations and preferences expressed by clients in relation to the clientelistic exchange with their spiritual leader – i.e., the type of good that is central to their contingent exchange relationship. Second, it affects the presence of trust between the actors. Let us now turn to the two points of differentiation. Having described and elaborated on the actors involved and religion as an identity, we now turn to the two main characteristics of the extant theory of clientelism through which I differentiate the sub-type of religious clientelism – the clientelistic exchange itself and the presence of trust between the two parties. In pursuit of theory development, the specification and elaboration of these two aspects will help improve the overall concept of clientelism (George and Bennett 2004, 63).

Type of exchange

The first point of differentiation is the type of exchange between the client-follower and patron-spiritual leader. In its purest form, clientelism is an exchange relationship within which much of the modern school scholarship highlights material exchanges as the central aspect of the exchange between both actors (highlighted in the earlier discussion between modern and classic schools). In religious clientelism, unlike other identities, religion offers the unique exchange of supernatural, *non-material* goods, like salvation and nirvana, in return for following the patron-saint. Simply put, when religion is the salient identity, then the balance of the exchange between client and patron no longer centres on material goods. Instead, the exchange includes and centres mainly on non-material religious goods such as salvation and prayers. As such, the main type of exchange in religious clientelism, and the one preferred by its clients, is overwhelmingly non-material (non-economic). These non-material goods include religious goods (such as the promise of salvation; spiritual guidance; making religion accessible); social wellbeing (including social standing, social identity as well as belonging), access (Springborg 1979) (whether this is to a government office or to business/personal networks) and impartial arbitration. Foster provides an apt example of a non-material exchange, in the form of a prayer being answered, between patron-saint and client-follower in a Mexican village, in which the clients invoke their saints, promising to perform various acts in case their request/prayer is granted. These can include acts such as wearing a wool garment or going for pilgrimage to the patron-saint's grave.

Foster elaborates on the mechanisms of the relationship:

if the contract is made, the supernatural being grants the request of the supplicant, the latter [client] is obligated, at his earliest convenience, to fulfill his part of the bargain, to strike the balance by complying with his offer (1963:1264).

The client-follower offers terms and conditions that s/he will fulfill, conditional upon their request being granted. If the prayer is not granted, the client views it as bad fortune, and the patron is not blamed but seen as blame-free (because the believer will not have to perform their end of the deal in the case of non-performance by the patron). Foster's example is rooted in the Christian cult of saints, wherein the saints are dead, and thus the saints have nothing to gain or lose from this relationship. In religious clientelism, however, the patron-saints are very much alive and contesting elections. The mechanisms remain the same, and in this case, the patron-saint receives a material performance/gain (in the form of the vote), whereas the client-follower is granted their prayer/promise. This works to the advantage of the patron because the client-follower understands the lack of performance as “God’s will” instead of something within the control of the patron-saint themselves. Also, a patron-saint has the added advantage of providing non-material incentives, such as prayers to the client, which does not require any material investment relative to normal politicians.

This is not to negate the existence of material goods within the overall relationship. These certainly are present and cover a broad range of potential exchanges of non-material goods, including “jobs” (Hicken 2011:291). However, when placed in a trade-off position between the choice of material and *non-material* goods, the client-follower in religious clientelism will tend to prioritise non-material goods due to the elaborate significance that is directly tied to the identity of their spiritual bond with their spiritual leader/patron-saint.

The presence of trust

The second point of differentiation is the presence of trust. In religious clientelism, there is a strong overarching trust that combines both social and political trust. It is present at different levels (interpersonal and individual-institutional) and to different degrees simultaneously. Let us begin with what I mean by trust. At a general level, and in a nutshell, trust is a reflection of our feelings about the future and the belief that others will not cause us harm, and in fact, will try to act towards one’s betterment (Gambetta 1988, Hardin 1998, Warren 1999). Specifically, I borrow Geoffrey Hosking’s two-part definition in which trust is defined as (2014:28):

1. *Attachment to a person, collective of persons or institution, based on the well-founded but not certain expectation that he/she/they will act for my good.*
2. *The expectation, based on good but less than perfect evidence, that events will turn out in a way not harmful to me.*

This definition is helpful for our purposes because it takes into consideration not only the different *levels* at which trust exists (individual/collective/institution) but also pays attention to the *expectations* of each respective actor involved. This interlocking definition allows a representation of how religious clientelism operates on the ground and the complex reality posed by the symbiotic existence of relationships (social and religious) and expectations between, and from, both patron-saint and client-follower.

As a basis of the social bond, religion itself is a generator of trust, elicited through its trust-generating functions. These functions are:

1. *Epistemic; it offers us a secure knowledge of the world in which we place our faith.*
2. *Existential: it is identity-forming. It offers us a sense of ourselves, makes self-confidence possible, and hence provides a secure base from which we can trust others.*
3. *Salvific: it offers a way of salvation, not from all evil, but at least from radical contamination by evil, so that trust in ourselves and others is still possible.*
4. *Affective: trust is, among other things, an emotion, and religion offers it periodic nourishment, especially at times of difficulty or crisis.*
5. *Social-cultural: religion generates public institutions as frameworks within which people can readily interact trustingly.*

(Hosking 2014:51)

Religion brings these five trust-generating factors to the religio-clientelistic relationship between patron-saint and client-follower, which are reinforced through the reciprocal and iterative nature of the clientelistic bond itself, and which David Torsello reminds us “is an inherently social, other than political phenomenon, which is informed by actors’ ideas and practices of trust...[and] is a cognitive as well as social mechanism of human interaction” (2012:77).

Having clarified what precisely we mean by trust, and the unique features of religion as a generator of trust, let us elaborate on the levels and ‘thickness’ (i.e., modes) at which this exists (as pictured in the figure below) in religious clientelism.

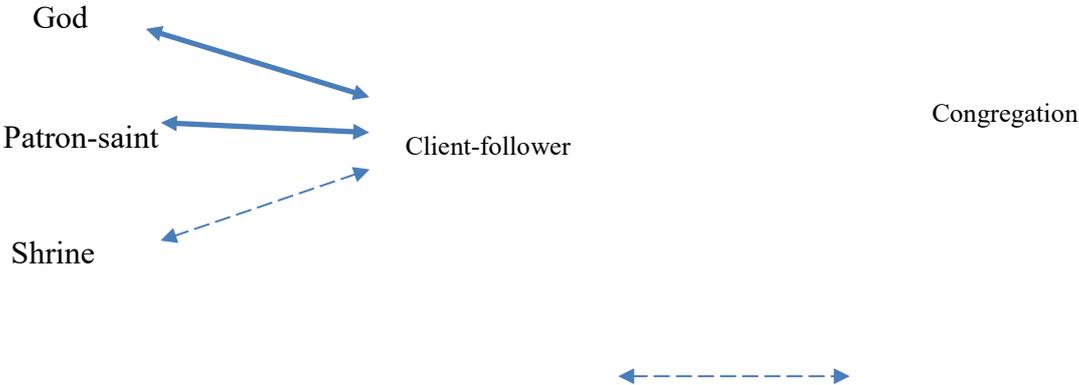


FIGURE 3.

At the interpersonal level, the client-follower shares strong thick trust between her/himself and the patron-saint as well as her/himself and God (represented by the thick arrows in the diagram) to whom they have committed valued resources in the form of an oath of allegiance, tithes etc. to the patron saint. At the individual level, the patron-saint as a religious leader serves as an authoritative figure to whom the client-followers look like a spiritual guide and intercessor, and in general, trust more than ordinary human beings. At the collective level, the myths associated with the patron-saint provide a narrative framework for trust. This trust, between patron and client, is reinforced by the iterative and reciprocal exchanges between both actors. The strong thick trust between God and client stems from, among other things, the following of religious rituals (investment of time and emotion) (Hosking 2014, 46). In fact, trust in God has a specific place in most religions. In Islam it has a specific term, *tawbaqul*, and is the basic requirement for adherence to the overall religion and before receiving any benefit from ritual. Similarly, it is considered a basic requirement in Christianity, and is needed prior to one being able to benefit from following the overall tenets of the religion.¹⁵ As the patron-saint acts as an intercessor between God and client-follower, the trust between them will also be strong, thick trust.

The second level of trust in religious clientelism is at the institutional-individual level, that is, the trust the client-follower has for the shrine and the congregation – i.e., generalised trust. This is a strong, thin trust within which the individual has strong general trust towards the institution of the shrine and towards the

¹⁵ See the latest book by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, wherein he discusses Christian belief and the importance of trust in God as a basic requirement prior to following Christian teachings. For details see introduction chapter in *Tokens of Trust* (2007).

overall congregation based on knowledge of how the society, within which one finds oneself, functions in terms of “more general information about social groups and situations” (Newton, 2007). This is not based on knowing someone personally but is “based on first-hand knowledge of how society generally works”. An example is the knowledge of which streets are safe to walk at night in the city one resides in, what Bronislaw Malinowski calls ‘auto-pilot’ trust because of one’s cumulative experiences with said institution (this is represented by the dashed thin arrows in the diagram). As a final note, the shrine as an institution provides durability and stability to the trust relationship but also to the overall clientelistic bond.

The presence of trust, at these different levels and such varying degrees, not only functions as an overarching trust that lends longevity to the relationship and the phenomenon of clientelism overall but more importantly, it provides an empirical example of an overlap between political and social trust that has been largely absent from the individual-level empirical research thus far (Newton 2007).

Conclusion

So far, I have sketched out and elaborated on the sub-concept of religious clientelism, detailing the important role of religion as a social identity. Here, religion is operating outside the bounds of formal religious institutions. Instead, it is operating within the confines of informal religious institutions, particularly the Cult of Saints. I have pointed out how clients negotiate between their identities relative to religion and how this in turn affects the type of goods demanded by the client-follower, their expectations, and the presence of trust between both actors in a clientelistic exchange. Due to the supernatural and transcendent character of religion as an identity, when the situation at hand involves their religious leader – their patron-saint – clients will rank their religious identity as higher relative to their other identities. This is reinforced by the fact that, as an identity, religion operates at two levels simultaneously – both collective and individual. Relatedly, it is this supernatural and transcendent characteristic, along with the above detailed ranking and multi-layer operation of religion, that activates non-material religious goods as part and parcel of the contingent exchange between patron and client in religious clientelism.

Having presented this theory and elaborated on the client’s calculus, I will now present the scope conditions for the theory through the presentation of the empirical case of Pakistan, upon which this theory and dissertation build.

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