Campesinos, Brokers and Politicians: Revisiting the Power of Exchanging Favours in Local Colombian Politics

Jairo Tocancipá-Falla, PhD
Cauca University, Comparative Social Studies Group
Colombia

Abstract

Patronage in the form of an exchange of gifts, goods and services for votes has characterised Colombian politics for many decades. As in the past, this practice continues to be labelled as "corrupt" because it is believed that "conciencias" (consciences) are bought. In order to explain why these practices continue in spite of recent laws and other national regulations prohibiting them, this paper casts its analysis of these patron-client relations within the theoretical framework developed by Marcel Mauss' work on the gift. Adapted from this scholar, 'giving and exchanging' are thus approached as strategies to establish social networks in which political parties, rural brokers and campesinos become entangled. Furthermore, it is argued that the pervasive nature of these practices in rural Colombia can be understood by reference to their social history. The paper concludes by considering the prospects for overcoming or rearranging this patronage system within the rural context.

Introduction

Following Parliamentary elections in March 2009 in Colombia, a national TV channel played footage showing leaders in a poor neighbourhood in the north of the country giving away zinc roofing tiles to inhabitants who had casts their votes in favour of a particular regional politician. The footage was widely presented as proof of how people are 'corrupted' through a common practice known as '*politiquería*'[1].

The term '*politiquería*' is used in Colombia, and in many Latin-American countries, to refer to a dyadic system of gift-exchange in which patrons and clients are dialectically integrated[2]. During the 1970 and 1980 social research on this topic was prominent. Yet in the following decades this phenomenon received little attention since the practice of '*politiquería'* should have disappeared because of the laws and the 1991 National Constitution Reform that prohibit it. However, this practice is still persistent in Colombian politics, something that is observed during the pre-election periods every three years.

This paper rehabilitates the study of '*politiquería'* in order to address the problem of why patron-client relations and gifts exchanges still pervade social life in rural Colombia after numerous discourses made by politicians focused to eradicate these practices. From a theoretical perspective, it will be necessary to address the following questions: (1) ¿What types of obligations do gifts engender within patron-client relations? (2) ¿What role does gift exchange play in creating social networks within the political domain in rural Colombia?

My argument is that in rural Colombia few alternatives exist to supplant the exchanging of services and gifts that favour patron-client relations, especially within the political and economic domains. This argument is presented in three sections. The first section sets out the current theoretical framework on gift exchanges and patron-client relations in the Latin-American context with some examples from Colombia.

[1] Other forms of "*politiquería"* are the well known "*trasteo de votos*" – moving votes -, which consists of paying potencial voters to register their names and IDs for the elections in a territory different from that in which they usually vote.

[2] In most parts of these countries, patron-client relations express themselves in different forms, albeit that they also share common features. One example is the expression of "*caciquismo",* an indigenous term that in Spanish speaking countries refers to the unequal relationship between a leader or chief and his community (cfr Friedrich 1977; Romero-Maura 1977; and Wlodarski 1979). In Colombia the term "*caciquismo"* serves to provide this meaning of patron-client relations. In México, by contrast, this practice is known by such labels as '*enchufe*' (*plug in* or useful contact) (Wolf 2001:181).

The second section presents the concrete example of Sucre municipality in the south of Cauca department, Colombia, in order to illustrate the development of two competing forms of exchange, that applied by rural communities in daily life and that applied by politicians and based on the premise of exchanging services and goods for votes. The concluding third section suggests new avenues for research into this topic.

Patron – client relations and exchanging gifts and services: understanding the morality of "corruption"

I would like to begin by discussing a set of keywords: Patron – client relations (or patronage), and exchanging gifts and services.

Patronage

Definitions of 'patron-client' relations share core similarities, although important differences also exist between them (Weingrod 1977:323). Some definitional features of patron-client relations are paradoxically integrated: from solidarity to inequality, from the legal to the illegal, and from voluntary to obligatory action (Eisenstadt and Roniger 1981:277). Weingrod (1977:324) compares the anthropological and political usage of this term.

> [Anthropological analysis is concerned with] persons of unequal authority, yet linked through ties of interest and friendship, manipulate their relationships in order to attain their ends (…) [Meanwhile, politicians are concerned with] the ways in which party politicians distribute public jobs or special favors in exchange for electoral support.

For Gellner (1977:3) patronage is a "style, a moral climate. In small intimate society, quasi-patronal relations can hardly form a system, either in the sense of forming a larger network, or in the sense of being self-conscious". Patronage, then, he suggests can be seen as the partiality of a centralised state and defective forms of the market and bureaucracies that provide the context for its emergence. This aspect of the definition allows us to grasp the morality of patron-client relations as well as its links to the State structure:

> Patron-client ties can be seen to arise within a state structure in which authority is dispersed and state activity limited in scope, and in which considerable separation exists between the levels of village, city and state. Party-directed patronage, on the other hand, is associated with the expanding scope and general proliferation of state activities, and also with the growing integration of village, city and state (Weingrod 1977: 325).

In this latter sense, clienteles work in networks (Jay 1964, Boissevain 1966, Boissevain 1968, Lemarchand and Legg 1972, Landé 1977, Mayer 1977, Powell 1977, Scott 1977, Boissevain 1979)[3], a relationship that was widely discussed in the 1960s and 1970s. Both, clienteles and networks, are cognate terms although they are not necessarily co-existent. According to Jay (1964:138), for example, a network can be "conceived as a piece of a totality of relationships" and/or "as the totality of all the units connected by a certain type of relationships". Others like Boissevain (1968:546), decompose this term and suggests that any social or personal network share at least three main characteristics: one, it is ego-centric; second, the links between that centre and the others "are structurally diverse"; and third, those relations "are qualitative diverse". In a similar vein, and for the case of India, Bailey (1969:44) acknowledges the complexities involved in political relationships between leaders and followers but underlining two aspects, "a moral and a transactional element" that are pertaining to different social circles. Similarly to Boissevain scheme "a leader may have an inner circle of retainers whose attachment to him is moral and other circle of followers whose attachment to him is transactional. The former are called his *core*: and the latter his following. For a word that covers both categories I will use 'supporters'". (Bailey 1969:45).

Whilst the anthropological debate about patronage focused ethnographically on Asia and the Mediterranean, similar studies were conducted in Latin American countries, including Colombia (Osbornn 1968, Schmidt 1974, Schmidt 1977, Lora 1984, Uribe 1986, Buitrago 1990). Schmidt (1977), for instance, explains the typical case in a rural Andean community in which he identifies the broker as a key actor in patron-client relations. A broker is somebody who links "together individuals, and clusters of individuals, providing sense of participation and some flow of resources to the clients" (Schmidt 1977:309).

---

[3] The idea of network analysis has been developed in past decades. Initially considered more a "method with theoretical implications" (Scott 1977:794, Boissevain 1979:392), more recently these theoretical implications have been crystallised in the form of Actor-Network Theory – ANT (for a definition, examples, and critical review see Latour 1988, Singleton and Mike 1993, Mol and Law 1994).

This flow of resources operates at the level of the exchange of gifts, goods and services. These flow within a social structure where the leader, a person recognised by rural communities and someone who deals with communitarian issues, can be a broker and as such he (less she) [4] acts as an ego or form his *core*, to follow Baileys' term, within the network playing a role in the establishment of this kind of exchanges. In a different case, Osborn (1968) describes the overlapping in practice between patronage and *compadrazgo* (co-parenthood) amongst *mestizos* and the indigenous group *kwaiker* in southern Colombia, a relationship that serves to the latter as an strategy of adapting into uneasy social conditions.

Summarising, *patronage* seems to be a term well researched in past decades in different social and cultural settings. However, these investigations appear to "naturalise" the expression in its moralizing and political terms. Perhaps, it is necessary to advance in examining its content as the ground of this permanent and pervading form of exchange.

System of gift exchange

From Marcel Mauss' *The Gift* (1990) onwards, scholars have explored the pertinence of gift exchange in terms of the differences between capitalist and "archaic societies" (e.g. Sahlins 1972, Gregory 1980, Braudel 1982, Gregory 1982, Levi-Strauss 1985, Appadurai 1986, Morris 1986, Piot 1991, Thomas 1991, Weiner 1992, Douglas 1994, Monaghan 1996, Godelier 1997). For the purposes of this paper, two relevant features of Mauss' work are emphasised: (1) his concept of a '*system of total services*' and (2) the temporal hierarchy that he applied to understand different forms of exchange.

By a '*system* of *total services*,' Mauss meant a form of contract involving different social groups: "it is not individuals but collectivities that impose obligations of exchange and contract upon each other" (Mauss 1990:5). This form of contract, moreover, is not a purely economic transaction but rather includes "acts of politeness; banquets, rituals, military services, women, children, dances, festivals, and fairs, in which economic transaction is only one feature of a much more general and enduring contract." (Ibid:5). Such total services are apparently voluntary and their manifestations can be seen in the exchanges of presents and gifts. As we will see later, in the case of Sucre, a municipality located at the Southwestern of Colombia in Cauca province, the form taken by such gifts is that of resources scarce in rural areas and obtained through contracts between politicians and leader-brokers (e.g. support for education, '*remesas*' – free food, money, house building materials, energy services, etc.).

For Mauss, the forms and logic of exchange present in "archaic societies" are "a stage in social evolution", albeit one that cannot be disconnected from more highly developed western societies and cultures: "Institutions of this type have really provided the transition towards our own forms of law and economy […] we are in a position to show that our own systems of law and economies have emerged from institutions similar to those we describe" (Mauss 1990:47). For some scholars, this temporal continuity in forms of exchange has had an important role to play in understanding social systems (e.g. Gregory 1980, Morris 1986, Monaghan 1996).

By contrast, this paper adopts the position that different forms of exchange are located less along an evolutionary scale than they are coeval and co-existential in rural areas as it happens in Colombia. The Sucre municipality case exemplifies the nature of interaction between rural communities and larger political systems, in which politicians adapt local rural forms of exchange towards their own political ends. In this manner, the social networks that result from patron-client relations are intermingled with different forms of exchange that still pervade social life in rural Colombia.

Despite the moral evaluation of 'corruption' associated with patron-client relations, its insertion within a social system that has traditionally attributed importance to gift exchanges allows a naturalising of this relationship and its assimilation to another more acceptable form of 'morality'. In this regard, 'totality' in Mauss' terms goes beyond a simple economic transaction and must be seen in relation to the political and economic context (Bailey 1969, Sahlins 1972). Sahlins, for example, suggests that: "the economic relation of giver-receiver is the political relation of leader-follower" (Sahlins 1972:133). This 'operative ideology' can be extended to the local, regional and national politics in Colombia which is coexistent to the contemporary changes that rural communities face today. In this regard, the notion of gifts assumes the quality of a contract established between the politician, the broker and the voter.

---

[4] In Colombia, most leaders in the 1960 were males. This trend has been changing in the last decades as new social practices and development discourses on education and social activities have increasingly involved women.

The uses of gifts and presents of different nature thus comprise components of the particular exchange system in which all these actors are involved in pre-electoral periods. As Mauss (1990:51) puts it: "The *res,* a service or thing, is an essential element in the contract", but in a contract that has a temporal dimension that is activated in our case mainly, although not exclusively, in pre electoral periods.

Reciprocity appears as the ground for this kind of relationship or contract (e.g. Gregory 1982, Cheal 1988, Gudeman and Rivera 1990, Mauss 1990, Godula 1993). Gudeman and Rivera, for example, summarise different approaches to reciprocity pointing out their origins in economics. For them, there are two basic models. One of them is dominated by Adam Smith's approach who considers exchange as the result of peoples' self-interest, according to "their differing skills and resources" (Gudeman and Rivera 1990:114), something akin to the discussion I provided above on patronage. On the other hand, there is the interpretation provided mainly by sociologists, anthropologists and economic historians such as Mauss, Malinowski, Lévi-Strauss, Sahlins and Polanyi. Lévi-Strauss assumes that reciprocity expresses "certain fundamental structures of the human mind and is a mode of integrating the inherent opposition between the self and other" (cited in Gudeman and Rivera 1990:114). Finally for Gudeman and Rivera, there is a third model in Colombia in which, as against these classical explanations, they emphasise on different voices intertwined in the exchange process, especially in discourses related to the house or the domestic economy. The household model contrasts with the "corporate model" which resembles the capitalist economy. In my criterion, this dichotomy, however, do not allow to perceive interactions between the two models and possible synergies that might occur amongst them. For our case, for example, *campesinos* or peasants were involved in systems of reciprocity based on favours, services, scholarships to leaders provided by politicians coming from the cities.

The idea of reciprocity, however, has already been discussed in the subdisciplinar field of political anthropology. Claessen (1979:9), suggests for example, that: "Sahlins […] placed reciprocity in the framework of politics in anthropology and showed different ways by which leaders can invest in relationships through the use of goods and services, thereby building up power." For our case, reciprocity contributes to shape different expectations of the actors (politicians, leaders and rural communities) and lead to the convergence of these actors in getting self-interests fulfilled. Thus, as part of a social system, reciprocity is extended in the mode of networks and in this way, a single social network can be embedded in other social networks (Schmidt 1977; Boissevain 1968) like in the triadic sets illustrated in Figure 1 (see below). During my fieldwork carried out in rural areas in past years, for instance, most leaders from Sucre had various contacts with local politicians in the capital city of Cauca province, Popayán, and other leaders from neighbour municipalities who were in permanent contact with them.

This network was actively used during the pre-electoral period and I knew of meetings in which different leaders were inviting others to listen up politicians, either in the locality or in Popayán. Through these meetings they learnt about the conditions of the gifts offers and services in pre-electoral periods and the ways of coordinating how accessing them. I also learnt that most of these contacts came through State institutions devoted to rural development programmes that were under control by politicians. In general, reciprocity provides the grounds for the emergence of Patron-client relations. Wolf (2001), for example, explains how two types of friendship relations in some societies might develop. Here he distinguishes between an expressive or emotional friendship, on the one hand; and instrumental friendships, on the other. The first form is supposed to be found in those social conditions when "the individual is strongly embedded in solidary groupings like communities and lineages and in which the social structure inhibits social and geographical mobility" (Ibid.:175).

In the second case, the instrumental friendship appears when one partner of the relationship develops hierarchical relations, "reaching a maximum point of imbalance", by granting services and goods. The synthesis of this relationship is characterised by either the provision of material and immaterial services or the provision of goods: "The offerings of patrons are more immediately tangible. They provide economic aid and protection against both the legal and illegal exactions of authority. Clients, in turn, pay back in more intangible assets" (Ibid.:180). However, as in any patron-client relationship, the lack of fulfilment in what is expected might have some implications in the sustainability of the relationship: "If a favour is not forthcoming, the relation is broken and the way is left open for a realignment of friendship bonds." (Ibid.:177). Conceptually, this latter definition is what in Colombia is called "*politiqueria*".

Thus, this leads us to the question on the geography under which these forms of gift exchange are possible. As with corruption, patron-client relations were initially seen as typical of underdeveloped countries, mainly those associated with the Mediterranean region.

However, recent studies on corruption have shown it to be a worldwide phenomenon: "Corruption is neither so benign in underdeveloped countries, nor is it so rare in advanced ones as previously thought." (Pinto-Duschinsky 1996:143). Moreover, patronage does not necessarily imply a particular kind of social relation between different social groups. The principal assumption here is that gift exchange can be coeval with contemporary forms of patron-client relations motivated by the shared needs of different social groups, rural and urban, indigenous and not indigenous, etc. Historically, patronage networks overlap with social systems to ensuring their reproduction at local level. This is exemplified for the Sucre peasant community in southern Colombia. To some extent, the example that follows also shows alternative modes of exchanging services that open practical possibilities for overcoming patron-client relations that although is incomplete, is at least an option.

Elections and Patron-client relations: exchanging gifts and services in rural areas in Cauca, Colombia

Based on previous discussions, this section describes two particular *momentos*[5] in the life history of a group of communities in Sucre municipality, southern Colombia, as an illustration of the social development of the different forms of gift exchange that currently prevail in many rural areas of this country. The first *momento* refers to the period from the 1950 up to the 1991 National Constitutional Reform. During this period 'vicious' practices of '*politiquería*' were developed in the form of deceitful promises made by politicians to rural communities; although this situation did not discourage the continuity of this practice in future political *momentos*. After the reform of the 1991 Constitution and the emergence of new social movements and communitarian processes political corrupt practices were apparently contested. The second *momento* refers to the period prior to 1999 when a group of leaders in Sucre began a process of independence from Bolívar municipality, a political move that materialised in December of that year. At that point, Sucre ceased being a district and became transformed into municipality, thereby accessing to a considerable amount of financial resources[6]. *Politiquería* involving patron-client relations was re-arranged as the availability of resources increased.

Sucre: Social and political changes in a network of communities

In administrative and political terms, Colombia is divided into 32 departments, which comprise 1098 municipalities (Dane 2006). Sucre is thus one of the 42 municipalities comprising Cauca province. Each municipality has a mayor and each village has a *Junta,* the principals of which act as a committee that takes decisions for each rural community. All these territorial divisions are enacted during the electoral period, especially for presidential, parliamentary and mayoral elections with the respective local council, forming a local network formed by political parties ascriptions[7]. For each political period voting tables are located in the main departmental capitals and also in some districts.
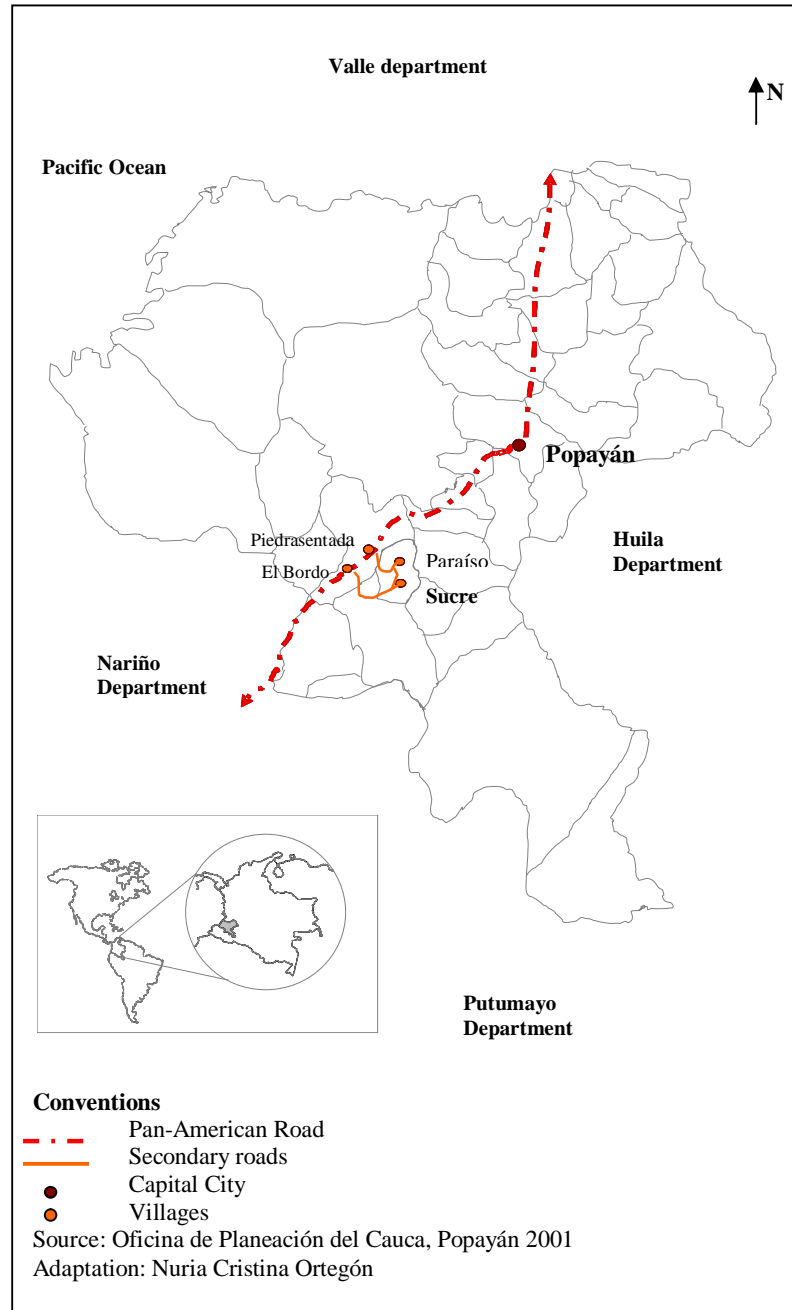
Sucre is located approximately 100 kilometres south of Popayán, the capital city of Cauca Department (see Map 1). Sucre municipality was founded in 1999 after leaders of 29 rural communities participated in a political movement to separate from the neighbouring municipality of Bolívar. Located at the foothill of the Central Andes, most of the local rural communities converge at the Saturday market in the municipal capital of Sucre to buy groceries and most products they no produce. According to the recent national census (2005), the municipality is inhabited by 7907 people, mostly *campesinos* (peasants) – *mestizos* (creole). The region comprises the three altitudinal zones (warm, temperate and cold) in which different products are cultivated, namely sugar cane, fruits trees (warm), coffee, plantain, kidney beans, fruits trees (temperate), and cattle (milk and cheeses mainly) and maize (cold) amongst other products (cfr also Tocancipá-Falla 2000/2001, Tocancipá-Falla 2005).

---

[5] I suggest the term *momento* to indicate a particular period of time where a social phenomenon becomes visible in its development and decay.

[6] By 1999 Sucre district received about 400 millions of pesos/year (approximately US200.000 today). Once the district became a municipality the budget multiplied in a period of 14 years to over 10.000 millions of pesos (approximately US5.000.000 today).

[7] The Liberal and the Conservative parties were founded at the climax of the independence process from the Hispanic domain in the mid XIX century. The first promoted independence of the colony, whilst the second supported the preservation of the colonial regime (for a discussion see Mejía 2001, Safford and Palacios 2002). Today (2013) there are 13 political parties with different ideological stances coming from a range of different possibilities from radical liberals, radical conservatives and left wings positions (Partido de la U, Conservador, Liberal, Opción Ciudadana, Cambio Radical, Polo Democrático Alternativo, Partido Verde, Movimiento Independiente de Renovación Absoluta (MIRA), Alianza Social Independiente, Autoridades Indigenas de Colombia, Movimiento Afrovides, Movimiento de Inclusion y Oportunidades). All these parties develop in different ways and degrees various forms of patron-client relationships.

Map 1. Sucre municipality in Cauca Department

Valle department

Pacific Ocean

N

Popayán

Piedrasentada

El Bordo

Paraíso

Sucre

Huila
Department

Nariño
Department

Putumayo
Department

Conventions
- — · — Pan-American Road
- ——— Secondary roads
- ● Capital City
- ● Villages

Source: Oficina de Planeación del Cauca, Popayán 2001
Adaptation: Nuria Cristina Ortegón

Let's have a look into two periods of time in the way of doing politics at local level and where patron-client relations and forms of reciprocity are revealed.

A first *momento* in socio political life in Sucre

The first *momento* refers to the new political setting in which many rural communities in Colombia found themselves following the formulation of national development programmes in the late 1950 up until the 1991 National Constitutional Reform. This first *momento* began with Law 19 of 1958, through which the national government created a new regime of social arrangements in which people were encouraged to organise themselves into *Juntas de Acción Comunal* (civil collective organisation) as a prerequisite to developing national development programmes. The system began in Sucre village at the beginning of the 1960 and later spread out in other villages. The flux of ideas about *Juntas* followed the centre-periphery pattern with leaders from outlying *veredas being* encouraged by leaders from centre, or by promoters or civil servants paid by the government, to enter into this organisational scheme.

As people began to believe in the modernisation discourse, the number of participating *veredas* and *Juntas* increased sharply, such that by 2005 there were around 44 Juntas: 7 in Sucre village, 3 in Paraíso village and 34 scattered in *veredas* or small villages. In 1950 Colombia, the word 'pacification' was a key word signifying attempts to tone down the animosity in the conflict between the two traditional parties, Liberals and Conservatives. The *Juntas* were held to be the best way to reconcile people from different political backgrounds. This could be done through various economic development strategies. First of all, people should be transformed and this implied training, discipline and a new sense of governing by themselves. Forming a new citizen in rural areas was then a key task to be conducted by the state and political parties in rural Colombia. Second, and as an effect of this process of educating and training people, social and cultural transformations should occur such that a *new peaceful society* could emerge. Today we know that in addition to the state this kind of social engineering was also developed years later by different institutions such as the coffee growers committee[8] and development programs that were conducted from the 1970 onwards.

Alongside the schools located in the villages, the *Juntas* were set up to educate and train people for the transformations that were needed. This was done using both oral and written means but, given the conditions in rural areas, the former was most relevant. Thus, for example, the use of radio played a key role in transmitting ideas. It was not only about socialising a broad audience in a particular type of knowledge but also transmitting a sense of community through shared values about social change (see also Anderson ([1983] 2000: 54).

In addition to the oral mode, there were a variety of other ways of transmitting new ideas and modes of understanding modernity. Written texts like '*The First Readers'* in primary schools were also part of this process of transforming people in the villages. Sometimes, both radios and written materials were distributed for free. For example, the government sought to promote knowledge about the functioning of the *Juntas* in the form of handbooks, regulations, and *First Readers*, which explained how to 'organise the community' and 'give rules' regarding the appointment of the *Junta* members*,* their functions and prohibitions. It was believed that the leaders in charge of this kind of committee were the leaders of a new generation that would transform the rural world. Each small village or hamlet had its *Junta* and their leaders. Usually the *Junta* was composed of a president, a vice-president, a secretary, a treasurer and an ombudsman. For *campesinos* these words were new[9] and they had to learn how to deal with new institutions and people, including the politicians who were interested in expanding their voters asset from rural areas under the ideology of a modern State and Colombian society.

It is in this context when gift exchange for political gain appeared with more intensity (see below). The leader was a key actor who mediated the relations between people, institutions and politicians, to improve the '*bienestar*' (well being) of the community. Elected by the community, he was identified as being an energetic, dynamic and outspoken character interested in communitarian issues. The leader's role was thus committed to *bureaucratising* the rural society as a way of relating the community to the modern world. As a result the leaders of the *Juntas* became the 'wheels of transmission' of social policies in at least two directions, on the one hand towards the community and on the other towards the external world (see Figure 1). In the first case it was a matter of resolving internal and communitarian issues. In the second case the role related more to connecting with institutions that might contribute to social change and the improvement of rural life. It is clear that both tasks involved an encounter between rural communities, political parties and the state. In relation to the first task, *Juntas* had to arrange problems such as the maintenance of roads, solving issues relating to the water and energy supplies. In connection with the external world, this relation was established more frequently by the leaders, who had the role to 'connect' and 'arrange' things for the community. In fact, people started to identify (sometimes with the support of the governmental promoter for community organisation) those leaders or persons with special abilities or skills for community work. However, "the traditional" political parties –read it as Liberals and Convervatives- also played a role in the election of these representatives, thus favouring patron-client relationships with rural communities.

---

[8] A regional organization affiliated to the larger Federation of Coffee Growers set up in 1927 to regulate and support the coffee economy in the country. The Federation also aims to support small coffee growers by changing local social conditions. The allocation of resources in rural communities by this committee was different to those developed by Juntas and politicians, although they aimed at rural development too.
[9] 'Leader', for example, is an English expression presumably introduced into Colombia by the Peace Corps and government programmes in the 1960.

A good leader was thus a 'keystone' in gaining more political power in the region. For this reason, it was important that he/she was part of the social network established by political parties. This connection between leaders and politicians framed the patron-client relations in rural Cauca, a relationship that was grounded in the gift exchange system. Before describing this system a word must be said about this triadic system of relations.

Figure 1. Triad of social relations in politics in Cauca

Politicians and traditional political parties

Líderes – Leaders – *Juntas*

Families - *veredas*
or villages

Leaders associated with the *Juntas* occupied mediatory and hierarchical positions in relation to people in the *veredas* or villages and the politicians (Figure 1). The importance of social changes in rural communities can be illustrated by reference to the forms of reciprocity that politicians sought to exploit during pre-electoral periods. Thus leaders were contacted by politicians secretly in order to present them with choices of services, gifts or presents that their rural communities might accept in exchange for votes. Basically, this scheme of reciprocity in political terms was developed in Sucre in the first *momento*. As today, at the beginning politicians were seen as 'institutions', 'doctors'[10], i.e. people well instructed in the cities with important 'things to say' in the countryside. This expression is still alive in rural Colombia to refer to politicians, professionals and technical experts in agrarian issues. However, in the political context, once the lack of 'achievements' began to outweigh trustworthy 'promises', the image of the 'doctors' decreased. For the duration of the first *momento*, leaders in Sucre were willing to cooperate with regional *caciques* (regional politicians) or chiefs during election periods. Providing gifts, goods and services were common practices by which those *caciques* or chiefs secured votes.

Initially, the municipality was known as a territory divided between representatives of the Conservative and Liberal political parties. Whilst Conservative influence was located in small villages located in the high mountains, Liberals controlled middle range mountains and valleys. Today (2013), as in many rural communities in Colombia, other political parties have been increasing their participation at local level.

Preparation for the electoral period had to be made in advance, such that leaders from different communities were called to meet the 'chief' or 'cacique' to arrange the main forms of exchanging services, goods, and gifts. During this first *momento* and during the elections in 1998 and 2009 I knew of local leaders that were invited to meetings in Popayán, explaining to the local communities upon their return the arrangements they had made with the politicians. However, in order to obtain these political favours (building a road, the aqueduct, gaining electricity or improving houses, providing food, etc.) people were obliged to vote for the politicians. Because political parties exercise control over public services, the provision of such services often formed part of the "contract" with rural communities. For example, people would often say that at that time politicians belonging to the Liberal party mainly controlled posts relating to electricity, infrastructure (especially roads building) and social programmes, such as social support during natural disasters. In turn, Conservatives controlled institutional offices pertaining to employment and support for micro enterprises. Offering food prior to the election is a prime example of the logic of these kinds of exchanges. Levi-Strauss (1985:96-97), for instance, suggests that offering a meal can be taken as a way of returning a "courtesy" for a given favour. In 2009, for example, some locals explained that voters supporting political candidates were provided with tokens to claim lunch in certain houses identified with supporters of the particular politician.

---

[10] According to the Oxford English Dictionary (Simpson and Weiner 2004), a doctor is somebody "who, by reason of his skill in any branch of knowledge, is competent to teach it, or whose attainments entitle him to express an authoritative opinion; an eminently learned man." 'The cult to the Doctor' is a cultural value inherited from Hispanic tradition that still pervades rural and city life in many places in Colombia. According to Stokes, in many Latin American countries, and Asia as well, "almost everyone wants to be a medical doctor who does not practice, a doctor of pharmacy who does not mix prescriptions (…) The high status of titles such as *doctor, Lic.,Ing.*and *Arq.* is seen in the excessive use of symbols" (cited in Kroef 1959:381-382). This continues to the present day.

Meanwhile, outside the voting offices, leaders supervised the election process, giving instructions on how to mark the ballot for the preferred candidate. The lunch tokens were given only after the client voted, and the menu usually included food prepared with meat and chicken (local cuisine), delicacies served mainly on special occasions. The power that "caciques" and "chiefs" possess because of their positions in key institutions and within the State is well known in rural communities, a condition which is perceived by the latter to favour social change (see for example Rojas 1993). Nonetheless, a failure to win elections can produce problems in satisfying the agreed demands, which may affect the terms of negotiation for the next election period. For example, some politicians might carry out certain activities in order to demonstrate to people their degree of commitment. However, they sometimes also merely pretended to do things without ever actually delivering on their promises. Thus, in many *veredas* one could see abandoned cement posts put there to support electricity cables that never materialised.

This scene was repeated in 1997 before the elections when large trucks transported such material to a *vereda* that lacked energy supply. The politicians thought that, in spite of their suspicions of *politiquería,* people would nonetheless be impressed if they could see that some kind of action was being taken. Sometimes people forget easily and this process of deception could be repeated every three years before the regional and national elections. Yet in other cases people do not forget. More recently, for example, in the 2009 parliamentary elections a professional who was willing to step into the political world explained to me that he went to a municipality in the south of Cauca department in the name of one Liberal political 'chief", only to find resistance and recrimination for the lack of fulfilment of the promises by this chief in previous elections. She had to return to the 'political chief' and obtain resources to accomplish what was promised previously in order to be able to establish new agreements.

Finally, there is another form of exchange that derived from the primary form that takes place between the leader, the politician and the community (see Figure 1). When the leader was mediating on behalf of the community between politicians and institutions, this implied a sacrifice of his own time on behalf of the community. In return, the community would support the leader in several different ways. In one *vereda*, for example, I found that people supported him by working on his *finca* (small plot). Here, the exchange system also functioned. Other ways of reciprocating the time invested by a leader in networking included the leader receiving a certain amount of money from the contracts that were negotiated between institutions (engineers) and local people in rural projects, such as the construction of aqueducts and the maintenance of roads.[11] The provision of scholarships for the children of the leaders constituted another form of payment.

The stability of these exchanging systems has changed in recent decades. Although the *Juntas* originally integrated part of this scheme of patron-client relations, their role in recent years has tended to decline. Many factors account for this decline. Firstly, one of the principal causes was a change in the Colombian legal framework. The new Colombian constitution approved in 1991 (Article 355) tried to change the *corrupt* relationships between politicians and people (a direct source for doing *politiquería*), which were based on the a*uxilios parlamentarios* (auxiliary political support). These were the financial basis upon which politicians were able to establish patron-client relations[12]. It allowed politicians to provide resources directly to leaders and communities in the localities and to receive votes from them in return. The changes in the law meant that politicians had to find new ways of establishing contracts with people. One way was to establish links *indirectly* either through the directors of institutions that supported rural development in the countryside or through the same leaders who were trained in the period of *Juntas* in the 1960. Secondly, the realignment of social relations with people was influenced by the presence of guerrilla movements in control of rural areas, which prevented *politiquería* in various ways such as politicians being warned not to visit the regions to do their politics. Other economic changes in the social life of the region such as the improvement of material conditions, e.g. by coffee and coca crops (Tocancipá 1998, Tocancipa-Falla 2000/2001), the emergence of new social movements such as the 'Macizo Social Movement' (Tocancipá-Falla 2004) and the presence of new institutions and programmes also meant the decline of the *Juntas*.

---

[11] The construction and, to some extent, the maintenance of roads, especially those that have importance at the municipal level, was the duty of the regional authorities. Sometimes maintenance was also done by the community, i.e. through *mingas*, an indigenous form of collective action still practised in the Colombian Andes.

[12] The changes promoted by the new constitution were not sufficient to avoid this kind of practice and they still remain in Colombian politics.

Although they survived these changes, they were overshadowed by a new wave of modernisation through new communal organisations such as the *Grupos de Amistad* (Friendship Groups), associations of producers, etc., promoted by new institutions and programmes.

These changes, however, were met head on by social actors. To overcome the new conditions of disbelief in '*politiquería*', for example, politicians changed their strategies. They started to give up travelling to the countryside and to rely more on the leaders. Some even changed their political discourse in order to distance themselves discursively from the practices of the past and pretending to be a 'new politician'[13]. In 1997, I found it surprising to hear a politician well-known in the region as '*politiquero*' expressing the need "to abolish the bad way of doing politics", i.e. to eliminate '*politiquería*', during an election campaign speech broadcasted by radio. Moreover, in the same election campaign, traditional parties decided to change the name of the party in order to gain power. That year, over 50% of departmental governors elected were representing apparently *new* parties using attractive names such as 'communitarian party', 'coalition', etc. Only 46% of the governors elected kept the official representation of traditional parties, i.e. Liberals or Conservatives (Espectador 2001). The very leaders who were engaged in the *Juntas* also participated in these changes of doing politics in the region. However, some understood that changes were possible, especially in reordering patron-client relations through the use of the law and the formalisation of the territory in a symbolic and political sense.

A second *momento:* re-arranging patron-client relations

The 1991 national constitution marked new political relationships in Colombia whilst leaving others unchanged (Safford and Palacios 2002). Most of these changes have to do with local participation of citizens in local and regional decisions. These changes mark a second *momento*, which encompassed the work of leaders in Sucre when, with the support of communities such as the colonial community of Sucre in Popayán, they decided to become an independent territory in 1999.

This process began with a preliminary study in which professionals from Sucre, supported by other professionals from Cauca University, proposed a Local Development Plan in 1998. This study visited each village in the area in order to consult on the proposal and identify the main social problems and needs. During discussions with leaders, the problem of not falling into patron-client relations and the votes for gifts exchange system was a crucial issue. The preliminary work with every single community in formulating the local development plan was considered as an advantage and as a matter of local power. It was decided then, that the process of becoming a new municipality must exclude any scheme of patron-client relations or exchange system based on gifts and services. The political process avoided contact with politicians, even though during the pre-elections period for the referendum about the creation of the new municipality, politicians enquired after this 'interesting process'. In order to avoid any connection to politics based on patron-client relations, food was offered to facilitate participation (people have to travel from small villages to the centre in Sucre village). This reminded participants that this was a collective project; a different kind of exercise from that which politicians 'customarily' do.

Within the political and administrative divisions of the national territory, the *municipio* is defined as the entity with power to provide social services at the local level. By law, *municipios* are also created "to build up infrastructure, to promote community participation, to improve the social and cultural conditions of its inhabitants, and to achieve other functions established in the Constitution and the law" (Article 311 of the 1991 National Constitution of Colombia). A *municipio* can be created by the regional authority called the Departmental Assembly[14], once certain requisites are fulfilled (specified under Law 136 of 1994, article 8). However, Law itself does not suffice in the creation of a *municipio*. There is a whole bureaucratic process, including the production of documents, letters, petitions, etc, which is part of how politics works in Colombian society. Law needs to be enacted and politicians were prominent actors in creating *municipios* and in this case the power of people could be a good force to produce changes that were waiting for decades. The choice to avoid influence from politicians in the process resulted in the use of collective instruments provided by law such as the 'popular consultation'.

---

[13] In past years (2006-2010), this situation has changed apparently because of the military control provided by Alvaro Uribe Vélez's government provided a more 'secure' stay of politicians in their regions to do politics, something that was not entirely demonstrated.

[14] This is an institutional and political body consisting of 15 people from different political backgrounds with a defined role, controlling and assessing the decisions and policies applied by the governor of Cauca province. Every political project involving substantial resources should be discussed and scrutinised there.

This form of Referendum is a legal and political device that has become more popular in the last decades in Colombia. In Article 103 of the 1991 Constitution, popular consultation is recognised as a device through which people can express a democratic decision on any public issue. The governor and the mayor conduct the petition and it must be organised by the *Registraduría* (Government Register Office), the office in charge of issuing identity documents for Colombians and for organising elections in the country. In the case of the Sucre *municipio* project, the committee made the petition to the mayor of Bolivar *municipio*. He was supposed to write a letter explaining the proposal to delimit a new territory and requesting the formal organisation of an election. Here, people were called to vote on the question: '¿would you agree with the formation of a new *municipio* with Sucre and Paraíso *corregimientos*? Yes or Not'. One of the legal requisites was the *legality* of the question be approved by the Superior Magistrate Tribunal, office that was in charge of deciding the constitutionality or non-constitutionality of the question. Depending on their verdict, the referendum would or would not be conducted.

In this case, whilst the Bolivar mayor had to present the request, the Sucre pro-*municipio* committee conducted the whole legal process on his behalf: collecting the letters, data, and the documentation. Although he agreed with the idea of Sucre *municipio,* he was not so enthusiastic in dealing with the task because it would affect his own political interests, and also because he had not been part of the formative political process. The text was produced in May 1999 and, in theory, it was only a matter of organising the election. As any election, leaders were cautious of how to face typical patron-client relations, particularly the customary practice of exchanging goods and gifts for votes. They then decided to take an alternative in this regard. As in most elections, politicians sponsor special meals for people while they provide votes. This time leaders decided to guarantee lunch for everyone without any reference to vote favourably or not for the creation of a new municipality. The strategy according to one leader was to sustain the service of providing lunch without giving any partisan political message[15].

Once the municipality was created in 1999 the first election for the mayor was accompanied by a general consensus about who should be the first political leader: a professional who contributed to the independent movement. For this election, most people were aware of the importance of making local politics without *politiquería*, especially because the process lacked any history of patron-client relations grounded in exchanging votes for services and gifts. However, as with any political action it was not exempt of any attraction for traditional politicians. Three years later in 2002, the power gained by local leaders in previous years through the formulation of the local development was lost precisely because '*politiquería*', a practice supposedly overcome during the forming process of a new municipality, remained based on social networks between local leaders and rural communities. The past four elections for mayor confirmed the continuation of patron-client relations based on exchanging votes for services and gifts, although also raised a series of questions on losing the power reached in previous years. All this evokes the popular saying that 'in politics not everything is already said' and that sources of power based on patron-client relationships must be reconsidered in alternative political forms, something uneasy to reach.

Some concluding remarks

This article has examined the kinds of obligations that gifts engender in patron-client relations and the role played by gift and goods exchanges in creating social networks in the political domain in southern Colombia. The maussian concept of a 'total services system' beyond the economic realm has served to ground the analysis, shifting the focus to the political field and its implications as a form of contract between leaders, rural communities and politicians. This paper explored these concepts in relation to the south of Cauca department where patron-client relations are still active despite there having been important social change with the 1991 National Constitution Reform aimed at erasing these forms of local political relationship. The analysis focused upon two historical *momentos* in which those patron client relations and exchanging gifts were intertwined in the context of the changing political conditions and legal framework. Having compared these two *momentos* it is now appropriate to draw some final conclusions.

---

[15] The results were astonishing: 950 votes supported the creation of Sucre *Municipio*; 5 votes disagreed and 3 were declared void. In addition there was a symbolic election which consisted of gathering signatures supporting the independence process. The results were impressive: 1200 signatures supporting the creation of Sucre *municipio*. In terms of figures, this result produced a political impact in the whole region as it showed high rates of electoral participation, a situation very unusual for normal elections in the countryside.

Firstly, whereas in the second *momento* leaders gained awareness of how practices of exchanging goods and gifts for votes worked, this did not imply overcoming the vicious practices known as '*politiquería*' that were common in the first *momento*.

In fact, local politicians were only biding their time for the opportunity to retake power. This came form the pre-electoral period of 2002 until now (2013) when these politicians integrated themselves into the politics of the new municipality. Secondly, in the second *momento*, people were pushed to think of alternatives to '*politiquería*', but their responses were re-appropriated by the very politicians and installed within the scheme of this practice.

By comparing these two *momentos* it is possible to appreciate ways in which conventional forms of exchanging goods and services for votes may be superseded. In the Sucre case, these alternatives were grounded in the use of the law. Nonetheless, the durability of these alternatives is open to question. An important contribution here has to do with the notions of *momentos* as a strategic and methodological approach to examine political projects, its sustainability and permanence in the dynamics of social life. In politics, time and space matters and anthropologists amongst other social researchers must paid attention to how to integrate their analysis to these dimensions comparatively.

Finally, the Sucre case emphasises how the exchange of gifts and goods is renewed through patron-client relations. This observation suggests that corruption/patron client relations, a theme seemingly discarded for academic research after the 1980, needs to be reviewed and re-accommodated. This implies new avenues for further research: ¿How are patron-client relations and gift exchange enacted in other contexts and institutional frameworks? ¿Are educational strategies and decisions based on the law sufficient to overcome practices of this kind? ¿Are these practices inevitable in the political context of countries such as Colombia? ¿Are other goods exchanges a real alternative to the conventional patron – client relations that favour individual power? ¿How might comparative research contribute to alternatives and visualise new forms of relations in a new political context?, I do believe that anthropologists and other social researchers have a crucial role to play in relation to these questions, particularly in converting academic theory into terms with real practical significance for the people with whom they live and work.

References

Appadurai, A. (1986). Introduction:commodities and the politics of value. The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective. A. Appadurai. New York, Cambridge University Press**:** 25.

Bailey, F. G. (1969). Stratagems and Spoils. A Social Anthropoloy of Politics. Oxford, Basil Blackwell.

Boissevain, J. (1966). "Patronage in Sicily." Man, New Series **1**(1): 18-33.

Boissevain, J. (1968). "The Place of Non-Groups in the Social Sciences." Man **3**(4): 542-556.

Boissevain, J. (1979). "Network analysis: a reappraisal." Current Anthropology **20**(2): 392-394.

Braudel, F. (1982). The wheels of Commerce. London, Collins.

Buitrago, F. L. (1990). Clientelismo: El sistema político y su expresión regional. Bogotá, Universidad Nacional/Instituto de Estudios Políticos y Relaciones Internacionales/Tercer Mundo.

Claessen, H. J. M. (1979). Political Anthropology. The State of Art. The Hague/París/New York, Mouton.

Cheal, D. (1988). The Gift Economy. London and New York, Routledge.

Dane (2006). "Información Geoestadística."Bogotá, Dane.

Douglas, M. (1994). Risk and Blame. Essays in Cultural Theory. London and New York, Routledge.

Eisenstadt, S. N. and L. Roniger (1981). The study of patron-client relations and recent developments in sociological theory. Plolitical Clientelism, Patronage and Development. S. N. Eisenstadt and R. Lemarchand. Beverly Hills/London, Sage.

Espectador, El. (2001). Gobernadores y Alcaldes capitales. El Espectador. Bogotá**:** 1.

Gellner, E. (1977). Patrons and Clients. <u>Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies</u>. E. Gellner and J. Waterbury. London, Duckworth.

Godelier, M. (1997). <u>Cuerpo, Parentesco y Poder. Perspectivas antropológicas y críticas</u>. Quito, Abya-Yala.

Godula, R., Ed. (1993). <u>The Gift in Culture</u>. Krakow, Poland, Jagiellonian University Press.

Gregory, C. A. (1980). "Gifts to men and gifts to god: Gift exchange and capital accumulation in contemporary Papua." <u>Man, New Series</u> **15**(4): 626-652.

Gregory, C. A. (1982). <u>Gifts and Commodities. Studies in Political Economy</u>. London, Academic Press.

Gudeman, S. and A. Rivera (1990). <u>Conversations in Colombia : the domestic economy in life and text</u>. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Jay, E. J. (1964). "The concepts of 'field' and 'network'." <u>Man</u>: 137-139.

Kroef, J. M. (1959). ""The Cult of the Doctor": An Indonesian Variant." <u>Journal of Educational Sociology</u> **32**(8): 381-391.

Landé, C. H. (1977). Introduction: The dyadic basis of clientelism. <u>Friends, Followers and Factions : A Reader in Political Clientelism</u>. S. W. e. a. Schmidt. Berkeley

London, University of California Press**:** xxxvii,512p.

Latour, B. (1988). <u>The Pasteurization of France</u>. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.

Lemarchand, R. and K. Legg (1972). "Political clientelism and development:a preliminary analysis." <u>Comparative Politics</u> **4**(2): 149-178.

Levi-Strauss, C. (1985). <u>Las Estructuras Elementales del Parentesco</u>. Barcelona, Planeta-Agostini.

Lora, R. L. (1984). <u>Clientelismo y Elecciones: Tres modelos explicativos del comportamiento electoral colombiano</u>. Bogotá, Impresora Gráfica.

Mauss, M. (1990). <u>The Gift. The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies</u>. London and New York, Routledge.

Mayer, A. C. (1977). The significance of quasi-groups in the study of complex societies. <u>Friends, Followers and Factions : A Reader in Political Clientelism</u>. S. W. e. a. Schmidt. Berkeley/London, University of California Press**:** xxxvii,512p.

Mejía, A. T. (2001). El Estado y la Política en el siglo XIX. <u>Nueva Historia de Colombia </u>J. J. Uribe. Bogotá, Planeta. 2 Era Republicana.

Mol, A. and J. Law (1994). "Regions, networks and fluids: Anaemia and socical topology." <u>Social Studies of Science</u> **24**: 641-671.

Monaghan, J. (1996). "Fiesta Finance in Mesoamerica and the Origins of a Gift Exchange System." <u>The Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute</u> **2**(3): 499-516.

Morris, I. (1986). "Gift and commodity in Archaic Greece." <u>Man, New Series</u> **21**(1): 1-17.

Osbornn, A. (1968). "Compadrazgo and Patronage: A Colombian case." <u>Man, New Series,</u> **3**(4): 593-608.

Pinto-Duschinsky, M. (1996). Corruption. <u>The Social Science Encyclopedia</u>. A. Kuper and J. Kuper. London and New York, Routledge**:** 142-143.

Piot, C. D. (1991). "Of persons and things: some reflections on African spheres of exchange." <u>Man (N.S.)</u> **26**: 405-424.

Powell, J. D. (1977). Peasant society and clientelist politics. Friends, Followers and Factions : A Reader in Political Clientelism. S. W. e. a. Schmidt. Berkeley London, University of California Press**:** xxxvii,512p.

Rojas, J. M. (1993). La Bipolaridad del poder local. Cali, Universidad del Valle.

Safford, F. and M. Palacios (2002). Colombia. Fragmented land, divided society. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Sahlins, M. (1972). Stone Ageeconomics. London, Tavistock Publications.

Scott, J. C. (1977). Political clientelism: a bibliography essay. Friends, Followers and Factions : A Reader in Political Clientelism. S. W. e. a. Schmidt. Berkeley

London, University of California Press**:** xxxvii,512p.

Schmidt, S. W. (1974). "La violencia revisited: the clientelist bases of political violence in Colombia." Journal of Latin American Studies **VI**(1): 97-111.

Schmidt, S. W. (1977). Friends, Followers and Factions : A Reader in Political Clientelism. Berkeley

London, University of California Press.

Simpson, J. A. and E. S. C. Weiner (2004). "Oxford English Dictionary. OED Online." 2nd.

Singleton, V. and M. Mike (1993). "Actor-Networks and ambivalence: general practitioners in the UK cervical screening programme." Social Studies of Science **23**: 227-264.

Thomas, N. (1991). Entangles objects: exchange, material culture, and colonialism in the Pacific. Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

Tocancipa-Falla, J. (2000/2001). "Civilisation and the Politics of Territorial Boundaries in Colombia." Cambridge Anthropology **22**(3): 36-61.

Tocancipá-Falla, J. (2004). "Movimientos Sociales, cultura política y poder regional. El caso del Movimiento del Macizo Colombiano (MMC)." website version in Latin American Anthropology.

Tocancipá-Falla, J. (2005). "'De la nata y el ripio': Drinking coffee, changes and social notions of quality in Colombia." Archaeological Review from Cambridge **22**(1): 118-136.

Tocancipá, J. (1998). Coca, campesinos y contextos de modernización en el Cauca Andino. Identidad, Modernidad y Desarrollo. M. L. Sotomayor. Bogotá, Colciencias/Ministerio de Cultura/Instituto Colombiano de Antropología (ICAN)**:** 173-185.

Uribe, E. D. (1986). El Clientelismo en Colombia: Un estudio exploratorio. Bogotá, El Ancora editores.

Weiner, A. (1992). Inalienable possessions: the paradox of keeping-while-giving. Berkeley, University of California Press.

Weingrod, A. (1977). Patrons, patronage and political parties. Friends, Followers and Factions : A Reader in Political Clientelism. S. W. e. a. Schmidt. Berkeley

London, University of California Press**:** xxxvii,512p.

Wolf, E. R. (2001). Kinship, Friendship, and Patron-Client Relations in Complex Societies. Pathways of Power. Building an Anthropology of the Modern World. E. R. Wolf. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, University of California Press**:** 166-183.