


Identifying clientelism in orphanages: a conceptual model

Rebecca Nhep 

Law Futures Centre, Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia

ABSTRACT

Much has been written on the factors that contribute to a child's admission into institutional care, including poverty, lack of access to education, death of a parent, active recruitment, and the sheer presence of orphanages. In addition, there is growing recognition of orphanage trafficking driving admission. This is more prevalent in unregulated orphanages (Van Doore 2016), where referral to a specific facility occurs outside of formal gatekeeping mechanisms and without the involvement of mandated authorities. Yet there is little research about how children are identified, recruited, and transferred into these orphanages. The irregular nature of admission, coupled with the fact that these orphanages are rarely proximal to the children's communities of origin, suggests the involvement of social networks in forging connections between families and specific orphanages. However, the nature of these social networks has not been examined. Missing from the current conceptualisation of drivers of child institutionalisation is the role of social networks, specifically those characterised as clientelist in facilitating children's recruitment, transfer, admission, and/or trafficking into unregulated orphanages. To address this gap, this article presents a conceptual model for identifying clientelist relationships in orphanages, allowing for the implications of clientelism for child institutionalisation, trafficking, and exploitation to be explored.

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Introduction

Globally an estimated 5.37 million children continue to reside in institutions, synonymously referred to as orphanages (Desmond et al. 2020), despite widespread recognition of orphanages as suboptimal, if not harmful environments, for children's development (van IJzendoorn et al. 2020). The closed environment, poor standards of care and lack of appropriate safeguards that characterise many orphanages place children at additional risk of experiencing abuse, exploitation, and trafficking (van IJzendoorn et al. 2020). These issues are exacerbated by the high prevalence of unregulated orphanages (defined as unregistered or underregulated privately run institutions) in many countries that operate unlawfully or without sufficient government oversight. Recognising these harms, and to meet obligations under international child rights law, States have unanimously committed to phasing out institutions in favour of family-based care (UN General Assembly A/Res/64/142 2010; UN General Assembly A/Res/74/133 2020). These international commitments underpin global care reform efforts, including the transition and closure of institutions.

CONTACT Rebecca Nhep  Rebecca.nhep@griffithuni.edu.au

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While orphanhood has been the purported driver of admission into orphanages, global estimates suggest that 80% of all children in orphanages have families, and few children are admitted due to a lack of caregivers (Csáky 2009). Much attention has been paid in scholarship to the role of ‘push factors’ that result in children being admitted into orphanages, including poverty, lack of access to education or health services, and death of a parent (van IJzendoorn et al. 2020). Some scholars have recognised the additional influence of ‘pull factors’ including community attitudes towards orphanages (Petrowski, Cappa, and Gross 2017), active recruitment, foreign funding, and the sheer presence of orphanages bolstering child institutionalisation (Rotabi, Roby, and Bunkers 2017). In addition, there is growing recognition of orphanage trafficking driving the admission of children, particularly in unregulated orphanages (Van Doore 2016).

Various studies show that children are often transported vast distances from their communities of origin to be placed in orphanages, which are typically located in urban centres readily accessible to foreign tourists and volunteers (Guiney and Mostafanezhad 2015; Nhep 2021). In the case of unregulated settings, referral to specific facilities occurs outside of formal gatekeeping mechanisms and typically without the involvement of mandated authorities. As a result of a lack of due process, little is known about how children are identified, recruited, and transferred into these orphanages. The irregular nature of admission, coupled with the fact that these orphanages are rarely proximal to the communities where children lived, suggests the involvement of social networks in forging connections between families and specific orphanages. However, the nature of these social networks and the characteristics of the relationships between the families and orphanage operators have not been subjected to serious examination.

For over two decades, the author has worked in care reforms, overseeing the transition and closure of numerous orphanages, in countries including Cambodia, India, Thailand and Indonesia. The author’s professional experience led to the hypothesis of the underlying presence of clientelist relationships between orphanage operators, recruiters, and families in facilitating children’s admission into unregulated orphanages and potential exploitation (Nhep and Won 2020). Families of children in these orphanages often spoke of a trusted person who encouraged the family to admit their child and facilitated their referral to a specific orphanage. In some cases, this person was the orphanage director or a caregiver. In other cases, a broker was involved in recruiting the child into care. The relationship between the family and the recruiter or orphanage director was almost always steeped in hierarchy. Families frequently described the orphanage director or the recruiter as a benefactor and referred to them using fictive kinship terms, which are widely used to denote patronage. It was common for families to refer to social obligations in the context of their relationship with orphanage directors and recruiters. Sometimes the obligations were of the family towards the orphanage director or recruiter, and other times in reverse, suggesting reciprocal exchange. Examples were given where parents’ employment was subject to their child living in the orphanage, suggesting children were sometimes the subjects of exchange. These obligations were often the primary determinant of the parents’ decisions, actions and/or inaction regarding children’s admission into care, ongoing institutionalisation, and their responses to issues, including abuse of their children, whilst in care. These relational dynamics reflect characteristics of patron-client relationships (Graziano 1976; Hicken 2011; Hilgers 2009, 2011; Munro 2013) and suggest the utilisation of clientelist networks to facilitate children’s admission into orphanages and potential exploitation therein. Yet patron-client relationships within orphanages have not been well examined or evidenced within existing academic literature on child institutionalisation, or clientelism.

While existing clientelism literature offers a rich body of descriptions of clientelism in specific countries, and political or anthropological contexts, it fails to reconcile different conceptions of clientelism and offer a clear, accepted and universally applicable definition that can be used for diagnosing relationships as clientelist and the creation of a taxonomy of forms of clientelism (Graziano 1976). Instead, a review of the literature reveals definitional and conceptual conflicts that act as a barrier to applying clientelism as a theory to any new site or space, including orphanages (Hilgers 2011).

This article proposes a means of resolving the primary conflicts in clientelism literature, to enable an argument for the application of clientelism theory to the relational ecosystem of unregulated orphanages. To do this I will first outline the definitional and conceptual divergence in existing clientelism literature. Second, I will locate and elucidate tenets within the clientelism scholarship that offer a resolution to these conceptual conflicts. Third, by weaving these tenets together I will build upon the work of several prominent scholars and propose a novel conceptual model for identifying clientelism in sites and spaces where it has not been previously documented and confirmed. This conceptual model will comprise a two-part assessment framework that can be used to first identify contexts or environments that enable clientelism, and second, provide a means for diagnosing specific relationships, present within enabling environments, as clientelist. While this model is generic and can be applied to a range of sites and spaces where clientelism may be suspected, the aim in developing and proposing the model in this article is quite specific: to create a means for examining and classifying patron-client relationships in the operational context of unregulated orphanages, and to enable the ramifications for children's recruitment, transfer, admission and exploitation to be explored.

Utility of detecting clientelism in orphanages

Should clientelism occur in orphanages, its impact on children's recruitment and transfer into unregulated orphanages needs to be considered amongst the full range of drivers of child institutionalisation, in the development of government care reform strategies. Strategies to scale back the use of residential care are typically informed by mapping and administrative data on orphanages, research into community attitudes, child and family vulnerability factors and the child protection legal and regulatory framework. However, clientelism is rarely considered in this context. This leaves potential gaps and barriers to effective implementation, which may impede efforts of governments to enact transition, closure or enforce regulation over orphanages where clientelism operates, the reintegration of children and the prevention of unlawful admissions of children into orphanages.

Additionally, clientelism if used to recruit and admit children into unregulated orphanages, would contribute to violations of children's rights. The best interests of the child, as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, is a substantive right, interpretive legal principle and rule of procedure that must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children (CRC 2013). It underpins formal gatekeeping mechanisms that stipulate the legal mandate, justifications and process for determining whether a child's admission into residential care is necessary, suitable and in their best interests. The hierarchical nature of clientelism, its imbued system of loyalty and submission, and its potential use in facilitating unlawful admission in contravention of gatekeeping mechanisms would conflict with the child's right to have their best interests considered as primary in decisions about their care. Care reform strategies that act as mechanisms through which states meet their obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of children must therefore address clientelism in orphanages in contexts where it occurs. The conceptual model proposed in this article provides a framework for clientelism in orphanages to be first identified so that clientelism's impact on children's rights can be considered and addressed in the development and implementation of care reform strategies.

Clientelism and the source of conceptual and definitional conflicts

Clientelism is a term used to refer to non-primordial vertical interpersonal social bonds that exist to facilitate reciprocal, albeit unequal, exchange (Scott 1972). At the core of clientelism are dyadic patron-client relationships, which Scott (1972, 92) describes as:

Largely instrumental friendships in which an individual of higher socioeconomic status (patron) uses his own influence and resources to provide protection or benefits, or both, for a person of lower status (client), who for his part, reciprocates by offering general support and assistance, including personal services to the patron.

Despite the plethora of literature on clientelism, no precise or agreed-upon definition of clientelism exists (Hicken 2011). Scholarship on clientelism reveals a lack of definitional and conceptual consensus, with the term being used variably across different disciplines (Graziano 1976). Discrepancies are most evident when comparing anthropological and political science literature on clientelism.

Anthropological definitions of clientelism developed as scholars analysed the cumulative body of ethnographic case studies of patron-client relationships in specific societies and identified commonalities (Eisenhardt 1989). This resulted in an extrapolated anthropological characterisation of traditional patron-client relationships as face-to-face, informal, asymmetrical, interpersonal relationships designed to facilitate unequal yet mutually beneficial exchange, sustained by norms of reciprocity and social obligation (Eisenstadt and Roniger 1980; Graziano 1976; Weingrod 1968).

Definitions of clientelism offered by political scientists took a more prominent place in the literature once factors such as colonialism, industrialisation, development, modernisation, and the introduction of democratic forms of governance, caused societies to reorganise. (Eisenstadt and Roniger 1980; Kettering 1988; Lande et al. 1977; Schmidt 1974). Such radical social reorganisation led to a diversification of forms of clientelism (Eisenstadt and Roniger 1980), with some traditional expressions of clientelism declining as new contemporary political forms emerged (Eisenstadt and Roniger 1980; Kettering 1988; Lande et al. 1977; Schmidt 1974). Political definitions of clientelism tend to incorporate many of the same characteristics as anthropological definitions, however, some scholars refute the notion that patron-client relationships need always be 'face to face' (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Muno 2010; Stokes 2007). This is due to the significant role of brokers in political clientelism, who facilitate connections and exchange between local-level clients and more geographically distant bureaucrats and political party figure patrons, often through the formation of patron-client clusters. This presents a point of difference from scholarship on traditional anthropological forms of clientelism, which tend to examine more localised interpersonal vertical relationships (Graziano 1976; Scott 1972).

Another significant point of divergence between anthropological and political science characterisations of clientelism pertains to the utility of reciprocal exchange. The classic patron-client relationships studied by early anthropologists included the landlord-tenant relationship (Weingrod 1968), and the fictive kin 'godparent' relationship, customary in parts of Latin America (Wolf 2013). These were only examples, and early scholarship recognised that patron-client relationships could be formed with a range of persons who by their position, wealth, birthright, or proximity to power, held a higher position in the social hierarchy and had access to concentrated resources (goods, services, protection, opportunity, social capital) (Eisenstadt and Roniger 1980; Foster 1963; Korovkin 1988) that could be distributed to clients for survival, security, or upward social mobility purposes (Blau 2017; Foster 1963). The source of a patron's power and resource, and the utility of reciprocal exchange, was not limited to any one site, sphere, or purpose.

For many political scientists, the sphere in which political clientelism manifests and its purpose acts as additional fixed boundaries for definitional and identification purposes. Relationships are often only categorised as clientelist when they are part of an informal mechanism used in political party processes and electoral strategies. Reciprocal exchange is also more narrowly conceived as the exchange of public resources for political allegiance and votes (Gallego 2015; Graziano 1976). There is some recognition by political science scholars of the involvement of private resources in clientelist exchange, however, mostly only as it pertains to party-political ends (Yıldırım and Kitschelt 2020). Therefore, while anthropological definitions leave more space for new expressions of clientelism to be identified, the more rigid and site-specific definitions offered by many political scientists serve to exclude all other forms.

Noting the disparity in characterisation, Weingrod (1968) questioned whether these anthropological and political forms of clientelism can be meaningfully denoted by a common descriptive term. In summarising these distinct vantage points, he stated that 'to the anthropologist, patronage

refers to a type of social relationship, while to the political scientist, patronage is a form of government' (Weingrod 1968, 360). Weingrod's (1968) statement reveals the locus of the main conflicts in existing clientelism scholarship that have muddied the academic waters and stifled theory-building efforts. These are the lack of an accepted definition, the level at which social analysis of clientelism can occur, and disagreements regarding the utility of clientelism and whether clientelism exists outside of party-political settings.

The first conflict is the lack of an accepted definition that could be used to create a primary category of clientelism and allow for a taxonomy of forms of clientelism to be identified, described, and differentiated (Graziano 1976). The absence of this definition and taxonomy results in descriptions of different forms of clientelism being presented as competing and conflicting concepts, rather than subtypes, and creates a sense of the term being used to refer to distinctly different phenomena (Graziano 1976; Weingrod 1968). This in turn results in disputed conceptualisations of the purpose of clientelism, including whether modern post-colonial manifestations of clientelism can be removed from machine politics and entail the distribution of solely private resources (Swamy 2016). This subcomponent of the definitional conflict stifles efforts to examine and diagnose clientelism in new non-party political sites, including in unregulated orphanages where the utility of clientelism may be divorced from the party-political realm.

The second most prominent conflict in the literature relates to the level at which social analysis of clientelism is conducted. Here disagreement exists as to whether clientelism is appropriate to depict macrosocial-state level political systems or whether it is suitable only to describe forms of vertical social interactions, which by nature of being interpersonal, exist solely at the microsocial level (Hilgers 2011). This results in poor differentiation between clientelism and other similar terms that describe particularistic forms of governance or political organisation at the state level (Hilgers 2011, 568).

Hilgers (2011) work on conceptual stretching provides the clearest articulation of the roots of this conflation. She notes that it stems from scholars indiscriminately using the term clientelism to describe phenomena that share a family resemblance with clientelism without exhibiting all the same core characteristics. Specifically, it is the omission of 'interpersonal' from the traditional core characterisation of clientelism that paves the way for the term to be conceptually stretched beyond the bounds of the microsocial level and used to depict meso and macro-level structures, including forms of government (Hilgers 2011). This is problematic as the omission of interpersonal as a defining characteristic has occurred without theoretical justification or recognition of the extent to which this represents a departure from the fundamental concept of clientelism. In the absence of a rationale, this omission constitutes uncritical use of the term clientelism and has contributed to the lack of precision and confusion surrounding the term.

The lack of definitional and conceptual clarity surrounding clientelism presents several barriers to the concept's effective use. Scholars such as Satori (1991, 249) and Gerring (1999, 360) argue that when concepts in the field of social science are inadequately formed, they may be subjected to 'conceptual stretching' and 'scrunching' to the point of becoming amorphous. This is evident in scholarship on clientelism, where new arguments employing the term in a broader or more limited fashion have been introduced without empirical verification (Allen 2011) or reconciliation with existing theorisation (Hilgers 2011). As Gerring (1999, 361) points out, the ambiguous use of concepts stifles theoretical development, as 'arguments employing such terms have a tendency to fly past each other; work on these subjects does not cumulate'. Hilgers (2011, 568) asserts the degree of conceptual stretching has left the term clientelism devoid of any specific meaning or 'descriptive power' and makes it a 'poor concept difficult to operationalise and to use for theory-building'. The lack of precise definition impedes attempts to identify and examine clientelism's influence within specific contemporary social phenomena. This includes the role of clientelism in facilitating child institutionalisation and exploitation in unregulated orphanages.

Resolving conflict and developing a conceptual model

As Graziano (1976) argued, at the heart of the conceptual confusion issue lies the lack of a taxonomic logic for clientelism, and a lack of differentiation between first and second-tier taxonomic terms. Resolving this issue requires first articulating a characterisation of clientelism as a primary category (Hilgers 2011; Satori 1991), stripped of any time, place, space, or site-specific descriptors. This would allow for specific types of clientelism, including political clientelism and traditional clientelism, to both comfortably occupy the second tier as subordinate subtypes, and resolve the current sense of different forms of clientelism being posited in oppositional terms. Additionally, the development of a taxonomic logic would dramatically reorientate the interpretation framework for existing and future literary contributions to clientelism. It would enable scholarship that elucidates particularistic features of one subtype of clientelism to be located within the taxonomy and viewed as compatible rather than conflicting. Most significantly, the development of a taxonomy, inclusive of a core characterisation of clientelism as a basis for forming a primary category definition, would pave the way for new contemporary subtypes of clientelism, in new sites such as orphanages, to be identified, and incorporated into the hierarchy (Collier and Mahon 1993).

The work of prominent scholars such as Hilgers (2011), Graziano (1976), Munro (2010) and to an extent Hicken (2011), have paved the way for the development of such a taxonomy. These scholars sought to resolve barriers to theory building by steering away from definitional debates. Instead, they identified the essential characteristics of clientelism, those unanimously expressed in varying forms and recognised across disciplines, to create a theoretically grounded, analytically useful, and stable concept of clientelism, with clear boundaries that enables differentiation from neighbouring concepts. By doing so they in essence developed a characterisation of clientelism as a primary category and first-tier taxonomical term (Collier and Mahon 1993; Hilgers 2011; Sartori 1984).

The characteristics of clientelism that have been recognised as essential by these scholars include dyadic personal relationships, asymmetrical, reciprocal and mutually beneficial, enduring, voluntary, and diffuse (Graziano 1976; Hicken 2011; Hilgers 2011; Munro 2013). These characteristics are described in the section below.

Essential characteristics of clientelism

Dyadic personal relationship

At the heart of clientelism is a dyadic relationship between a patron and a client (Torsello 2012). Patron-client dyads are vertically formed between persons of unequal power and status (Scott 1972). In the patron-client dyad, the person with the higher position in the social hierarchy and with greater access to or control over distributable resources occupies the position of patron. The person with lower status and a lesser resource base occupies the position of the client.

Asymmetrical

Patron-client dyads are asymmetrical in terms of social status, power, exchange, and access to resources (Graziano 1976; Munro 2010). They are hierarchical and forged between patrons who belong to a higher social stratum, based on factors such as wealth, formal positions, and lineage, and clients in lower positions seeking support and protection (Scott 1972).

Reciprocal and mutually beneficial

Patron-client relationships exist to facilitate unequal reciprocal exchange of non-comparable goods (Gallego 2015; Graziano 1976; Munro 2010). Patrons typically offer clients access to material goods, resources, opportunities, services, and protection, in exchange for loyalty, personal support and sometimes resources (Gallego 2015). Clientelist exchange is a conditional form of resource distribution (Hicken 2011; Powell 1970; Torsello 2012). Each offer of resource binds the receiving party to an obligation to reciprocate. The exact nature of the obligation does not need to be specified in

advance and reciprocation need not be immediate (Muno 2010). When one party gives, they amass a social credit that can be called upon in the future as needs arise (Scott 1972).

Enduring

Patron-client relationships are enduring partly because of the instrumental nature of reciprocal exchange (Hilgers 2009; Pellicer et al. 2021; Scott 1972). The promise of future benefits dissuades both parties from taking action that would constitute a severance of the tie. However, patron-client relationships are equally sustained by social norms of obligation, which generate a retrospective sense of debt that must be repaid for benefits already received (Gouldner 1960; Lawson and Greene 2014). In highly relational, hierarchical, and shame-based collectivist cultures, these norms surrounding gift reciprocity act as social contracts (Hilgers 2011; Kyriacou 2016) that are binding and often imbued with the threat of consequence (Fox 1994). The power differential between patrons and clients further serves to reinforce the threat of consequence and discourage nonconformity with social obligations.

Voluntary

Patron-client relationships are described as voluntary as neither party is legally obliged or contractually bound in the formation or the maintenance of the tie. However, the notion of voluntarism in clientelism is highly nuanced and paradoxical (Eisenstadt and Roniger 1980; Hilgers 2009). Patrons and clients alike are free to make approaches, initiate reciprocity, or accept or reject an offer of clientelism (Auerbach and Thachil 2018; Hilgers 2009; Nichter and Peress 2017). In theory, both parties can exercise agency in the severance of a clientelist tie (Gouldner 1960). However, in practice, the power asymmetry and social obligations innate to patron-client relationships constrain agency and volition, most notably for clients on the lower rungs of the social strata (Eisenstadt and Roniger 1980; Kimchoeun et al. 2007; Yildirim and Kitschelt 2020). Numerous scholars characterise voluntarism in patron-client relationships as a variable factor existing on a continuum, influenced by the size of the client's resource base relative to the patron and degree of competition or presence of alternatives (Hilgers 2009; Nichter and Peress 2017; Scott 1972).

Diffuse

The characterisation of patron-client relationships as diffuse stems from the flexible, unspecified and unconstrained nature of the reciprocal exchange (Hilgers 2011; Scott 1972). Unlike market-based exchanges or contracts, patron-client reciprocity is rarely pre-negotiated or defined at the point of forming a clientelist tie. Similarly, the expectations surrounding reciprocation are not made explicit when a tangible offer or request is initially made. Obligations remain amorphously suspended in time and place, until a need arises and triggers the obligation to reciprocate. Resources given in exchange need not be equivalent in nature or value (Gouldner 1960). The indeterminate and diffuse nature of reciprocity engenders patron-client relationships with a degree of uncertainty and vulnerability (Mitchell, Cropanzano, and Quisenberry 2012), which contributes to the risk of clients who lack power and viable alternatives, experiencing coercion or exploitation within these relationships (Scott 1972).

Implications of identifying the essential characteristics of clientelism

Hilgers (2009, 2011) asserts that, in the absence of a categorical definition, these six essential characteristics of clientelism should be viewed as a fixed indivisible set used to identify clientelism. In addition to enabling the identification of patron-client relationships, other significant corollaries of this approach resolve the various conflicts in clientelism literature.

First, by employing this fixed set of essential characteristics as the basis for identification, clientelism is necessarily situated at the microsocial level of analysis, based on its characterisation as a dyadic interpersonal relationship (Hilgers 2011). Second, once confined to the microsocial realm,

clientelism is immediately differentiated from neighbouring terms, including patrimonialism, neo-patrimonialism, pork barrelling and authoritarianism (Hilgers 2011). These are systems- and state-level forms of political organisation and therefore exist at the macro-level for analytical and descriptive purposes. As Hilgers (2011) notes, this delineation does not mean that clientelism cannot be expressed within state-level political apparatuses, or associated meso-level organisations and bureaucracies. However, it does negate defining these organisations or systems as clientelist overall (Hilgers 2011, 573). Rather it is the relationships between individuals, one or more of whom may hold positions within meso and macro-level structures and draw their legitimacy as a patron from these positions (resource and power), that are clientelist in nature (Silverman 1965).

The third corollary of this approach is that it describes clientelism as a primary category and first-tier taxonomical term, free of site or purpose-specific definitional constraints. This resolves the issue of whether contemporary forms of clientelism can exist outside of political settings and for non-party-political purposes. Such an approach recognises that these are simply sites in which one subtype of clientelism finds expression. It provides a framework for new expressions to be examined, in previously undocumented sites. This approach would clear a pathway for relationships between orphanage directors, donors, recruiters and the families of children in care to be evaluated solely against the core characteristics of clientelism, irrespective of any party-political association.

There is one final advantage of this approach, which forms a critical part of the novel conceptual model being proposed. When clientelism, as a primary category, is appropriately divorced from contextual subtypes definitionally, and differentiated from similar yet distinct meso and macro-level phenomena descriptively, it becomes possible to analyse and pinpoint the broader macro-level influences that make certain societies more conducive to manifestations of clientelism than others. The benefit of this is that despite being discrete for analytical purposes, micro, meso and macrosocial levels and phenomena are far from disconnected. They are nested and influence each other in several ways. First, they are embedded in the same overarching cultural and social arena, the characteristics of which shape to varying degrees the social structures and norms across all levels (Bolíbar 2016). Second, macro-level social structures exert a strong downward influence. These structures create environments that allow microsocial interactions with shared characteristics to flourish and constrain those built on opposing values (Korovkin 1988). As Korovkin (1988) noted, these macro-level influences are capable of not only shaping interpersonal relationships expressed within macro and meso structures but can penetrate right down to the lowest level and affect social interactions in the furthest removed local communities.

Several scholars have sought to identify which macro-level political, cultural, economic, and social factors create an environment conducive to clientelism's expression across varying sectors and levels. In addition to thriving under patrimonial and neo-patrimonial political regimes (Hilgers 2011), Muno (2010) notes that clientelism fits seamlessly within highly stratified societies and cultures steeped in hierarchy. Roniger (2015) adds that clientelism is more pervasive in certain types of stratified societies. He argues that it is the additional elements of non-ascriptive stratification and deep structural inequality that promote clientelism (Roniger 2015). In these sociocultural settings, interclass social interaction is possible and upward social mobility is negotiated through informal channels to counteract structural barriers to accessing support and opportunity through more democratic means (Roniger 2015). Additionally, Hilgers (2011) notes the interplay between economic factors and social attitudes, arguing that long-term resource constraints lead to the endorsement of clientelism as a normative and necessary survival mechanism. She asserts that, because this precludes clientelism from being perceived negatively as a 'violation of politico-institutional norms', there is little social pressure exerted on its curtailment (Hilgers 2011, 576). Weak State apparatuses have also been identified as a factor that promotes recourse to clientelism, and widespread participation amongst poor and marginalised populations (De Sousa 2008; Lauth 2000; Shami 2019; Stokes 2007).

As Muno (2013) and De Sousa (2008) stressed, it is inaccurate to construct these macro-level factors that enable clientelism as proxies to measure clientelism. This would result once again in the conflation of clientelism and macro-level social phenomena. However, diagnosing these macro-level attributes as present in society at large is useful in the development of causal theory for new and previously undocumented forms of clientelism, as it provides a cultural and institutional explanation for the propensity for clientelism in certain societies (De Sousa 2008).

De Sousa (2008, 8) further notes the absence of an effective welfare state (derived from weak state apparatus) leaves a critical gap that clientelism becomes instrumental in filling. In these contexts, non-government organisations (NGOs) often form a parallel welfare system and assume many of the welfare service delivery functions that are neglected responsibilities of the State. This is common for child protection services in many low-and middle-income countries where budgetary allocations to child welfare are insufficient, and services are predominantly NGO-run and donor-funded (MacLean 2017). This often results in an overreliance on institutional care due to donor preferences for funding orphanages. These NGOs are as prone to being influenced by and mirroring broader social and cultural idiosyncrasies as other meso-level structures. As such NGOs, and their services, including orphanages, are vulnerable to becoming sites of clientelism (Bratton 1989; Onyx 2008; Wenar 2006).

In addition, certain characteristics that stem from NGO services being situated within a parallel system in a weak state context increase their vulnerability to clientelism. First, due to a lack of State capacity and resources, NGO services are rarely subject to sufficient regulation, oversight, or accountability, which MacLean (2017) notes are necessary to curtail particularism and ensure rights-based and democratic access to services. These unregulated or under-regulated NGO services are consequently able to employ highly discretionary strategies to determine the service design and scope, resource distribution and service access (Ebrahim 2003). This is exacerbated by the generally small-scale nature of NGO services, which necessitates discretionary decision-making regarding access, even when a beneficiary criterion is established (Anciano 2018). Second, NGO services that substitute for public services in weak state contexts are typically funded by international donors and therefore positioned as a middle piece within the international aid value chain (Smith 2010; Wenar 2006). This value chain is inherently top-down hierarchical (Edwards 2012; Kumi and Copestake 2022) and involves the discretionary and particularistic distribution of resources by donors to and by their in-country recipient partners alike (Drollinger 2010; Platteau and Gaspart 2003; Swamy 2016). This establishes multiple tiers of asymmetrical dyadic reciprocal exchange between donors, consultants, aid brokers, NGO partners, and beneficiaries (Alexander 2018). Development agendas are often outworked through relational networks that operate parallel to, or instead of, bureaucratic structures (Ebrahim 2003; Kumi and Copestake 2022). These factors lend themselves to a charity model of service provision, where services can become discretionary gifts (Mauss 2002) distributed through personal networks or in response to personal appeals (Fowler and Mati 2019). This makes them conducive to service providers positioning as patrons to beneficiaries, and beneficiaries as clients to service providers (Gupta 2014). Would-be beneficiaries, accustomed to accessing public services via patron-client relationships, are likely to view the act of making clientelist approaches to NGOs, as a normative means of securing and sustaining support (Gupta 2014; Hilgers 2009; Oreilly 2010). Consequently, clientelist networks are readily able to form within the aid and development landscape, in which donors, often unknowingly, hold the position of higher-order patrons and are at the top of an upward-facing accountability chain (Ebrahim 2003; Townsend and Townsend 2004; Wallace, Bornstein, and Chapman 2007).

The above description of small NGO-run services positioned within parallel welfare systems aptly describes the situation of orphanages in many low-and middle-income countries where a significant proportion of facilities are typically privately run, small-scale, foreign-funded, donor-driven and where many are unregistered and/or unregulated (Abebe 2009; van Doore and Nhep 2021; van IJzen-doorn et al. 2020). In addition, as unregulated orphanages operate outside formal gatekeeping mechanisms, admission processes are entirely discretionary and may be initiated by families requiring

support, or by orphanage operators seeking to populate their services to meet beneficiary quotas, which are often donor-determined (Van Doore 2016). In Cambodia, for example, of the 406 institutions or ‘orphanages’ identified through the residential care services mapping exercise conducted in 2015, 95% were NGO-run, 100% were foreign donor-funded, 21% were operating without an MOU with any government agency, and 38% had never been inspected by mandated authorities (MoSVY 2017; UNICEF 2011). Cases of recruitment and transfer of children into orphanages outside of formal gatekeeping mechanisms were widely reported and initiated both by families and orphanage operators (Miller and Beazley 2022; Unicef 2011). Accountability was primarily upward and donor-facing, as evidenced by the disproportionate amount of influence donors held over the actions and decisions of orphanage operators (Nhep and van Doore 2021; Unicef 2011).

In several countries, scholars have documented accounts of NGOs being established for the primary purpose of accessing donor funding (Hearn 2007; Smith 2010). In these cases, services become pretexts for personal gain and signal the commodification of beneficiaries. This has been well documented concerning orphanages in a range of countries (Cheney and Ucembe 2019; Cheney and Rotabi 2017; Guiney and Mostafanezhad 2015; Rubenstein et al. 2018; Van Doore 2016; van Doore and Nhep 2021), further indicating the potential for these services to become prime sites of clientelism, including its more coercive forms. In addition, a study conducted in Morocco documented children as subjects of exchange in adoption requests occurring within clientelist relationships (Fioole 2015). Such documentation points to the critical importance of having the means to identify clientelism within NGO and privatised alternative care services, and an ability to detect the point at which clientelist relationships may transform these services into potential sites of coercion and exploitation.

A conceptual model for identifying forms of clientelism in new sites

Overview of the conceptual model

This paper proposes a novel conceptual model for identifying clientelism in new sites, including in orphanages. The model comprises three aspects: macro-level sociocultural attributes conducive to clientelism, macro-level political attributes conducive to clientelism and the essential characteristics of clientelism. The model depicts the interaction between these three aspects and proposes that clientelism is likely to occur in contexts where macro-sociocultural and political attributes conducive to clientelism are identified as coexisting. Contexts that exhibit both sets of macro-level attributes conducive to clientelism are referred to within the model as ‘generally enabling environments’. The model proposes that clientelism can be confirmed when microsocial relationships found within this generally enabling environment, exhibit all the essential characteristics of clientelism. In addition, the model proposes that a site located within the generally enabling environment, in which a clientelist relationship is identified, can be confirmed as a site of clientelism.

The model proposes a framework for conducting a two-part diagnostic analysis to determine whether:

- (1) a macro-level sociocultural and political environment can be diagnosed as generally enabling of clientelism, thus providing a rationale for clientelism’s manifestation in new sites within this context,
- (2) a specific micro-level relationship can be identified as patron-client,
- (3) a site in which clientelism has not previously been evidenced academically can be substantiated as a new site of clientelism.

This model is depicted in the diagram below [Figure 1](#).

The diagram provides a visual representation of how macro-level sociocultural and political attributes intersect to create a generally enabling environment in which clientelism may occur

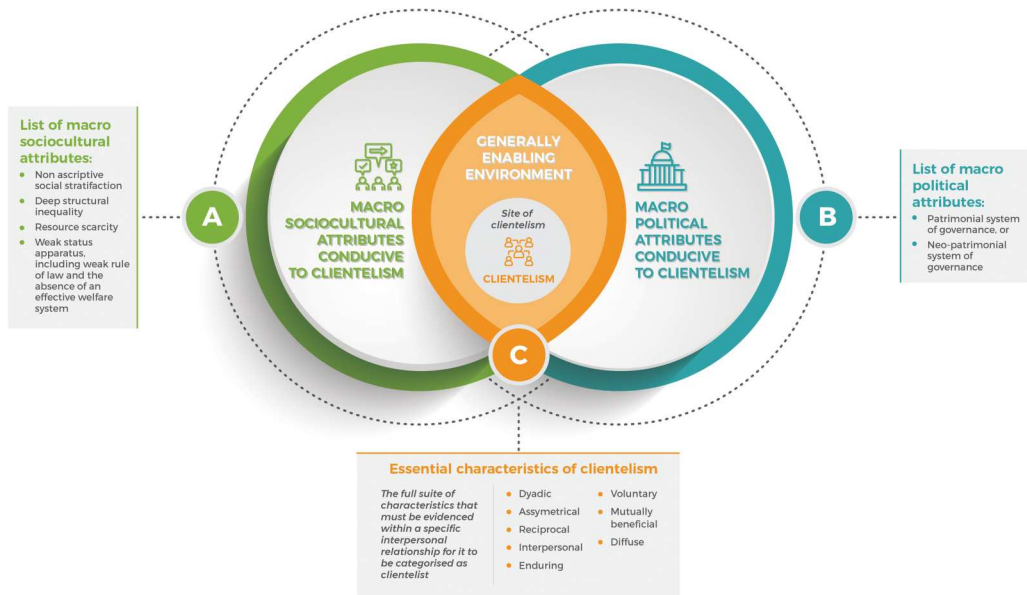


Figure 1. Conceptual Model for Identifying Clientelism in New Sites.

and sites of clientelism may be identified. Parts A and B of the model include lists of attributes that are integral to the circles, and which set the parameters for the macro-level analysis to diagnose an environment as generally enabling of clientelism. The generally enabling environment is represented by the intersecting area of the two circles shaded orange. Part C of the model provides the parameters for the microsocial analysis and lists the essential characteristics to identify clientelism within a relationship. Once clientelism is detected, the site in which the patron-client relationship was identified can be confirmed as a site of clientelism. Sites of clientelism are indicated by the grey circle located within the orange-shaded generally enabling environment in the diagram.

Conducting the two-part analysis to identify forms of clientelism in new sites

Applying the conceptual model for identifying forms of clientelism in new sites involves a two-part analysis. The first part of the analysis is to detect the presence of macro-level attributes conducive to clientelism to determine whether the context constitutes a generally enabling environment for clientelism. The macro-level analysis is further broken down into two parts. The first part is to detect the presence of sociocultural attributes conducive to clientelism, shown in Part A of the diagram. These attributes are non-ascriptive social stratification; deep structural inequality; resource scarcity; and weak state apparatuses, including weak rule of law and the absence of an effective welfare system. The second part of the macro-level analysis is to detect the presence of political system attributes conducive to clientelism. This is shown in Part B of the diagram and includes patrimonial and neo-patrimonial systems of governance. These forms of government are conducive to clientelism as they share many of the same characteristics and exert a downward force on the meso and micro-levels, making all sites found at those levels also conducive to clientelism.

When all the macro-level sociocultural and political attributes, listed in Parts A and B of the model, are present within a particular society, that society can be classified as a generally enabling environment for clientelism. This enabling environment, represented by the intersecting area of the two circles in the diagram, is the nexus at which clientelism is likely to manifest at the microsocial level. Within this enabling environment, patron-client relationships will be incentivised and supported rather than constrained by the broader sociocultural and political environment. These

influences are broad-reaching, penetrating all levels and sites. This makes all sites and systems within generally enabling environments, potential sites for clientelism.

Part C of the model is to detect clientelism within specific relationships and to identify sites of clientelism. Part C includes a list of the set of essential characteristics that must all be evidenced for a specific microsocial relationship to be classified as patron-client. Once a specific relationship has been confirmed as patron-client on this basis, the site where that relationship found expression can also be confirmed as a site of clientelism.

Therefore, in summarising the model, Part C alone enables the identification of a relationship as patron-client, and the site where that relationship was found as a site of clientelism. Parts A and B of the model are included to provide a framework for identifying whether society, at a national or state level, is a generally enabling environment. This provides causal reasoning for the identification of clientelism, made through the application of Part C. This helps to substantiate the identification of new forms of clientelism or the detection of clientelism in a previously unconfirmed site.

Applying the conceptual model to orphanages as a site

The application of this conceptual model to the relational ecosystem of orphanages, as with any site, requires the same two-part assessment. First, the macro-level society in which the orphanage is situated must be evaluated for the sociocultural and political attributes listed in Part A and B of the model. The detection of all these attributes would confirm that society is generally enabling of clientelism and that orphanages constitute a site where patron-client relationships could theoretically manifest with little constraint.

Next the relationships between the stakeholders involved in a specific orphanage, including directors, recruiters, donors, and children and their families, must be examined for the presence of the essential characteristics of clientelism listed in Part C. If evidenced, one or more of these relationships could be classified as patron-client, which would provide empirical evidence of the phenomenon in the relational ecosystem of orphanages. This would allow for broader clientelism theory to be applied to investigate the ramifications of patron-client relationships for children's recruitment, transfer and exploitation in unregulated orphanages.

Conclusion

Examining the relationships between stakeholders involved in orphanages, including orphanage directors, recruiters, donors and the children and their families, specifically for the presence of clientelism, is critical to closing gaps in knowledge regarding factors that contribute towards child institutionalisation, particularly in unregulated settings. This includes improving knowledge regarding the mechanisms for recruitment, transfer, trafficking, and exploitation of children in institutional care settings, which is required to develop effective care reform strategies. Current definitional and conceptual conflicts in clientelism literature hamper the application of clientelism theory to the relational ecosystem of orphanages for classification purposes and for the more critical work of analysing the range of legal, policy and practical ramifications. To overcome these challenges, this article identifies, synthesises, and builds upon existing tenets within clientelism scholarship to propose a novel conceptual model for the identification of clientelism in new sites.

The novel conceptual model proposed in this article can be used to detect and confirm clientelism in any site where it may be suspected. It contributes to clientelism literature and theory building in general. Nonetheless, it was developed with a specific purpose and hypothesis to detect and confirm whether clientelism is operational within the relational ecosystem of orphanages. Further research to apply the conceptual model proposed in this article to orphanages as a site is critical to identifying clientelism in orphanages, and to addressing gaps in understanding regarding children's recruitment and transfer orphanages, particularly unregulated settings. Should clientelism be confirmed as operational within orphanages, broader clientelism theory could be applied to analyse

its impacts in this setting. This would allow for any potential links between clientelism and child institutionalisation and exploitation to be elucidated and for the ramifications for child protection, the development and implementation of care reform strategies and for combatting orphanage trafficking to be explored.

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ORCID

Rebecca Nhep  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0115-2175>

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