

PATRIMONIAL RISE AND DECLINE. THE STRANGE CASE OF THE FAMILIAL STATE

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Recall Weber's diagnosis. A patrimonial system of governance is one in which those holding public offices manage these offices as if these were their "personal property." In this system of rule, the ruler and his officials are only limited by tradition. The consequences are twofold. First, institutional innovations are precarious since they do not enjoy the "sanctity of tradition." Second, new kinds of acquisition and enterprise are exposed to the arbitrary character of the ruler's governance and of his officials'.¹ Investments can be wiped out by one single stroke. Arbitrary power begets instability which in turn undermines sustained investments over time. The indictment is therefore quite clear. "The patrimonial state lacks the political and procedural *predictability* [Weber's emphasis] indispensable for capitalist development."²

This liability is compounded by a second one which Weber does not elaborate but which is quite consistent with his overall diagnosis. In a patrimonial system of governance, rulers and their officials seek to convert their office into a family property. Handing down their office and the prestige attached to it to their male heirs is their way to trump death. The implication is that when the logic of patrimonial appropriation is under way, family ties and the logic of political consolidation, not standards of

political or administrative competence, motivate office allocation. The door then is open to nepotism, corruption and inefficiency.

In light of this diagnosis, we would expect any patrimonial system of governance to undermine rather than to enhance collective capacity. More to the point: we would *not* expect such a system to lay the ground for an institutional setting prone to innovation. The first contribution of *The Familial State* is to point out this paradox and to document it extensively in the case of the Netherlands in the early modern period. This case has demonstrative value: here is a country in which patrimonial practices were rife and pervasive. Far from hindering the development of state institutions, these practices were key to the geopolitical rise of the Dutch state and its hegemonic position. Two questions then come to the fore. Which factors made these developments possible? How does this paradox contribute to our understanding of institution building and state formation?

I propose to discuss the contributions of *The Familial State* by focusing on three nodal points: (1) the family as a site of strategic investment, (2) the analytical relevance of the Dutch anomaly for the theory of state formation and (3) the institutional underpinnings of decline. *The Familial State* places gender and families at the center of the stage by emphasizing the centrality of family relations and patriarchy in patrimonial strategies. In so doing, Adams invites us to ask, beyond any naturalist conception of patriarchal domination, why family relations were so central to strategies of patrimonial aggrandizement and consolidation. The “unique” (Adams, 2005a, p. 5) character of the Netherlands’ system of governance raises the issues of its comparative status – how shall we assess its patrimonial character? – and of its theoretical potential. Since, furthermore, this case is a clear-cut case of rise and decline, I will also examine to what extent *The Familial State* provides a theory that accounts for both sides of the coin.

1. LINEAGE AND STRATEGY

Whenever we speak of patrimonialism, the reference is to the rule of the *pater*. Weber theorizes this connection from a genetic perspective. The prototype of patrimonial governance is the household. The patrimonial ruler manages his realm as he would manage his household according to rules of traditional wisdom. This genetic and naturalist model makes patriarchy a constitutive dimension of patrimonial practices. In this conception, patrimony implies the dominion of fathers. Patrimonial officials are bound to be male.³ At least this is what we think. And we are all the

more inclined to think so if we assume that the rule of the fathers is a fact of nature grounded in a biological necessity. Etymology comforts this bias: the reference to gender, being inscribed in the term, lends credence to a substantialist interpretation.

Adams warns us against this naturalistic bias (Adams, 2005a, p. 32). Weber mistakenly takes the etymology of patrimony at face value, interpreting the rule of the father as a fact of nature grounded in biological differences across sexes.⁴ The problem with this naturalist understanding is that it prevents us from investigating patriarchy for its own sake: if the rule of the father is a natural phenomenon, there is no need to construct it as an object of inquiry. Consequently, in failing to make the gender dimension of patrimonial practices a focus of inquiry, we miss the opportunity to explore “modes of politico-economic reproduction” that impinge on “how political alliances are formed and how power is transferred, how new members of the elite are recruited, how political rule is legitimated, and when it founders” (p. 32). The point of *The Familial State* is precisely to extract patriarchy out of its naturalistic gangue so that we can adequately gauge these patterns of reproduction.

Whether the focus is on the Netherlands (p. 102), France (p. 108) or England (p. 129), the private appropriation of rule which Adams documents in the early modern period was a fathers’ and sons’ business. Each case was “a version of single template of patriarchal patrimonialism” (p. 7). The players were male family heads “holding their card on behalf of the lineage” (p. 93). Fathers sought to capture state positions to the benefit of their own lineage. It is they who administered the allocation of goods across generations. Consequently, the rule of the father suffused the common sense of elite families. “Contemporaries saw themselves as bound by the rules of family patrilineal succession in politics.”⁵ In this political economy thus, norms of patrilineal succession enjoyed hegemony. Adams does not use the notion in this specific sense.⁶ Yet, hegemony captures the thrust of her descriptive claims.

Conjointly, this mode of reproduction made the family a site of intense strategic investment. The key issue was not only to get hold of offices and positions but also to make sure that these would remain within the purview of the family. This analytical and descriptive foray into the gender dimension of patrimonial practices in early modern Europe points to two further questions. First, how shall we account for the cultural hegemony of this patriarchal model? Theorists of hegemony such as Laitin (1986) draw attention to the conditional impact of state practices and institutions on the creation of common sense.⁷ The interesting point in the case of the familial

state is that the cultural hegemony of the patriarchal norms described by Adams either preceded or was contemporaneous with the emergence of state institutions.⁸ Second, what explains the centrality of family relations in this strategic universe? Both questions take on their significance in light of Adams' critique of Weber and, more broadly, the critique of any naturalist conception of patriarchy.

Historicizing Hegemonic Representations

Adams' analysis can be deemed "Geertzian" to the extent that it is interested in capturing the semantic logic of a set of cultural representations grounded in normative assumptions about fatherly rule and familial honor.⁹ We cannot purport to reconstruct the subjective ethos of historical actors without mapping out their collective representations and without investigating how these representations relate to one another in a symbolic system endowed with its own semantic consistency and logic.¹⁰ Here the approach is primarily static. In adopting this standpoint, *The Familial State* displays a powerful matrix of widely shared normative representations.

The paradoxical effect of this perspective is that it relegates to the background Adams' critique of naturalist conceptions. If indeed practices such as those recorded by *The Familial State* are socially and symbolically constructed – the outcome of struggles and conflicts that are historically situated and socially conditioned – then this critique calls for a genetic analysis tracing the processes whereby these practices became referential, pervasive and commonsensical. We demonstrate the inanity of the assertion that a social pattern is grounded in nature by showing what made this pattern historically possible. There is considerable tension between, on the one hand, the claim that the gender dimension of patrimony should be analyzed in its own terms as a mode of regulation (by definition historically relative) and a structural analysis mapping out a matrix of cultural representations enjoying cultural hegemony and, as a result, endowed with the universality of their hegemony.

The following statement is indicative of this tension: "In more structural terms, one of the general arguments of this book is that paternal authority and patriarchal status are core dimensions of patrimonial rule; entwined with the articulations of political privilege and property relations specific to the times, they could be expected to shape the development of the Dutch and other European states in a range of specific ways" (p. 29; my emphasis). Unless we unduly interpret the first part of this statement ("In more

structural terms ... are core dimensions of patrimonial rule") as a definitional claim, this part asserts an anthropological truth that has no historical referent. Patriarchy is inherent to, and constitutive of, patrimonial power. The second part of the statement, on the other hand, situates the claim historically, but eludes the question of genesis, presumably because it is grounded in the anthropological claim.

Thus, the question which Adams' critique of Weber invites us to ask is: why did this patriarchal ideology emerge with such symbolic force? Or shall we conclude that this ideology has no history (as Althusser, 2001, would put it) because patriarchy is a trans-historical feature of patrimonial structures?¹¹ If indeed patrimony always implies the rule of the pater, is this not to say that it has universal truth? *The Familial State* leaves us on the verge of these different interpretive leads, in part because with regard to the ideology of family lineages, the book adopts a predominantly culturalist standpoint and downplays the issue of emergence processes.

Strategizing Family Honor

The second issue worthy of attention pertains to the family/strategy nexus. Adams portrays family relations as central to strategies of patrimonial appropriation. The family is the collective actor on behalf of which elite family heads deploy their strategies. It is both the end and the means of office acquisition. The logic inherent to these strategies asserts the prevalence of kinship ties over any other criterion of office transfer. Why were elite family heads so eager to convert their office and state service into a property of their lineage? Two very different lines of argument are possible to address this question. The first one points to the condition of possibility of a moral economy, the second one to a strategic model of cooperation.

At first sight, it is tempting to interpret these family strategies in light of the inevitable standoff with Death – the "Ultimate Master" as Hegel once put it: they are last-ditch attempts to fend off death's grip by vesting sons and daughters with the task of being on our behalf. We will be defeated for sure. Who is not? But we can nonetheless claim to a modicum of immortality through our lineage and the lineage of our offspring. Family is our trump card. According to this interpretation, converting offices into family properties is one instance of a broader anthropological pattern. In handing down their office and the prestige attached to it to their heirs, patrimonial officers and rulers were extracting their fate from the temporal horizon set by their death.

However basic this anthropological interpretation may seem, it needs to be qualified: if it provides a plausible foundation for the moral economy of intergenerational investment, it does not tell us under which conditions this moral economy becomes possible and when it is likely to emerge. It may well be that this type of investment becomes conceivable when prestige can be viewed as a family feature. Particularly significant in this regard are Adams' remarks about the crystallization of a new cultural understanding of patriarchal familial honor. The early modern period in western Europe is a time when two different idioms of honor – one stressing state service, the other, the aristocracy of blood – get conflated.¹² The Netherlands are particularly representative of this cultural evolution. Adams notes for instance that even the princes of the House of Orange portrayed themselves as “state officers” (p. 97).

Is this enough? It is possible to set forth a different account of the centrality of family ties – one that is focused on the strategic requirement of private appropriation. In environments that lack the stabilizing effects of well-functioning legal settings, interpersonal commitments are constantly undermined by the possibility of defection and betrayals. By contrast, because of the normative underpinnings of kinship, and because of the density and the mutual dependence inherent to family relations, family ties bring with them the promise of interpersonal commitment. They maximize the cost of defection for potential defectors and are better suited to the goals of maintaining supervision and enforcing sanctions than ties of friendship or relations of personal exchange.¹³ This explains their pragmatic convenience.

2. THE PATRIMONIAL MOMENT

Adams situates the unique character of the Dutch case in the “three-way institutional nexus of elite families, state, and economic flows” (p. 6). This “distinctive patrimonial institutional configuration – linking a merchant capitalist class, an estatist state and the elite patriarchal families – “was a central factor explaining “the ascent of the Dutch state in the Golden Age” (p. 77). Since the paradox of the Dutch case is one of patrimonial expansion, the issue is, first, to figure out what was distinctively “patrimonial” in this configuration and, second, to what extent this “unique” setup is amenable to a general theory of state formation.

To fully gauge the contributions of *The Familial State* on this point, it is helpful to discuss in which respects Adams' analyses build on, and depart from, Weber's framework. Summarizing Weber's views on patrimonial

structures and their collective impact is not an easy task. His reflections shun clear-cut arguments. Weber proceeds by delineating multiple contrasts and by outlining different directions of research. It is as if, implicitly acknowledging the multiplicity of the effects at work and the wide range of possible outcomes, Weber had shunned away from making definite statements and predictions. The terrain which he is mapping is one in which gradation and combined effects carry more analytical weight than self-enclosed types.

Stereotyped and Parcellized

Two broad principles of differentiation run through the apparent maze of Weber's historical observations and analytical insights regarding the collective implications of patrimony. The first one relates to the extent to which patrimonial agents can indulge in arbitrary power. The second one pertains to the degree to which power is “parcellized downwards” – to use Adams' apt expression (p. 17). I consider each dimension in turn.

The possibility of arbitrary power is inherent to patrimonial relations. Since, in a patrimonial system of governance, rulers and officials manage their office as if it were their private realm, they can have considerable discretion in the way they exercise power and for which purposes. This discretion, however, does not go unchecked. For one thing, tradition sets powerful limits to the legitimate use of patrimonial power.¹⁴ “The exercise of power is primarily a personal right of the official: outside of the sacred boundaries of tradition, he makes ad hoc decisions. Hence, a typical feature of the patrimonial state in the sphere of law-making is the juxtaposition of inviolable traditional prescriptions and completely arbitrary decision-making.”¹⁵

Further, as patrimonial rulers and officials engage in repeated transactions over time, they organize their interactions by reference to a set of expectations, explicit or not, that provide the basis for common understandings and that enmesh these interactions in a codified setting. Without providing an explicit characterization of this dimension, Weber evokes the notion of “stereotyped patrimonialism.”¹⁶ Codification differentiates patrimonial arrangements by stabilizing relations and by limiting the unpredictable character of patrimonial power.¹⁷

The second principle of differentiation running through Weber's analysis is the degree to which power gets fragmented among multiple agents directly managing portions of the public rule. Fragmentation is a natural outgrowth of patrimonial rule: “As the appropriation of offices progresses, the ruler's

power, especially his political power, disintegrates into a bundle of powers separately appropriated by various individuals by virtue of special privileges – rights which are most variously defined but which, once the definition has become established, cannot be altered by the ruler without arousing dangerous resistance from the vested interests.”¹⁸ Hence, as Adams points out (p. 17), a patrimonial system of governance is “crosscut by patterned tensions” between rulers and agents with a local basis of power.¹⁹

How shall we situate the Dutch case in this conceptual space? *The Familial State* makes it clear that on both counts – codification and power fragmentation – Dutch patrimonial structures ranked high. These structures exemplify Weber’s implicit definition of “stereotyped patrimonialism.” To a significant extent, patrimonial relations in this institutional configuration enjoyed a high degree of codification. Moreover, power was parcellized and fragmented.²⁰ This being said, the unique character of this case still remains elusive when we remain within the confines of Weber’s analytical framework. The broad characterization of Dutch patrimonialism as “stereotyped” and “fragmented” does not make it more distinctive than England and France at the same period of time. If, from a macro comparative perspective, we were to locate these three cases in the two-dimensional space constituted by “codification” and “power fragmentation,” we would in all likelihood situate them in the same quadrant.²¹

More to the point, the references to “stereotyped patrimonialism” and power fragmentation tell us nothing about their impact on economic development and collective capacity. Clearly, codification has a stabilizing effect on relations and expectations about the future. In this respect, it does contribute to the prospect of capitalist investment.²² But the codification of patrimonial relations into stereotypes can also inhibit innovations in the same way tradition does.²³ Even more damaging, the stabilization of patrimonial privileges creates an opportunity for rent situations, that is, situations in which wealth is accumulated “as a source of rent, not as a source of capital.”²⁴

As for the degree to which power is fragmented in the patrimonial structure, it is unclear how this variable could be construed as a factor of economic development. Those who have crafted for themselves a parcel of power are likely to enjoy it for their own sake, not for the sake of collective projects. Once patrimonial officers have got hold of their office, they have no reason to tolerate entrepreneurial moves and reforms if these threaten the bases of their wealth and power. The French *parlements* are a case in point. They “blocked all innovations which would have been detrimental to their traditional rights.”²⁵ Hence, in a parcellized system, the potential for

arbitrary power gets replicated at the local level. And arbitrary power, insofar as it begets unstable decisions, impedes economic development.

In short, the reference to Weber is of little help in the present case. Parcellization downwards and codification capture important sources of variation among patrimonial structures. But these two dimensions are of little explanatory value if the point is to assess the impact of patrimonial arrangements on economic development and, more specifically, on capitalism. They are of little explanatory value because their effects are indeterminate. They do not inform us about actors’ capacity to put collective resources to a productive use.²⁶ The consolidation of office creates the capacity to take over free-floating resources. In this respect, it is a factor of stability. It creates a temporal horizon for the management of resources. But the flip side is never far away: the appropriation of office also creates the opportunity for exclusive appropriation and the suppression of any innovation that could be threatening. From an evolutionary viewpoint, the challenge is to identify which factors lead actors to promote innovations versus exclusive appropriation.

This analytical agenda is very much present in Adams’ historical inquiry: “Venality and associated styles of patrimonial governance welded states to the political goals and reproduction of particular elites as those elites in turn tightened their grip on pieces of patrimonial power. *Under certain conditions*, this dynamic encouraged politico-economic rigidity ... *Under others*, it fostered plural, decentralized possibilities ...” (*The Familial State*, p. 26, my emphasis). The point is key. The effects of patrimonial arrangements on the collective capacity for institutional innovation remain indeterminate if we cannot specify the parameters conditioning these outcomes. By focusing specifically on the characteristics of the Dutch case from a comparative viewpoint, *The Familial State* helps us flesh out an argument that complements and goes beyond Weber’s framework.

Nodes of Agency

Large-scale organizational endeavors require the formation of cliques of agents with the capacity to build institutions. Stated in more abstract terms: cooperative efforts rest on nodes of agency. Patrimonial practices provide a breeding ground for these cliques and nodes by webbing a network of interrelated ties geared to shared interests and coordination. The groups thus constituted may be exclusive. But they can also be “initiating nuclei.” As such they create the condition for institution-building (pp. 35, 98).

From this perspective, these groups are a necessary and constitutive moment in the process of institution building.²⁷ *The Familial State* restores the significance of this constitutive moment. In the Dutch state, patrimonial practices welded corporate families to the state.²⁸ Remains the intriguing question: how can these practices serve a collective project that is antithetical to their underlying logic?

Two key factors stand out in Adams' account: decentralized rule and regulated competition. Both are of broad theoretical significance. They explain how the logic of patrimony can be turned against itself. Consider the impact of decentralized rule. The case of the Netherlands in the 17th century exemplifies a system of rule in which no clique and no single actor had the capacity to monopolize executive power. The contrast with the Florentine case, which Adams underscores (p. 101), is striking. In the confederate structure of the Dutch state, sites of sovereignty – town councils, provincial representative assemblies and the States General – were too numerous to be taken over by one single family (p. 104). Very significantly Adams establishes a negative correlation between the scope of decentralization and the instability of governance: “the uncertainty that was endemic to patrimonial rule was minimized when corporate elites controlled the levers of power – that is, when the monarch or stadholder was politically subordinated to the estates, as in the Netherlands of the Golden Age” (p. 21).²⁹

The second factor is the regulated exercise of competition. This point relates to the corporate and mercantilist setup of the Dutch state. Families were competing for offices in a corporate setting. This setting induced a fair amount of competition and elicited an interest in self-regulation. It is very striking to observe that early on, in the second half of the 16th century, members of the regent class were pushing for the abolition of venal office-holding and that the proscription of venality acquired legal status (pp. 43, 81). As we could have expected, this proscription was far from being fully enforced. The interesting point is that family heads invoked these rules when they sought to limit the margin of maneuver of their competitors (pp. 93–94, 145–146).³⁰ Competition thus was regulated and this regulation limited the destructive logic of private appropriation.

3. EXPLAINING DECLINE

Stasis and decline are the flip sides of hegemony. It is possible to set forth an explanation of the decline of the Netherlands exclusively in terms of

economic factors, both structural and contingent.³¹ But decline can also be analyzed as a political phenomenon: economic patterns co-evolve with governance systems.³² Regarding stasis and decline, one of the strengths of *The Familial State* is to propose an account which, from an analytical viewpoint, is highly consistent with Adams' explanation of the rise of the Dutch state. The focus is on the interplay between actors' capacity for institutional innovations and the impact of structural constraints. The question *The Familial State* invites us to pursue further from a comparative perspective is whether, and in which capacity, elite groups had the ability to overcome or reverse politico-economic developments that had a structural character. On this point, Adams' formulations are compatible with two possible interpretations, and it is not entirely clear which one, in the end, we should endorse.

Taking full advantage of the analytical resources provided by her comparative framework, Adams shows that patrimonial actors in England, France and the Netherlands sought to entrench and consolidate their privileges by drafting cartel-like agreements specifying who was entitled to what. These covenants took the form of family syndicates of officeholders in France (p. 172), elite arrangements determining the distribution of proprietary office-holding in England (p. 184) and “contracts of correspondence” formalizing “the distribution of city offices in written succession rules” in the Netherlands (p. 146). These different schemes exemplify the drive for monopoly characteristic of patrimonial appropriation.³³ Yet, in spite of these similarities, these three states underwent very different political trajectories with strikingly dissimilar outcomes in terms of institutional capacity.

Clearly, exogenous factors related to the dynamics of trade patterns played a role in these trajectories.³⁴ Still, Adams argues that the variance in outcomes should not be reduced to these exogenous constraints. Whether the focus is on England, France or the Netherlands, her conclusion is that “key elite actors, ..., had a hand in shaping the different resolutions ... to analogous institutional limits and quandaries” (p. 201). As far as the Dutch regents were concerned, the problems of state management they faced ultimately were “collective action problems” and these, as collective action problems, were “susceptible of solution” (p. 154). Thus, actors had their say. The type of responses they came up with had a crucial influence on institutional trajectories and state capacities.³⁵ This observation suggests that the decline of the Dutch state was not a foregone conclusion. If so, that is, if indeed elite actors had some leeway in shaping different solutions to the challenges they faced, we should be able to identify missed opportunities,

possible turning points or counterfactual scenarios through a close investigation of their conflicts and strategic motivations.

When we narrow the focus down, however, this suggestion becomes elusive. The diagnosis Adams brings into relief is one that emphasizes not missed opportunities but either a lack of alternatives or an inexorable logic. In the first half of the 18th century, the Dutch regents crafted ingenious pacts allowing them to secure their grip over corporate and political offices by making their positions the property of their lineage – the so-called “contracts of correspondence.” These covenants were indeed innovative and they sanctioned cooperative strategies. But in setting up political cartels shutting off competition for office, these actors were behaving in true patrimonial fashion. They were doing nothing else except bringing about the logic inherent to their position. They were acting as the agents of the structures in which they were embedded.³⁶

Collective action was therefore possible but along the lines set by patrimonial consolidation. These instances of collective coordination far from challenging structural developments were contributing further to their implementation. True, there were pressures from below and proposals for reform coming from the top (pp. 155, 159). Yet, the conclusion emerging from this account is that these initiatives never materialized. Willem IV’s “Proposition for a Limited Free Port” (1751), which Adams singles out as a significant moment, was “stillborn” (p. 159). By then, the state had the structure of a pyramid of cartels embedded in one another and this structure made coordination among the various loci of sovereignty highly problematic. Furthermore, the regents were obviously incapable of moving beyond their patriarchal understanding of patrimonial authority (p. 155).³⁷

If historical close-ups reveal stillborn attempts at reforms and if the analytical narrative overall says very little about the moments in which alternative historical possibilities came to the fore, it seems reasonable to conclude that there were no such moments, no real missed opportunities and no conflict that could have reversed the logic of patrimonial decline. Adams endorses this interpretation when she claims that “fiscal crisis and state incapacity were *the legacy of structures* that vested power and policy making in the hands of elite family heads committed to protecting their local – at most provincial – identities and positions” (p. 144, my emphasis).

In this interpretive framework, decline was inevitable. The regents’ power was too much entrenched in state and corporate institutions to make alternative historical developments possible. As they captured the state from the mid-17th century on, the merchant-capitalists became state rentiers (pp. 39, 71, 150). In practice, family covenants institutionalized the

extraction of rents from corporate and political offices.³⁸ In the end, the logic of patrimonial accumulation got the upper hand and undermined their collective capacity to handle external challenges. The contrast with England is striking. For in England, rulers did dismantle “key structures of patrimonial power” (p. 194). From a comparative viewpoint thus, the outcome appears more open-ended than a retrospective assessment in terms of structural legacy would lead us to assume.

These few remarks also outline the contrast between Adams’ understanding of path dependence and a standard account in terms of punctuated equilibria, i.e., equilibrium configurations punctuated by sudden change. In the standard account, path dependence can be traced to foundational events, whether these events are defined as “times of crisis” (Krasner, 1984, p. 240) or as “contingent” in the sense that they fail to fit standard theoretical predictions (Mahoney, 2000, p. 514). By contrast, Adams’ analysis gives no pride of place to founding events, for good reason: the shift to a locked-in patrimonial system of rentier positions was the outcome of multiple, decentralized and local formal arrangements which sanctioned elite family heads’ attempt to secure their hold over their office. Far from reflecting the impact of a foundational event, local arrangements in this account appear to be determined by the structural logic of patrimonial appropriation.

We thus have two accounts: one emphasizes historical actors’ collective capacity; the other underscores a developmental process driven by an inexorable, i.e., structural, logic. The claim: “key elite actors had a hand in shaping different possible outcomes” (p. 201) is an invitation to focus on some key moments and to delve into the reason explaining why calls for reform fell through. Conversely, the claim: “decline was the legacy of a certain type of patrimonial structure – a type of corporate privilege associated with dispersed federated sovereignty” (p. 194) – this claim, I would argue, actually calls for further comparative analysis regarding the processes whereby elite groups acquire or fail to acquire the cognitive and political ability to overcome or reverse politico-economic developments that have a structural character.

CONCLUSION

As these comments make clear, it is possible to engage the claims of *The Familial State* from multiple standpoints. This multiplicity of perspectives testifies to the richness of this inquiry. Adams’ original and

provocative analyses explore different terrains of investigation: state formation, the institutionalization of patrimonial practices, the political economy of chartered companies, the anthropology of familial honor, class structures and geopolitical competition in early modern Europe. *The Familial State* paces these terrains with great relevance and stylistic brio. Adams sheds light on the complexity of the cases while developing, through the critical dialog with Weber, a comparative argument that informs our theoretical understanding and, as a result, has broad relevance. This combination is a remarkable achievement.

NOTES

1. Weber (1978, p. 1094).
2. Weber (1978, p. 1095).
3. On this point, see Adams' exegesis of *Economy and Society* (2005b, pp. 238–241).
4. Weber (1978, p. 1007). True, Weber acknowledges that females can play a leading role in extended families when he observes the existence of female sachems (p. 1009). Despite its heuristic value, this observation remains buried under a naturalist conception of gender differences.
5. Adams (2005a, p. 9). Conversely, elite family heads "believed that *they were entitled* to family property in office and privilege" (p. 45, my emphasis).
6. In *The Familial State* hegemony describes a geopolitical position of dominance. The term is confined to this international relation usage.
7. Laitin (1986, p. 153).
8. "As the patriarchal family and lineal networks and ideologies were woven into the web of patrimonial power, they formed what we might call a familial state" (Adams, 2005a, p. 34).
9. Geertz (1973), Chapter 8. See Adams (2005a, pp. 10, 31, 2005b, pp. 242–245).
10. Along the same lines, see Bloch's (1997, p. 131) broad claim that, in the end, history's subject-matter is human consciousness understood in collective terms.
11. Althusser (2001, pp. 108–109).
12. Adams (2005a, p. 97).
13. Hechter (1987, Chapter 3) develops a consonant theoretical argument about group solidarity.
14. Weber (1978, p. 1008) sets forth this claim first with regard to patriarchy: "Everything within [the patriarchal] structure of domination is ultimately determined by the power of tradition, that is, the belief in the inviolability of what has always been (*des ewige Gestrigen*).” Subsequently, he extends this claim to patrimonialism: "the ruler's powers are legitimate insofar as they are traditional" (*ibid.*, p. 1020). The order of presentation is consistent with the premise describing patriarchy as the evolutionary grounding block of patrimonialism.
15. Weber (1978, p. 1041).

16. The opposite of "stereotyped patrimonialism" (*der stereotypierte Patrimonialismus*) is "arbitrary patrimonialism" (Weber, 1978, p. 1090, 1971, pp. 639, 648). "Stereotyped" relations ... contribute to stability. The non-stereotyped patrimonial state lacks a stable "legal order" (p. 1101). The distinction between "pure patrimonialism" and "estate patrimonialism" only partially overlaps the distinction between "arbitrary" and "stereotyped" patrimonialism. Undoubtedly, estate patrimonialism overlaps with "stereotyped" patrimonialism since estate distinctions involve codes and patterned expectations. Weber (1978, p. 1046) for instance observes that there is no polity of estates if the ruler can treat "the officials' privileges as precarious". Pure patrimonialism, on the other hand, cannot be equated with "arbitrary patrimonialism" if it is regulated by well-established codes of etiquette.

17. It could be objected that any reference to tradition for the purpose of curtailing a patrimonial official's privileges draws on a codified understanding of the relation between this official and his subjects. Weber does not explain in which sense stereotyped patrimonialism is different from patrimonial relations legitimized by the reference to tradition. However, his historical references draw a picture of stereotyped patrimonialism as an ad hoc form of regulation emerging through the exercise of patrimonial power. The main difference between stereotyped patrimonialism and tradition thus can be viewed as one of temporal frame. The codification implied by "stereotyped" patrimonialism becomes part and parcel of the tradition after a certain point, most likely when actors have forgotten the context in which the rules were established.

18. Weber (1978, p. 1040) states that decentralization and appropriation are "natural processes".

19. A patrimonial system of governance generates its own contradictions between the logic of power accumulation at the center and the logic of power accumulation at the periphery. There is an inevitable conflict of interests between the patrimonial prince and the "natural tendencies of the local patrimonial interests" (Weber, 1978, p. 1058). Weber refers to the "trend toward the elimination of any control on the part of the ruler and toward the hereditary appropriation of the political office by a family, ideally or in fact" (*ibid.*, p. 1058).

20. Adams (2005a, pp. 44–45).

21. Ertman's (1997, pp. 66, 126, 155, 322) remarks on the "rationalization" of patrimonial structures in the early modern period suggest a significant degree of codification. Regarding fragmentation, 't Hart (1993, p. 189) draws a parallel between the "fragmented" Dutch state and "the shift from central to centrifugal government and from public to private administration" observed in France in the first decades of the 17th century. For his part, Ertman (1997, p. 184) concludes that in the first half of the 17th century, "tendencies towards appropriation were nearly as strong in England as they were in Latin Europe".

22. This partial conclusion follows from the broad and negative observation that the lack of continuity proper to "non-stereotyped" patrimonial structures impedes capitalist development (Weber, 1978, p. 1102).

23. "The spirit of patrimonial administration, interested as it is in public peace, the preservation of traditional means of livelihood and the satisfaction of the subjects, is alien to and distrustful of capitalist developments, which revolutionizes the given social conditions" (Weber, 1978, p. 1109).

24. Weber (1978, p. 1097).

25. Weber (1978, p. 1038). "By virtue of their property right to office, the parliaments, through remonstrance, often questioned immediately afterwards the validity of the decree which ran counter to tradition" (p. 1039).

26. Do patrimonial structures allow for institutional innovation or do they stultify it? Are they factors of stability or instability? Are they compatible with capitalist developments or do they jeopardize such developments? Do they enhance collective capacity or do they undermine it? Weber's (1978, p. 1095) overall diagnosis is negative. Capitalism cannot tolerate the unpredictable character of a patrimonial rule. Instability is inherent to the confusion of the private and the public. "The patrimonial ruler does not like independent economic and social powers" (*ibid.*, p. 1102). Furthermore, the regulative role of tradition preempts incentives for innovative moves.

Along this broad negative assessment, Weber points to opposite developmental trends. A patrimonial rule can contribute to stabilizing resources thereby enhancing the capacity for innovation. Hence, capitalism is "compatible with patrimonialism" (*ibid.*, p. 1091). Whether we are focusing on arbitrary power, fragmentation, or codification, each one of these variables can have positive and negative effects. The conclusion thus is bound to remain open-ended. "Patrimonialism in part furthers and in part deflects modern capitalism" (*ibid.*, p. 1099). This indeterminate character explains why at times, Weber's observations sound contradictory. For instance, while observing that the patrimonial state "easily dissolves into a congeries of privileges" (*ibid.*, p. 1097), he also argues that "the more restricted access to patrimonial office is, the more wealth is directed to purely bourgeois-capitalist uses" (*ibid.*, p. 1102).

It is interesting to observe that this indeterminacy even extends to "arbitrary patrimonialism." This type is the most antithetical to economic development as a result of its arbitrary character. Weber grounds his overall negative diagnosis regarding the externalities of patrimonial arrangements in the potential for instability inherent to unrestrained power. Yet, rulers who enjoy considerable leeway, precisely because they have this unrestrained margin of maneuver, have also the capacity to introduce and impose innovative arrangements.

27. "Patrimonial state formation can be seen as a process of tying together nodes in a single cartel or network, in mutable arrangements that are variably centralized and contingently integrated" (Adams, 2005a, p. 35). Interestingly, a rational choice analyst like Chong (1991, p. 36) makes consonant observations regarding the emergence of collective action: "preexisting social networks play a central role in the emergence of collective action... collective action invariably involves the confederation of smaller organized units, rather than the aggregation of previously isolated, atomized individuals". To the extent that institution building is a form of collective action, this statement applies to state formation as well.

28. In this respect, Adams' account fleshes out what Tilly terms the "capital-intensive path" of state formation (Tilly, 1990, p. 99). Tilly's synthetic description of "capital-intensive" regions applies particularly well to the Netherlands in the 17th century: "In capital-intensive regions, the presence of capitalists, commercial exchanges, and substantial municipal organizations set serious limits on the state's direct exertion of control over individuals and households, but facilitated the use of

relatively efficient and painless taxes on commerce as sources of state revenue" (*ibid.*, p. 99).

29. Contemporary observers drew the connection between, on the one hand, the political structure of the Dutch state characterized in the first place by the absence of a monarchical "center" and, on the other hand, the security of property rights. Witness this statement by Pieter de Groot in 1673: "What constitutes the wealth of the Republic? The opulence of its trade. And what is the source of that trade? Good government. For nothing is more attractive for the whole world than freedom of conscience and security of possessions. It is impossible that this freedom and this security of possessions would survive the government of a monarch" [Lettres de Pierre de Groot à Abraham de Wicquefort, edited by F. Krämer. Utrecht: Werken Historisch Genootschap. 1894; quoted by Smit (1968, p. 23)].

30. As I have argued elsewhere, a key factor in the process whereby a proscriptive norm acquires validity is actors' decision to invoke the norm to undercut the political capacity of those whom they view as competitors (Ermakoff, 1997, p. 418). The regents' invocation of an anti-venal norm fits a priori this analytical scenario.

31. E.g. Ormrod (1975, pp. 36-43).

32. This broad point underlies North and Weingast's (1989, pp. 806-808) interpretation of the institutional effects of the Glorious Revolution in England. Swart (1975, p. 44) makes it explicit in the Dutch case by drawing attention to the political dimension of the decline of the Netherlands. Similarly, Weber's (pp. 1092-1094) remarks on the political consequences of trade and the relationships between feudalization and the market economy points to different hypotheses about the co-evolution of governance structures and economic systems.

33. Weber (1978, p. 1028).

34. Adams (2005a, pp. 138-144).

35. See Adams' (2005a, p. 165) reference to the "collective responses of state elites". These collective responses had "starkly contrasting upshots, in the face of similar institutional opportunities and conundrums" (p. 165).

36. Weber develops a different account of the decline of "patrimonial capitalism," i.e., the establishment of monopolistic industries under the control of the political center and the granting of "concessions to private trade or craft monopolies for high fees" (pp. 1097-1098). This type of enterprise "often furthered or awakened the entrepreneurial spirit." But its impact is short-lived (p. 1098). The political reason for this failure is to be found, not in the capacity of patrimonial officials to turn their corporate positions into rentiers positions, but in "the legal insecurity owing to the always doubtful duration of monopolies in view of possible new privileges" (p. 1099). In sum, the ultimate cause for the decline of patrimonial capitalism was "the arbitrariness of patrimonial rulership" (p. 1099). The examples Weber draws on to illustrate his claim are examples of centralized regime (p. 1098). In Weber's terminology, these cases exemplify "patriarchal patrimonialism," characterized by the "mass domination by one individual" (p. 1106). "The arbitrariness of patrimonial rulership" could not play out in the Netherlands given the federal and highly decentralized structure of the state. The Dutch case does not fit Weber's account of "patrimonial capitalism." Yet, it fits the prediction of decline.

37. Israel's observation that "Dutch society in the 18th society was a society dominated by the rentier" is consonant with this strand of Adams' diagnosis (Israel, 1998, p. 1016).

38. "The shift toward rentier status and the formal monopolization of urban office-holding were related tendencies" (Adams, 2005a, p. 72).

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