Rethinking Patrimonialism and Neopatrimonialism in Africa

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Abstract: Current usages of the terms *patrimonial* and *neopatrimonial* in the context of Africa are conceptually problematical and amount to a serious misreading of Weber. His use of the term *patrimonial* delineated a legitimate type of authority, not a type of regime, and included notions of reciprocity and voluntary compliance between rulers and the ruled. Those reciprocities enabled subjects to check the actions of rulers, which most analyses of (neo)patrimonialism overlook. We apply these insights to a case study of Botswana and suggest that scholars reconsider the application of Weber's concepts to African states.

Introduction

Is "neopatrimonialism" a pathology, analogy, cause, effect—or a term for all of Africa's troubles? How is it linked to Weber's notion of patrimonial authority, and what parts of it, precisely, are "neo"? Is it an attribute of most African states only, or are its causes and consequences generalizable to other countries and regions of the world? Indeed, given its myriad uses by scholars, does the term *neopatrimonialism* retain any analytical utility at all? We argue that the answer to that last question is "yes"—but that the meaning and its implications can be surprising.

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We begin with a survey of the uses and misuses of neopatrimonialism as an idea, and of the analytical and policy consequences that may flow from its abuse. We then return to Weber to explore the core concept of patrimonial authority. Our focus—like Weber's over a century ago—is on the contrasting ways rulers may establish legitimate authority by securing consent (compliance) from their subjects. Throughout the analysis we draw a distinction between types of *authority* and types of *regime*—the latter referring to the means by which positions of power are filled in a state and the degree to which citizens are allowed to participate in that process. Larry Diamond's classification (2002), extending from liberal democracies to politically closed authoritarian regimes, embodies well our understanding of regime types. We suggest that many applications of neopatrimonialism wrongly assume a direct causal connection between types of authority and types of regime, or even treat the two as synonymous. To illustrate the fundamental difference between the two, and to illustrate the critical role of human agency in shaping both, we examine the case of Botswana, where a modern democratic state has been erected on historical foundations of patrimonial authority. We conclude by exploring some implications of our analysis, arguing that a misreading of Weber has turned African countries into examples of an imagined common pathology and caused a mistaken identification of this pathology with a type of legitimacy or authority. As deGrassi (2008) has noted, too often the term *neopatrimonialism* is invoked in the absence of detailed historical and ethnographic attention to particular times and places. Scholars consequently ignore variations in the interactions of power and accountability within African states that might lend themselves to insightful comparisons with countries elsewhere.

Diverse Roots of Legitimacy

For Weber, *patrimonialism* was not a synonym for corruption, "bad governance," violence, tribalism, or a weak state. It was instead a specific form of authority and source of legitimacy. Weber (1947[1922]) defined power (*Macht*) as "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests" (152).[1] While he understood such power as pervading all human interactions, he was fascinated with how certain structural positions were allocated the right to expect compliance by others—or "the probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons" (1947[1922]:152). Almost all structural subordinates retain some power to resist or subvert the desires of those in authority, but they also agree that certain individuals are entitled to their obedience. Weber's ideal types, describing the cultural variations with which this compliance with authority could be constructed, attempted to examine how the dominated understand, participate in, and even celebrate their domination. Going well beyond Marx's ideas of mystification

or false consciousness, Weber tried to catalog the diverse ways in which the legitimate exercise of power could be culturally framed.

In patrimonial societies, which have existed in many places outside Africa, what we would call the state was indeed the personal domain of one or a few leaders. But in many such places significant legitimacy was derived from an aspect of patrimonialism that is now frequently overlooked. These were reciprocities that helped cement patrimonial authority. Such reciprocities—personal, densely interwoven, often lopsided, and based on intangible and symbolic dynamics of status, loyalty, and deference as much as on material exchange—became the means by which rulers sought obedience from the ruled. Even if those reciprocities did not rest upon contemporary distinctions between the public and the private, or employ formal mechanisms of accountability and transparency, where they were sustained through voluntary compliance they constituted a system of legitimate authority.

The issue is important on several levels. Often both analysts and perpetrators of various abuses of power tell us that such practices are simply reassertions in new settings of historic, distinctively African forms of power and leadership. That interpretation of the *neo* part of the term oversimplifies both patrimonialism and the cultural manifestations that grew up around it. Further, such arguments conceal rather than explain the ways everyday Africans have adapted to the nation-state and international systems. They underestimate the diversity of historical situations across the continent as well as the responses to them. They ignore the impact of change, and they blind us to the rationality that may exist within the responses to that change. Such arguments not only condemn those societies for failing to live up to idealized visions of life in developed states and markets—visions rarely, if ever, realized anywhere—but also imply that something fundamental in African society prevents them from ever doing so. They ignore the fact that even in the most highly industrialized societies significant elements of patrimonialism survive and thrive today without decisively undermining democratic processes or economic development.[2]

To understand the *patrimonial* core along with the *neo* prefix, we must reexamine Weber's use of the concept. A true neopatrimonialism, we argue, would have to include the reciprocities that Weber discusses along with the personal dimensions of power, governance, and compliance that feature in most contemporary accounts. It would have to recognize the mutual, socially constructed obligations he delineated, along with the inequalities. It must allow for the possibility that such a complex, multistranded set of ties and obligations is too complex and diverse to predetermine any one regime type, dysfunctional or otherwise. State frameworks, after all, have proven remarkably adaptable to a wide range of social settings and styles of interaction, as any look at South, Southeast, and East Asia will show. Finally, a fair reexamination of Weber must avoid the evolutionism that later theorists have read into his typologies. Neither patrimonialism nor neopatrimo-

nialism is an inevitable stage in some linear progression; to imply that they are effectively relegates many societies to "backwardness," or at the least to a "developmentally delayed" status. Although Weber was interested in transitional moments when one form of legitimacy gives way to another, he was remarkably careful, for his time, to distinguish between local historical processes and claims for universal trajectories. As Roth has argued, "Weber's comparative approach was directed against theories of historical sameness as well as theories of universal stages" (1978:xxxviii).[3]

Rituals and Metaphors in the Construction of Authority

Jean-Francois Vincent, a French anthropologist, described in 1986 a traditional ritual practiced by the Mofu of Northern Cameroon to confer legitimacy on an incoming chief. A panther was hunted and killed, transported to the village chief, and eventually eaten. Because the panther was the most powerful and feared of forest animals, the transfer of this power made the chief's subjects tremble before him, confirming his political legitimacy. The chief needed neither prisons nor gendarmes to enforce his will; rather, the transfer to him of the panther's magical power was sufficient to establish compliance with his commands. Yet in return for that power a chief was obliged to feed his subjects and protect them from sorcery. Otherwise, he risked rejection.

Vincent wrote that the Mofu extended this understanding of political authority, and the use of animal imagery that described it, to other powerful figures in Cameroon, including the president of the republic. Many African leaders since independence have also understood the persuasive power of such rituals or other traditions, and many have twisted their historic meanings to establish their contemporary political legitimacy. Consider, for example, Joseph Mobutu Sese Seko, that archetypal "big man," who ruled the former Zaire. Even after decades in power, he continued to justify his dominance with the following traditionalist appeal:

> "Nowhere in this continent have there been two chiefs in one village, a majority chief and an opposition chief. Dating back to ancestral times, there has been only one chief. In the United States and Europe, it is commonly accepted that enlightenment emanates from the clash of ideas. In Africa, we follow an ancestral policy in which, when a problem arises, we rally around the leader and work out a solution. Zaire is a shining example of this policy in action. For this reason, we have become the most stable country in Africa." (Quoted in Elliot & Dymally 1990:21)

Here Mobutu stressed that not only did a politically closed authoritarian regime (to use Diamond's terminology) have historical roots in Africa, but also that solidarity and unity of the people around their leader was an enduring feature of African politics.

Numerous rulers have appealed to traditions that associated chiefs with panthers or national leaders with leopards (and related visual representations), or have cited ancestral policies that precluded competition and enforced solidarity in order to build their legitimacy. Michael Schatzberg observes that political images depicting leaders such as Félix Houphouet-Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire or Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya as "Father of the Nation," and portraying those over whom they ruled as their "children," were common across Middle Africa. In Mobutu's Zaire, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Cameroon, and to a lesser extent in Senegal and Tanzania, paternal metaphors were particularly potent because, as Schatzberg notes, "there are two sides to this particular coin. On the first side there is the loving, kind, understanding, always solicitous, and caring paternal—and occasionally maternal—figure.... The second side of the coin is less loving, less nurturing and less paternal. If the father smiles and forgives, the chief snarls and punishes" (2001:24–25).

As Schatzberg argues so persuasively, such repertoires of myth and metaphor, imagery and rhetoric constituted the "moral matrix" on which Africa's leaders based their legitimacy because they resonated so well with the cultural understandings of local populations (2001:23–31). However, the reliance by leaders such as Houphouet-Boigny or Paul Biya of Cameroon on particular historical moments or potent symbols to justify their authority was selective, varying in accordance with their perceptions of threats to their authority. Over time, each leader oversimplified "traditional" relationships between chiefs and subjects to rationalize his own behavior. At different moments during his rule, each privileged the importance of particular customs or rituals, and their symbolic meanings, over others. Thus a newly installed leader, unsure of his political base, might reference a feared animal to induce compliance. Another leader, as his rule continued, might portray himself as the "father of the nation" who would nourish and protect his subjects if they offered him respect in return. Yet another, after many years, might resort to "ancestral policy" to resist external pressures to seek legitimacy through the ballot box. Scholarly claims regarding the ubiquity of patrimonialism in Africa which have been based on such rhetoric, and the practices that it attempted to justify have therefore to some extent overstated the case.

Patrimonial and Neopatrimonial Constructs in the Social Science Literature

Particularly in the political science literature, the terms *patrimonialism* and *neopatrimonialism* are commonly understood (with reference to Weber) to denote systems in which political relationships are mediated through, and maintained by, personal connections between leaders and subjects, or patrons and clients. Authority and the social linkages through which it is exercised are vested almost as personal property in an individual, rather than

in impersonal institutions or in a mandate conferred and withdrawn by citizens. Ironically, while patrimonialism is said to cement social bonds in small-scale situations through a reliance on trust, reciprocity, and material exchanges, it is believed to distort power, corrupt authority, and fuel personal aggrandizement when it permeates larger political institutions such as bureaucracies and states.

This mode of authority is often contrasted with rational-legal authority, another of Weber's ideal types, in which an impersonal bureaucratic logic governed by law and reason is the defining characteristic of legitimate authority. In other words, citizens comply because they believe the law grants authority to the ruler. The law, or a governing instrument such as a constitution, has a transhistorical rationality of its own that extends beyond the behavior of any individual leader. In theory, the leader derives legitimate authority to act and expect obedience only insofar as he or she is accountable to the rule of law.

> Thus the typical person in authority, the "superior," is himself subject to an impersonal order by orienting himself to it in his own dispositions and commands (this is true not only for persons exercising legal authority who are in the usual sense "officials," but, for instance, for the elected president of a state).... It is held that the members of the organization, insofar as they obey a person in authority, do not owe this obedience to him as an individual, but to the impersonal order." (1978[1922]:263)

Weber noted, however, that this ideal is never fully achieved: "legal authority is never purely legal. The belief in legality comes to be established and habitual, and this means it is partly traditional" (1978[1922]:263).

Although the ideal of rational-legal authority hardly exists anywhere, scholars still invoke the ideal type to highlight what they see as shortcomings inherent in African states. Furthermore, many social scientists add the modifier *neo* to *patrimonialism* to distinguish what they regard as a modern variant of Weber's ideal type—one in which a veneer of rational-legal authority has been imposed by colonialism, yet a personalistic or "patrimonial" logic characterized by patronage, clientelism, and corruption is said to prevail—just as it is assumed to have done in the past.

First applied by Zolberg in 1966 to depict the traditional patterns of authority exhibited by party states of West Africa (140–45), the term *patrimonialism* or *neopatrimonialism* has persisted, even proliferated, in recent decades.[4] Initial works sought to explain patrimonialism or neopatrimonialism as a consequence of the continued existence of premodern cultural norms, or as an effect of colonialism. More recent studies find patrimonialism or neopatrimonialism to be the cause of poor leadership, economic stagnation, and a host of other ills. Frequently scholars simply employ the term or closely related concepts (see Medard 1994) as handy labels to describe leaders, regimes, and systems.

The vastly different contexts and the variety of purposes to which the concept has been applied have diminished its analytical utility. As illustrations, we highlight four interrelated uses, variously depicting (1) a set of social relations at either the community or nation-state level, mediated by personal loyalty and governed by bonds of dependence and subordination; (2) the rent-seeking behavior and personalist patterns of authority practiced by African leaders in selected country settings; (3) an economic logic distinguished by the continual blurring of public service and private gain, with serious implications for economic development; (4) a characteristic regime type associated with most African countries not only during the period of one-party rule, but also in the present period of democratization. The works that we cite below are meant to be representative but not exhaustive.

First, several scholars employ *patrimonialism* and *neopatrimonialism* to describe a range of social relations in Africa. In a nuanced examination of child soldiers in the Liberian and Sierra Leonean wars, for example, William Murphy (2003) adapts the concept of patrimonialism to explain the institutionalization of youth clientelism in the service of violence. He argues that a patrimonial logic, similar to that governing the behavior of "big men" in these former "shadow states," also characterizes the administration of rebel groups during wartime. Like political leaders, military "big men" take advantage of the raw power of violence and control over resources to dispense patronage to youth in return for loyalty, protection, administration, and firepower. This domination, established through terror, is shaped into a form of authority through the creation of an administrative staff, and these patron-client relations are replicated down through the command structure and into the civilian populations over whom the rebel groups exercise control. The reciprocal relations of dependency thus created allow the rebel groups to perpetuate themselves over time and space.

While Murphy uses the term to capture the ways in which a micro-level relationship between a rebel commander and his troops is structured, others use it to illustrate the predominance of personal relationships in the governance of past and present African polities. They note that African communities were "historically" organized along patron–client lines, a pattern they now perceive in the contemporary political organization of states. Medard (1982), for example, refers to the "traditional clientelist states" of Rwanda and Burundi (166), arguing that patron–client relationships formed the basis of the state from king down to peasant. Hyden also asserts that "historically speaking, this (personal rule) is a form of rule that existed in all regions of the world" (1997:25) and that a "lineage orientation," whereby patron–client relations, kinship networks, and other "primary reciprocities" govern communities, continues in Africa (2006:55). The persistence of such community-centered networks, as Hyden sees it, explains why informal rather than formal rules have greater salience, and why rational-legal authority gains little traction in contemporary African

settings. While other states have moved on to newer and more efficient forms of governance, Africa remains rooted in a "community-centered orientation" (Hyden 2006:56).

Precisely what has kept African states from moving on is often left unspecified, although a common line of argument is that colonialism, while severely disrupting traditional patterns of authority in some instances, also reconstructed and reconfigured patron–clientelism so that it survived in "neotraditional" form after independence. In some cases, it replaced traditional modes of maintaining authority that local communities regarded as legitimate.[5] The survival of clientelism, its reconfiguration in an era of dependency and modernization, and its existence alongside a bureaucratic logic thus give the contemporary state its neopatrimonial character. In these states, social norms do not distinguish between public and private realms, and they crowd out other forms of autonomous social organization. Efforts to suppress such norms and values or to organize society along different lines have largely failed: instead, "parochial identities" (Hyden 2006:62) ethnic ties, and communitarianism prevail, and the growth of "civil society" as an autonomous check on state power faces severe challenges.[6]

Such arguments locate the logic of patrimonialism in social relations reflecting either precolonial traditions or the coercive, distortionary, and exclusionary practices of colonial regimes. A second use of the term *neopatrimonialism* builds on that analysis but applies the term more deliberately to describe the behaviors and patterns of authority established by particular national leaders and their followers after independence. Examples of this kind of analysis can be found in Callaghy's work on Zaire (1984) and Nigeria (1986) as well as in Joseph (1987) on Nigeria, Ellis (1993) on Togo, and Bayart (1985) and van de Walle (1994) on Cameroon.[7] Reno (1995, 1998) extended the label (though he applied it rather sparingly) to a set of extreme cases in his work on the warlord states of Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, while Vidal (2003, 2008) and Hodges (2008) have recently applied the term to Angola. Indeed, at one time or another scholars have labeled nearly every African government as patrimonial or neopatrimonial.

In each case, scholars explore the dimensions of what they variously call "personal rule" or "big man rule" in specific settings where autocratic leaders retain power, accumulate wealth, and maintain order by relying on patrimonial or neopatrimonial authority. Patrimonialism or neopatrimonialism share a number of core features in these works: the flouting of rational-legal authority in favor of highly personalistic presidential rule; a reliance on patron–client ties and networks for professional and political advancement or support; the use of state resources to reward supporters for their loyalty; and repeated appropriation of state funds by African leaders and their followers for their personal enrichment. In these cases, as Joseph (1987) and others (e.g., Diamond 2008: 145–46) have pointed out, the informal takes precedence over the formal and the private conquers the

public. Private strategies and particularistic mechanisms trump impersonal rules and institutions as patrons and clients seek economic and political rewards.

Noteworthy in these works is the variety of leaders and contexts to which scholars apply the labels of patrimonialism and neopatrimonialism. The cases range from a study of Houphouet-Boigny in Côte d'Ivoire (Zolberg 1966), a country hailed as a showcase of economic growth in the 1970s and 1980s, to the rule of Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire (Callaghy 1984), which was considered a paradigmatic example of economic ruin during the same period. They include warlords in Sierra Leone, military leaders in Nigeria, and autocrats in Angola; their ideological persuasions range from the more procapitalist approach of Houphouet-Boigny and Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya, to the Afro-Stalinists turned petro-capitalists of Angola under Eduardo dos Santos. In many such applications the distinction between types of authority and types of regime is blurred, and what precisely neopatrimonialism explains and how it does so are left unclear.

Despite early concerns that patrimonialism had become a "catch-all concept" (Theobald 1982:555) and that the applicability of patrimonialism and neopatrimonialism to such a range of cases required too much conceptual stretching (Crook 1989), the third and fourth uses of these terms attempt to advance more general theoretical propositions about the causes and consequences of neopatrimonialism in developing countries. In the third case, scholars trace relationships between patrimonialism or neopatrimonialism and economic development. For example, Theobald observes that a lack of development tends to produce a patrimonial public administration. Drawing on Weber's typology, he suggests that underdeveloped states typically have bureaucracies in which individuals rely on public office to secure private gain because such states lack the institutional arrangements necessary to provide a consistent source of revenue to the state. Without a stable revenue stream with which to pay its officials, the state fails to create a professional and credible bureaucratic apparatus; officials rely on personal networks for power and funds, thereby creating patrimonial bureaucracies. Although Theobald does not restrict his analysis to Africa, he cites a number of examples from Africa to support his claims.

Like Theobald, Pierre Englebert (2000a) does not limit his explanation to cases in Africa, but he does invert Theobald's causal logic. He asserts that neopatrimonialism or patrimonialism, rather than being the consequence of a certain stage of economic development, themselves hinder development and economic growth. Employing a rational-actor model, Englebert locates the cause of neopatrimonialism in the imported nature of African states at independence and seeks to differentiate cases according to this criterion. He argues that where preexisting institutions were disrupted by colonialism or simply did not exist prior to colonialism (as in Congo/Zaire, for example), African leaders confronted a legitimacy deficit at independence. Leaders such as Mobutu then compensated for their low or weak

initial legitimacy by relying on neopatrimonial strategies. By securing the "instrumental loyalty" of competing elites, such strategies yielded the greatest short-term payoffs, but with the result that economic development was derailed (2000b:7).

Englebert finds that in Botswana, by contrast, traditional Tswana elites were able to "reappropriate" the state from the departing British, and thus never lost their legitimate right to rule (2000b:112). Instead, the historical continuity of traditional patterns of loyalty and authority gave the independent Botswana state a high level of legitimacy. Endowed with the "initial allegiance" of their subjects, Botswana's leaders did not need to resort to neopatrimonial strategies to consolidate power. As a result, they were able to pursue longer-term developmental strategies: "The initial degree of state legitimacy at independence," he says, "is therefore a determinant of the pressing nature of leaders' quest for increased power and the relative returns, in terms of power, of developmental versus neopatrimonial strategies" (2000b:116). Like Englebert, we highlight the case of Botswana below—but we argue that neopatrimonial authority is compatible both with high levels of legitimacy and with economic development.

Eric Budd (2004) and Jay Oelbaum (2002) reinforce the claims made by Theobald and Englebert regarding the relationship between neopatrimonialism and poor developmental outcomes. Like Theobald, Budd indicates that patrimonialism is a structural feature of many states but is not an institution; as he states, "patrimonialism mitigates institutionalization" (2004:6). He claims that all states are patrimonial but "some states are clearly more patrimonial than others" (2004:139), and he attempts to document levels of patrimonialism exhibited by thirty developing countries. Budd emphasizes the inhibiting effect of patrimonialism not only on the economy but also on democratization; his rankings indicate that the more patrimonial the state is, the lower its gross national product and its "freedom" score in the Freedom House rankings are likely to be. Although Budd does not present an African case study to illustrate his claims, many African countries appear in his rankings, with Botswana considered a "moderately patrimonial" state and Gabon, Kenya, Nigeria, Zaire, and Zimbabwe considered "highly patrimonial."

Oelbaum broadens the discussion to include the international financial institutions and other developing countries with which a postcolonial state might interact. Examining Ghana under Jerry Rawlings, he argues that neopatrimonial relations explain how neoliberal market reforms might be accomplished in the face of a distinct lack of popular support. According to his analysis, the international actors assume that "donor-supported programmes of economic liberalization undermine clientelism and require a fundamental change in the way African leaders relate to and reward their followers" (2002:286), yet many leaders seem able to capture these external resources and allies in an infinitely flexible network of "personal" relationships. Even the IMF and other paragons of bureaucratic rationality become

corrupted through contact with the "disease" of African patrimonialism. The support of international financial institutions and middle-income countries like Malaysia, combined with neopatrimonial structures, inhibits the growth of a domestic capitalist class and the consolidation of democracy in Ghana (2002:318). Unfortunately, the "challenge of distinguishing cause and effect in Ghana's economy is too recondite for most of Ghana's population" (2002:318), leaving them at the mercy of patrimonial leaders.

Scholars such as Budd and Englebert are mostly concerned to trace the negative effects of neopatrimonial practices on economic development while observing that such results are not "intrinsically African" (Englebert 200b:7). By contrast, scholars in our fourth category such as Bratton and van de Walle (1994, 1997) see patrimonialism and neopatrimonialism as institutionalized regime types that are mostly specific to African states. They state categorically that "while neopatrimonial practices can be found in all polities, it is the *core* feature of politics in Africa and in a small number of other states, including Haiti, the Philippines, and Indonesia" (1994:459, their emphasis). As with the case studies above, the central characteristic of these systems is "personal relationships" that "constitute the foundation and superstructure of political institutions. The interaction between the 'big man' and his extended retinue *defines* African politics, from the highest reaches of the presidential palace to the humblest village assembly" (1994:459).

In making this sweeping claim, Bratton and van de Walle build on the analysis of African politics by Medard and also by Jackson and Rosberg, who make a case for the systemic existence of personal rule across much of Africa.

> Personal politics are "systems" insofar as they function to regulate power in the state and thereby provide political goods or carry out political functions (such as peace, order, stability, and non-material security), but they are not systems of *public* governance or of *rationalist* decision-making. A political system of personal rule is not a system which responds to public demands and support by means of public policies and actions, nor is it a system in which the ruler aims at policy goals and "steers" the governmental apparatus by information "feedback" and "learning". Indeed, the concept of governance as an activity of guiding the ship of state toward a specific destination—the assumption of modern rationalism and the policy sciences—fits poorly with much political experience in contemporary Black African countries. (1982:18, italics in original).

With the exception of Ethiopia, however, Jackson and Rosberg largely reject the label "patrimonialism" as a description of personal rule, arguing that Weber's ideal type presupposes "'traditional' norms that rulers *and* subjects can use to justify or criticize government acts or omissions..." (1982:74). They note that "traditional" norms may still exist at the local level in Africa and perhaps in select cases such as Botswana, Lesotho, Swa-

ziland, and Somalia, where existing territorial boundaries and institutions were not disruptive. But because colonial boundaries were artificially imposed, the norms did not exist at the "territorial" level; therefore, in their view, to describe African states as "patrimonial" would be of "questionable" value (1982:74). As we will discuss below, Weber's formulation does indeed stress the reciprocity between leaders and followers in patrimonial systems. In Jackson and Rosberg's analysis, however, what might have been a positive or functional institution in smaller-scale indigenous forms of governance is assumed to be lost in cases where colonialism established novel political boundaries, thereby unsettling traditions.

Bratton and van de Walle (1997) differ from Jackson and Rosberg in two important respects. First, whereas the latter eschew the term *patrimonialism*, Bratton and van de Walle, like Medard, embrace and extend it. They refer to a "patrimonial logic" that operates within African politics to emphasize the commonality with Weber's ideal type. Simultaneously, they label political regimes as "neopatrimonial" rather than "patrimonial" in order to acknowledge the contemporary and national, as opposed to local or regional, character of this phenomenon. Moreover, they follow Medard in his argument that "unlike the patrimonial regime the neopatrimonial regime hides behind a façade which is complex and differentiated" (1982:181).

Second, although they acknowledge Jackson and Rosberg's point that personal rule undermines the kinds of formal institutions that seek impersonal processes and ends (a claim also made by Budd), Bratton and van de Walle argue that "when patrimonial logic is internalized in the formal institutions of neopatrimonial regimes, it provides essential operating codes for politics that are valued, recurring, and reproduced over time" (1997:63). Under the rubric of "neopatrimonialism" they subsume several "variants" in Africa including personal dictatorships, military oligarchy, plebiscitary, and competitive one-party systems (1994:468–89).[8] Like Clapham (1985), they claim that neopatrimonialism is not just a limited pattern but also a systemic, institutionalized regime identified by "at least three—albeit informal—political institutions" including presidentialism, clientelism, and the use of state resources to maintain legitimacy (1997:63–68).

Bratton and van de Walle wrote at a time when African countries were undergoing complex processes of democratization and neoliberal reform. It could be argued that the moment that they were describing has receded with the demise of the one-party state and the departure of "big men" such as Mobutu Sese Seko, Houphouet-Boigny, and Daniel Arap Moi—all of whom, according to scholars, practiced variations of neopatrimonialism. Yet their 1994 article anticipates that neopatrimonialism likely would provide the "template" on which transition would take place (1994:489; see also Chabal & Daloz 1999:4–16). For some scholars that has indeed proved to be the case. Recent work on democracies as well as on market economies in Africa continues to juxtapose implicit and explicit references to the informal, personalistic, and patronage-based appeals characteristic of neopat-

rimonial regimes against the characteristics of formal institutions, such as regular elections and the rule of law, that are said to be the foundations of democratic ones. The use of binary opposites to characterize such regimes persists: neopatrimonialism is synonymous with clientelism and prebends (and in some accounts causes violence and instability), while the adoption of democracy represents its antithesis.[9]

Recently, however, several of these scholars have begun to recognize the limitations of the concept for explaining transitions to democracy, and variations in politics and policy among democratic regimes. This has resulted in more judicious uses of the term and greater recognition of the possible coexistence of neopatrimonialism with formal democratic procedures as well as the interpenetration of the two. Thus VonDoepp and Villalón (2005), Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi (2005), van de Walle (2007), and Erdmann and Engel (2007) now use the term sparingly. They also allow that most democracies are now hybrid or mixed polities combining both formal and informal modes of authority, personalism, and rule of law. Other scholars such as Bauer and Taylor (2005:8–11) and de Grassi (2008) have begun to question the utility of the term altogether—as do we.

Erdmann and Engel (2007) both critique previous references to patrimonialism and neopatrimonialism and offer a view of current practices of domination or authority in Africa—one stressing equally the "legal-rational bureaucratic aspect" and the patrimonial aspect. That approach, they argue, corresponds more closely to the hybrid reality of African states today and brings greater analytical rigor to the term *neopatrimonialism* (104). They offer different means by which scholars might measure the existence of the two types of domination (patrimonial and legal-rational authority) that constitute the modern variant of neopatrimonial authority, as well as a rather crude typology that distinguishes among regime types (which they characterize as democratic, hybrid, or authoritarian), possible subtypes of these regimes, and different forms of authority practiced by each regime—either neopatrimonial or legal-rational authority (113). Erdmann and Engel claim that their operationalization of neopatrimonialism not only moves the debate beyond Weber, but also requires that the study of formal institutions be balanced against the ways in which informal relationships structure political and economic power in Africa.

Later in this article we address the question of whether acknowledging both neopatrimonial and legal-rational authority offers an improvement on previous efforts to draw a sharp distinction between the two. But first we must compare these past and present uses of *(neo)patrimonialism* with Weber's conceptualization of the term. We ask whether elements of authority said to constitute patrimonialism agree with Weber's delineation, and examine the types of societies to which he applied the term. Finally, we look at the extent to which the evolutionist assumptions that underpin many contemporary uses of the term compare with Weber's own understanding.

Misreading Weber

As we have seen, scholars of Africa seem to have been looking for a theory of political relations in relatively small-scale polities, recognizing that post-colonial nation-states tended to be more condensed than their European counterparts. They were also seeking a way to account for a legitimacy that was not institutionalized in formal bureaucratic structures of the state apparatus, but seemed to have roots in kinship, precolonial polities, and other forms of value. In addition, deGrassi suggests that scholars in the 1990s needed a way to explain why liberal democracy did not flourish in all places once the Soviet threat had been eliminated, as well as evidence concerning the dangers of "statist" policies (2008:121). And, it appears, scholars of Africa were guided by unexamined evolutionist and exceptionalist assumptions that African societies were differently located along a universal trajectory from those of the West. Most important, as discussed above, contemporary scholars of Africa have been at pains to explain how personalized relations could function (or malfunction) in the public realm. Rather than questioning the supposed exclusion or neutralization of personal ties in rational-legal bureaucracies, these analysts have seen such relationships as either impossible to institutionalize (Budd 2004) or as "polluting" the public sector with inappropriate connections (Jackson & Rosberg 1982), resulting in corrupt "hybrid" forms of social and political relations.

The very problem these scholars were trying to explain—why there is no "fire wall" between the personal and the political in African nations—was derived from a normative conviction that there *should be* a fire wall, and from a sweeping empirical assumption that such boundaries are commonly found, intact and legitimate, in many or most other states. This in turn was grounded in three problematic assumptions about rational-legal bureaucracies: (1) they are intrinsically more advanced than historically "earlier" forms of governance; (2) they are more suitable to large-scale administration; and (3) they are the only bureaucratic forms compatible with the broadest extension of democratic rights and market capitalism.[10] The result is that scholars have judged African societies by standards that have not been realized anywhere.

At first glance, Weber seems to provide a convenient lens through which to view twentieth- and twenty-first-century Africa, since he described patrimonial legitimacy as an outgrowth of the organization of smaller scale entities such as the family, pointed to its "mystical" or "traditional" symbolic construction, and understood it as historically preceding the rational-legal arrangements of modern Europe. But a closer reading of Weber demonstrates that his own understanding of patrimonial legitimacy was quite different from the one that has been deployed by recent Africanist scholars, especially in terms of the three issues mentioned above relating to scale, the symbolic construction of domination, compliance, and reciprocity, and the evolutionary relationship between different political and economic formations.

Guenther Roth opens his extensive introduction to a 1978 edition of Weber that includes *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (1922) as well as other writings with the following claim: "This work is the sum of Max Weber's scholarly vision of society.... *Economy and Society* was the first strictly empirical comparison of social structure and normative order in world-historical depth" (1978:xxxiii).[11] Although the term *patrimonialism* (or "the patrimonial estate") is conventionally attributed to Weber, Roth notes that it was actually introduced by an earlier writer, Carl Ludwig von Haller, as part of an antiliberal attack on the separation of governmental authority from divinely appointed rulers. Von Haller was dismayed by the very "depersonalization" of public life, which was later seen as the benchmark of European political superiority. Roth notes that Weber rejected von Haller's equation of patriarchialism (the family-based domination of an individual man over his wife and children) with patrimonialism, arguing that the latter was a truly political and institutionalized system in which the ruler used as his administrative staff members of his own household, including slaves, retainers, and other followers.

Thus, where earlier German scholars had located the origin of extrafamilial administration in the family itself, Weber insisted on making a qualitative distinction between purely personal household relations and the structured interdependence of larger-scale units of governance. Arguing that there were several possible ways to arrive at the latter sort of state, he insisted that patrimonial domination, although not encoded in legal rights, was grounded in "the subjects' claim to reciprocity, and this claim 'naturally' acquires social recognition as custom" (1978[1922]:1010). Using current terminology, we might say that patrimonial legitimacy (or domination) is institutionalized and grounded in rules that are broadly shared and understood but not, or not sufficiently, codified in law (see Helmke & Levitsky 2004). We note, however that some African states are now formalizing these institutions; for example, the Ugandan government has restored the traditional authority of the Buganda kingdom (see Englebert 2002), while the Ghanaian government has formally recognized the jurisdiction of customary authorities over land (see Lund 2008).

Weber noted that patrimonial legitimacy derives its force from the voluntary compliance of subjects with domination by their rulers, which is very different from the domination deployed against slaves, and even from the threat of joblessness used against free workers in industrial capitalist countries. Rather than forming an autocratic relationship, the parties to a patrimonial arrangement, according to Weber, are highly aware of their mutual dependence and have institutionalized means of holding each other accountable: "The master is considerably influenced by the well-founded apprehension that his own, especially his economic interests, would be badly hurt by any shock to the traditional loyalty produced by groundless and 'unjust' interference with the traditional distribution of duties and rights. Here too, the master's omnipotence toward the individual dependent is paral-

leled by his powerlessness in the face of the group" (1978[1922]:1012).

This crucial point—that the *collective* requires the political authority to exercise its powers responsibly—is frequently missing from contemporary discussions of African patrimonialism, even though it is embodied in narratives regarding the legitimacy of traditional authority such as the one told by the Mofu. It is the very essence of how the "personal" and the "public" seem to intersect and mutually constitute each other in many African contexts. Rather than positing this as a flaw to be overcome with increasingly "rational" or "impersonal" institutions, Weber saw it as the strong yet flexible bedrock of legitimacy institutionalized by this form of governance. Indeed, the relationship of domination retains its legitimacy only insofar as both sides recognize their responsibilities to each other.

Using the historical cases of ancient Egyptian, Roman, Chinese, and Incan states to illustrate his arguments, Weber explained the feudalism of medieval Europe as a transitional form in which the patrimonial relationship between lords and fief-holders became codified and partially removed from the domain of personal loyalty (1978[1922]:255–62). He traced the bureaucratization of patrimonial relations in such great historical empires, showing how the cultural symbolism of an individual, personal relationship between the ruler and his governing officials could provide stability and efficient administration in very large-scale systems. In the process he also demonstrated, by implication at least, how bureaucratization could grow out of patrimonialism rather than necessarily arising as a "rational" negation of it. Indeed, as Roth points out in his introduction, understanding how political legitimacy developed into numerous forms in the context of differing economic and legal arrangements was at the heart of Weber's project of comparative analysis.

Weber's primary project, after all, was an exhaustive sociology of the legitimate forms of domination, which he saw as limited to patriarchal/patrimonial, charismatic, and bureaucratic. According to this perspective, an uprising against an authoritarian ruler might be a thrilling example of collective agency, but like a coup d'etat it is a form of nonlegitimate domination (or power), assuming that the basic understanding of what constitutes political authority is not in question. Both revolutionaries and juntas must justify their usurpation by coming up with an effective system to suppress the claims of the former holders of legitimate authority. There is, for Weber, no necessary connection between rational-legal legitimacy and democracy, any more than there is a necessary contradiction between patrimonial legitimacy and democracy. According to Roth, "If the course of history is not predetermined but domination [is] inescapable at the same time that its forms are limited, a historically saturated typology is the best analytic tool for the researcher" (1978:c).

Some scholars, as noted above, have emphasized the inhibiting effect of patrimonial authority on Africa's economic development, and particularly on the growth of market capitalism. There are good reasons to turn to We-

ber to support this linkage, since he states explicitly that the lack of predict-able *calculability* (guaranteed by an established legal code) had a limiting effect on the growth of markets and in some cases made the development of capitalism impossible (1978[1922]:238). In the absence of codified rules applicable across variable contexts, the economic incentives for capital accumulation and investment appear to be low. Callaghy notes, however, that Weber's antievolutionism leaves his theoretical model open to numerous local articulations, and that to Weber patrimonialism is "'compatible with household and market economy, petty bourgeois and manorial agriculture, absence and presence of capitalist economy'" (Weber 1978[1922], quoted in Callaghy 1988:86]. Callaghy insists that

> there is nothing mechanistic or deterministic about Weber's views on state and class formation or the development of capitalism. The same holds for Africa today. The paths that different countries take are determined by the presence and balance of facilitating factors, opportunities and struggles between rulers, emerging classes, status groups, organizations and particu-laristic forces, both internally and externally. (1988:89)

Weber's model for the emergence of capitalism in conjunction with rational-legal bureaucratic political legitimacy was, not surprisingly, the history of Western Europe, but he was imaginative enough to consider a multitude of possibilities, including "patrimonial capitalism." While he thought it unlikely that this could reach the "true type of profit-making enterprise with heavy investments in fixed capital and a rational organization of free labor which is oriented to the market purchases of private consumers" (1978[1922]:240), he mentioned some circumstances under which even that could be achieved by a patrimonial regime. These conditions included the following: "(1) the technical training should be available, (2) there must be a sufficiently powerful incentive to embark on such a policy—usually sharp competition... (3) a very special factor is necessary, namely, the participation of urban communes as a financial support in the competition" (1978[1922]:240). While Oelbaum (2002) seems to interpret the second of Weber's conditions as evidence that "Weber—not Charles Tilly as is typically claimed—is the actual author of the theory that war-making and modern state rationalization are two faces of the same coin" (291), the actual text does not specify that the "competition" is necessarily military; the context could suggest equally that the "sufficiently powerful incentive" is competition for trade and markets. As we shall see below, many of these conditions are similar to the emergence of a vibrant and productive market economy in postindependence Botswana.

In grounding his "historically saturated typology" in the examples of Egypt, Rome, China, and the Inca of Peru, Weber was of course limited by the kinds of material to which he had access, and he had very little access to historical accounts of precolonial African polities, although as Roth points

out, he used what he could find. It is therefore curious that latter-day scholars would insist that precolonial Africa provides the best examples of both traditional and "neo" patrimonialism.

In the course of "Africanizing" patrimonial legitimacy, much of the reciprocity and mutual respect between ruler and subject that Weber emphasized seems to have been overlooked. For example, Goran Hyden claims that for Weber, patrimonialism is

> associated with the exercise of power in small-scale, face-to-face types of traditional communities. In such patrimonial systems, a person rules due to his personal power and prestige. Others are followers or subjects with no rights and privileges other than those bestowed upon them by the ruler. Authority is wholly personalized, shaped by the ruler's own preferences rather than a codified system of laws. The ruler ensures political stability and personal political survival by providing security in an uncertain environment and by selectively allocating favors and material benefits to loyal followers who are not citizens but merely the ruler's clients. (2000:18–19)

In addition to suggesting that patrimonialism is limited to small-scale societies, Hyden's account of the relationship between ruler and subject lacks Weber's emphasis on legitimacy and accountability.

Furthermore, several accounts couple the reduction in scale and the one-sided view of domination with an insistence that Africa is somehow the home, par excellence, of patrimonialism. For example, Bratton and van de Walle argue that

> His [Weber's] definition of patrimonialism may provide an accurate description of the political systems of small isolated communities with rudimentary economies, including African chiefdoms in the precolonial era, and the practices of patrimonialism may persist at the local level in a number of different settings....It is clear that some nations in the developing world, most notably in sub-Saharan Africa, retain in modified form many of the characteristics of patrimonial rule. (1997:62)

This characterization of "precolonial African chiefdoms" is accompanied by little ethnohistorical evidence to demonstrate that they were in fact "small," "isolated," or had "rudimentary economies." Any such claim that patrimonial legitimacy is "traditional" across the continent must surely be qualified by specifying *where* and *when;* Asante before 1900 but not after? Buganda in the period of state consolidation or now?

Besides reducing the size of the society in which patrimonial government may be effective (where Weber spoke of "grand continental empires" these authors refer to "small, face-to-face communities"), some scholars introduce a subtle, and in some cases evolutionary, time frame through the use of terms like "persist" and "retain." Some scholars (e.g., Bayart 1986)

attribute persistence to the conscious design of colonial officials to preserve those elements of precolonial Africa that were most useful to them or, as we have mentioned above, to the efforts of nationalist leaders after independence to justify their legitimacy through reference to "tradition." Clapham makes the evolutionary argument most explicit in insisting that contemporary patrimonialism exists in Africa because it "most corresponds to the normal forms of social organization in pre-colonial societies" (1985:49), but he does not detail the causal mechanisms that contributed to its survival. Evolutionist assumptions, moreover, are implicit in a number of current analyses of the flaws of democratic performance in Africa. The implication is that Africa has not kept pace and must now "catch up" with other countries. As deGrassi notes, "An assumption that African patronage is an enduring aspect of rural systems... runs the risk of portraying rural poverty in Africa as primordial, thereby occluding the processes through which African poverty was historically produced "(2008:118).

Such evolutionary trajectories had no place in Weber's carefully constructed historical typologies. Roth argues that Weber himself was the most adamantly opposed to grand evolutionary schemas of any of the "classical" social thinkers: "Weber rejected the prevalent evolutionary and mono-causal theories, whether idealist or materialist, mechanistic or organicist; he fought both the reductionism of social scientists and the surface approach of historians, both the persistent search for hidden 'deeper causes' and the ingrained aversion against historically transcendent concepts" (1978:xxxv). Unlike the unilinear evolutionists of his day, Weber was a careful historian of specific times and places; he was acutely aware of the dangers of generalizing across unlike cases:

> A genuinely critical *comparison* of the developmental stages of the ancient polis and the medieval city... would be rewarding and useful—but only if such a comparison does *not* chase after 'analogies' and 'parallels' in the manner of the presently fashionable general schemes of development, in other words, it should be concerned with the *distinctiveness* of each of the two developments that were finally so different, and the purpose of the comparison must be the causal *explanation* of the difference. (*Agarrverhaltnisse in Altertum*, cited in Roth 1978:xxxvii, emphasis in the original)

Furthermore, Weber recognized his ideal types as precisely what they were: idealized concepts that would always differ in some respects from real social relations and be shaped by local conditions:

> Hence, the kind of terminology and classification set forth above has in no sense the aim—indeed it could not have it—to be exhaustive or to confine the whole of historical reality in a rigid scheme. Its usefulness is derived from the fact that in a given case it is possible to distinguish what aspects of a given organized group can legitimately be identified as falling under or approximating one or another of these categories (1978[1922]:263–64)

Returning to Weber's original text is instructive in demonstrating what has been lost, selected, and emphasized in the contemporary literature on African patrimonialism. What Weber intended as a typology of forms of legitimacy has been reinterpreted as a classification of regime types. The discourse of recent years has naturalized the behavior not just of African rulers but also of their subjects, portraying them as passive and accepting of autocratic behavior in the name of "traditional expectations" (see Oelbaum 2002:293). Truly pathological leaders, like Charles Taylor of Liberia, have been described as "neopatrimonial" as if their countrymen automatically accept such claims to legitimate rule. In fact, as Englebert demonstrates (2000b), such criminal and self-aggrandizing behaviors are more a sign of the lack of legitimacy than a uniquely African style of leadership. As de-Grassi (2008) argues, when ordinary people resist such illegitimate uses of power, their actions should not be seen simply as a reaction to the diminishing flow of patronage resources, but rather as a real attempt to hold leaders accountable. A closer reading of Weber refocuses our attention on the question of mutual rights and responsibilities, on the expectations for fairness and assumptions of mutual dependence inherent in his construction, and on the need for greater historical specificity than imagined African villages. As Weber insisted, "it should be kept clearly in mind that the basis of every authority and correspondingly of every kind of willingness to obey, is a *belief* by virtue of which persons exercising authority are lent a prestige" (1978[1922]:263, emphasis in the original).

If by patrimonialism we mean that rulers and subjects in particular times and places understand that the customs and expectations governing their relationships enable subordinates to hold leaders accountable in significant ways, then informal institutions such as patron–client relations or personal ties can complement and even reinforce formal institutions associated with democracy and rule of law while remaining distinct from them. Our challenge as scholars is to question the assertion by some continental rulers as well as scholars that "Africans like and expect strong, autocratic leaders," paying attention also to those instances in which popular dissent rejects claims to "tradition"—as has occurred in numerous recent cases in which leaders have been forced from office (see Schatzberg 2001). To examine these ideas, we turn now to the case of Botswana, ironically often represented as the exception that proves the rule of neopatrimonial domination in Africa.

Botswana: Neopatrimonial, yet Democratic

Botswana's rise from abysmal poverty to middle-income status, its sustained multiparty politics, and its favorable scores on governance rankings make it a key case for analysts of African development and democratization. That exemplary status makes inferences risky: it is important to avoid both generalizing from the unique, and—given the nation's continuing difficulties—

accepting at face value the enthusiasms of aid and business interests holding a stake in the status quo. Worse yet is the risk of selectively linking elements of Botswana's current situation to whatever we wish to emphasize in its history. That would be to repeat the errors we have criticized in earlier sections, whereby virtually any evil can be written off as (neo)patrimonialism.

In fact, Botswana shows that a history of patrimonial authority neither leads necessarily to a neopatrimonial regime, nor proves incompatible with liberal democracy, as a reading of Erdman and Engel (2007) might suggest. Instead, a succession of elites, deeply rooted in the traditional life of village and countryside, used personal power and a range of reciprocities to solidify their legitimacy as a governing class. In the process they built bridges across tribal (*morafe*) divisions and solidified their own financial stakes in sound institutions. The result has been sustained economic growth and a successful "open elite democracy" (Good 1992:95). Botswana's elites have not abandoned patrimonialism or overcome it; rather, they have built a democratic state on a foundation of traditional and highly personalized reciprocities and loyalties. The leadership has been sufficiently secure, politically and economically, to accommodate opposing parties and interests, as well as the rise of a civil society that also brings traditional loyalties into the public arena. Its electoral politics, while not as yet producing a handover from the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) to any of its rivals, has seen lower-level victories by opposition parties; elections are widely regarded as fair and substantially free of fraud.[12]

A variety of factors have contributed to Botswana's development. The land is dry but well-suited to the breeding and trading of cattle—a social and economic enterprise critical to the rise of the elite, as we shall see. The British left traditional institutions largely intact. The population is small— only about 1.8 million—and concentrated in the eastern regions of the Texas-sized state, and was thus relatively easily drawn into social networks. Diamonds, the main natural resource, are not a resource curse (Acemoglu, Johnson, & Robinson 2003): deposits lie deep beneath the surface (unlike in the shallower fields of Angola and Sierra Leone), and mining is thus difficult and profitable only over the longer term. Those facts encourage partnerships between public and private sectors rather than smash-and-grab extractive and political practices (*The Economist* 2004).[13] The majority of the population are Tswana speakers, but "ethnic homogeneity" should not be overstated, either as a fact or as an explanation for development: eight main tribes make up the Tswana nation.

Botswana has significant problems: the struggles of the Kalahari and San peoples reflect a measure of ethnic tension. AIDS and HIV infection rates are among the highest in the world, although recent progress, particularly among children, has been impressive (MSNBC 2008). Its political style—close integration of the political leadership, relatively "short" hierarchies from grassroots to the state, continuity in government, cooptation of

most minority groups, and tight control over symbols and networks under-
lying traditional legitimacy—has fostered stability and growth, but may also
resist challenges to the nation's striking economic inequalities. While cor-
ruption has apparently been kept to moderate levels, significant scandals
requiring the formation of a national anticorruption Directorate did occur
in the 1990s. Botswana's style of corruption, termed "elite cartels" in one
case study, may indirectly aid growth and reduce political uncertainties via
elite collusion. But elite networks that make for predictability today can be
barriers to needed adaptation tomorrow; other "elite cartel" cases suggest
that in a crisis—political (as in Italy) or economic (as in South Korea)—
elite networks, having preempted smaller changes over time, are less likely
to bend than to break.[14]

Cattle, Kgotlas, *and Power*

For many generations power, status, and prosperity in Botswana were based
upon the cattle trade—so much so that Robinson and Parsons (2006:120–
21) characterize Botswana at independence as a "beefocracy." Local chiefs,
with their inner circles of relatives and cattle owners, managed land and
production issues, settled disputes, and ruled communities through the
kgotla—assemblies at which the chief "not only delivered judgments and
laws but where he listened to his people" (Peters 1994:33). Kgotlas, which
likely emerged early in the nineteenth century, were not democratic bod-
ies; only males could attend, and while all could speak, the normal strat-
egy was to build consensus behind decisions the chief and his cadre had
already made. Still, power generally drew upon consensus, not birthright,
and the chief was no autocrat: while dissent was normally muted, discus-
sions on controversial matters could show that more contributions were
needed in order to build consensus. Morton (2004:347) notes a Tswana
saying, "kgosi ke kgosi ka batho"—"a chief is a chief through the people."
Peters (1994:27-8) adds:

> The political structure entailed a strongly institutionalized central author-
> ity focused on the chief, combined with strong local representation of
> constituent units through the public assembly (*kgotla*). And the political
> structure of the *morafe* is energized by a cultural focus on *both* the hero-
> chief *and* the power of words (*mafoko*) wielded in the *kgotla* by commoners
> [emphasis in original].

Consensus was reinforced by a mix of interdependence and patron-
age. Patron–client relationships were in no way equal; at best, they likely
embodied the sorts of "lopsided friendships" noted in other contexts by
Springborg (1982). A poorer individual who owned no cattle might receive
meat, hides, or (later) money from a chief, but enduring loyalty was expect-
ed in return. Yet unlike electoral machine patronage in many societies—a
system of control sustaining self-serving political monopolies—much more

was at stake in the kgotla: authority rested on ownership of resources critical to the survival of all. Ordinary individuals had meaningful claims on local chiefs, and the chiefs themselves had real responsibilities. Authority, though personal rather than civic, was still legitimate, secure, and based on cooperation. Trade among villages linked chiefs on a wider basis, while the small scale of society helped keep personal networks strong.

Governing a State

After independence the chiefly class became the core leadership for the state—a development seen in several other African countries. But Botswana's leadership class was legitimate: like leaders elsewhere they openly laid claim to traditional authority, but they did so through the kgotla and its mutual obligations. Because the new political class could draw upon a heritage of effective rule at the local level and extensive personal ties that had not been disrupted by colonialism, it was secure; contending viewpoints, parties, and interests thus did not threaten the state or regime. Further, leading figures had personal stakes in sound economic institutions and secure property rights—attributes often assumed to require legal-rational foundations—which both positioned the nation for growth and enabled elites to continue to make money. Just as Weber postulated, capitalist markets can flourish when patrimonial elites are presented with the appropriate incentives.

The resulting regime governed in a paternalistic, yet open and effective manner, and it drew strength from traditional structures. Seretse Khama, cofounder in 1962 of the Bechuanaland (later Botswana) Democratic Party BDP) and the first president of the new republic, drew prestige from being chief of the Ngwato (see Robinson & Parsons 2006), and the BDP aggressively drew village chiefs and kgotlas into its base. In a manner reminiscent, perhaps, of a chief and his inner circle, government officials and BDP leaders cooperated extensively in building support for their policies and candidates. But the regime was also held accountable by popular sentiments expressed in local kgotlas, as well as in less traditional settings such as Freedom Square gatherings and party nomination caucuses. Good (1992:73) sums up the resulting fusion of traditional power and an effective state:

> Strengths of this kind, from precisely where they counted, had not appeared overnight. They were in a real sense simply the just deserts of a chieftaincy located in commercial agriculture, which also possessed long experience of government and social control. A rising rural capitalist class had made a successful transition from political power in pre-colonial societies to the new nation-state.

Despite internal frictions more or less inevitable in any party dominant for over four decades, the BDP continues to hold power. Competing parties have gradually increased their share of the vote; still, in 2004, in an elec-

tion that *The Economist* (2004) termed "admirably dull," the BDP won 51.7 percent of the vote and took forty-four of the fifty-seven popularly elected seats in the sixty-three-seat lower house. Opposition parties are occasionally threatened with banishment should they endanger national unity or any segment of the population, but criticism of the government is tolerated and opposition rights are generally secure. When Mogae stepped down in April 2008 and handed over power to his vice president, he was praised for not clinging to power in the style of other rulers.[15]

Traditional elements of the regime's legitimacy do not necessarily conflict with Botswana's formal institutions. During the 1990s, for example, bureaucrats blocked implementation of rangeland privatization policies enacted by the National Assembly on grounds of professional disagreement with privatization as a strategy for managing arid lands. Their control over advisory committees effectively stalled privatization for nearly a decade, in spite of the interests of politicians in seeing the policy implemented (see Poteete 2003a, 2003b). Similarly, when a temporary slump in diamond markets threatened growth in the early 1980s, the government responded with grants and subsidies. While the program rewarded the loyalty of a range of business leaders and rural communities, it was also well administered and targeted to real entrepreneurs, sustaining the industry until market conditions improved.

What Does Botswana Show Us?

In no way did Botswana turn patrimonialism into governance magic. Like any other state it faces demands from excluded groups—notably the San—as well as from women seeking a full voice in government. At some point the BNP will lose an election; whether it will hand over power seems less in question than whether any successor government can draw upon the multi-stranded ties and loyalties that have sustained the BNP and modern state. Politics during Botswana's first four decades has been strikingly nonideological (see Molomo 2000); that tradition fits well with personal authority and consensus-oriented elite rule, but it raises questions about the longer-term scope for political competition and—again—about any opposition party's ability to govern.

Botswana is not offered here as a model for emulation, nor as typical of anything but itself. Its significance is that it vividly illustrates the critical distinction between types of authority and kinds of regimes. While numerous societies with patrimonial pasts have regimes that have turned out badly, in Botswana patrimonial practices and institutions provided a foundation—via the kgotla and traditional patterns of leadership, accountability, and exchange—on which more recent generations built Africa's most solid democratic regime. The argument is not that patrimonialism "caused" that success, or that one African case necessarily illustrates the development of others. Instead, the contrasts between Botswana and other cases are the key, showing that there is nothing in patrimonialism that leads directly to

any one regime type, and there is nothing inherent in patrimonialism to prevent the creation of a democracy by leaders determined to do so. In that sense, understanding the role of patrimonialism in the building of a durable democratic regime is a much more demanding analytical test than looking at the more numerous cases in which just a few, often sporadic, democratic attributes would have to be accounted for.

Types of authority and types of regimes, then, are different entities. Patrimonialism must be understood in context, evaluated for its positive as well as negative consequences, and not be used as a one-variable explanation for broad national outcomes. That sort of evaluation must keep Weber's ideas at center stage, employing them accurately and in detail rather than as "catch-all" concepts. Patrimonialism, as Weber insisted, is a form of authority and belief, not a regime type—a kind of legitimacy, not a pathology.

Conclusion

Many contemporary African leaders and the bureaucrats who serve them have consciously distorted history to justify dictatorial rule on national and local levels. Moreover, claims to historical legitimacy are echoed in the frequent characterizations of African political systems as "neopatrimonial" by Western scholars. Under a veneer of rational-legal authority imposed by colonialism, a pervasive "patrimonial" or personalistic logic is said to prevail, encouraging patronage, clientelism, corruption, and economic stagnation. Even with the transition to democracy, forms of patrimonialism are still seen as brakes on Africa's future political and economic development.

The use of terms like *patrimonialism* and *neopatrimonialism* to explain contemporary strategies of governance in Africa has had three important consequences: (1) it has established and naturalized a supposedly characteristic form of leadership and governance to the continent as a whole; (2) it has attributed to this form of governance both the failure of African states to operate according to the principles of liberal democracy and the "passivity" of African citizens in demanding accountability; and (3) it has located the poor economic performance of postcolonial Africa in the political chaos caused by "strong men" and "weak states." It thus makes historical, political, and economic claims about the continent as a whole, providing a neat and consistent explanation for violence, state collapse, petty to extreme corruption, irresponsible resource allocation, and a host of other ills.

But such arguments, explicit or implicit, derive from a misreading of Weber. The scholars making these claims often inscribe an evolutionary logic to Weber's categorization of charismatic, patrimonial, and bureaucratic authority, invariably associating rational-legal authority with "progress" and with Western, developed countries. In fact, a close reading of Weber shows that he avoided evolutionary schemes and instead constructed a series of ideal types in order to explore different forms of legitimate domination

or authority. Weber's goal was to understand the cultural framing of beliefs about the operation of legitimate power in diverse settings; he noted that these beliefs could be compatible with many possible types of regimes. Finally, most scholarly accounts ignore Weber's emphasis on reciprocities between rulers and their subjects, and his understanding that patrimonial leaders could be held accountable by the collective. If the belief in legitimate authority is lost, nothing is left but the raw power of violence. Even leaders who build their initial following under such circumstances must create a new legitimizing "script" in order to sustain the willingness of their subjects to obey.

We dispute the assertion that "patrimonialism" accurately describes political realities in Africa, past or present. A more complete application of Weber suggests that Botswana—one of Africa's success stories—may also be one of its most clearly "patrimonial" or "neopatrimonial" states. In Botswana complex reciprocities link the government and its citizens, legitimacy is created and reinforced through both the rule of law and personal bonds, and a mutually constitutive relationship exists between the personal and the public. With regard to other countries, scholars might be better served by calling them what they are: authoritarian regimes, dictatorships, or democracies with adjectives. Not only would that be more faithful to Weber; it would also open up fruitful comparisons with countries in Asia and Latin America which have been precluded by the notion of African exceptionalism.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

1. Weber died in 1920, leaving many unpublished manuscripts and fragments that were later collected and edited by his students and colleagues and published as *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Economy and Society) in 1922. Later translators used the various German editions of this work, with the Roth and Wittich translation (1978) based on the fourth German edition of 1956.

2. These critical points are explored in detail in Erdman and Engel (2007); Roth (1978); Theobald (1982).

3. See also deGrassi (2008) on the conceptual roots of much of the neopatrimonialism literature in the evolutionist tradition of modernization theory.

4. We confine our remarks to use of the terms in the context of Africa. For broader applications of the term see Erdmann and Engel's critique of the concept (2007).

5. See (Medard (1982:166); Callaghy (1986:32–33); but see also Chabal and Daloz (1999:4–16).

6. See Medard (1982:179); Hyden (1997:25); Hyden (2006:57–62); Lewis (1998:144).

7. Note that Bayart seems to have abandoned the term with the publication of his classic work, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (1993).

8. In their 1997 book the personal dictatorships category no longer exists and the countries in this category are subsumed under the remaining categories. Presumably, the reason for getting rid of this category is that it lacks the "institutional" character of the other categories calling into question the systemic quality of neopatrimonialism.

9. See Gyimah-Boadi (2007); Hyden (2006:101–15); Mehler (2007:216–17); Simon (2005:199–220); VonDoepp and Villalón (2005:1–26).

10. See also deGrassi (2008); Leonard and Straus (2003).

11. While many translations of Weber's work are available to English-speaking scholars, we are basing our discussion on the two-volume *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology,* compiled and edited by the German scholars Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (1978, a reissue of the original edition of 1968). This work is drawn from the fourth edition (1956) of Weber's *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (1922) as well as other writings produced at different times over

the course of his long and productive career. Among the translators who contributed to the Roth and Wittich collection are Hans Gerth, C. Wright Mills, Talcott Parsons, and others who had produced earlier volumes of selections from Weber's writing and commented extensively on his work for English-speaking audiences.

12. The discussion of Botswana here and below is based on a number of sources. See Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson (2003); Robinson and Parsons (2006); Rotberg (2004); Werbner (2004); "Economic Snapshot" (2008); Danevad (1995); Good (1994); Samatar and Oldfield (1995); Englebert (2000b); Carroll and Carroll (2004); Molomo (2000); Molutsi and Holm (1990); Somolekae 2002; Peters 1984. See also Samatar (1999) for a dissenting position on whether Botswana overcame patrimonialism or built upon it.

13. See also Weber's criteria (1978[1922]:240) for the compatibility of patrimonial authority with capitalist development.

14. On the subject of ethnic tension see Good (1999); Corry (2002); Taylor (2007). On HIV/AIDS see Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson (2003). On the integration of political leadership see Good (1996); Holm, Molutsi, and Somolekae (1996). On the cooptation of minority groups see Werbner (2004). On so-called elite cartels see Johnston (2005:ch. 5).

15. However, the fact that the new president was Seretse Ian Khama, son of the first president, raised concerns in other quarters about a dynastic presidency (MSNBC 2008).