

# DISCUSSING NEOPATRIMONIALISM AND PATRONAL PRESIDENTIALISM IN THE CENTRAL ASIAN CONTEXT

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**Abstract:** This article first introduces the recent theoretical advances achieved through the concept of neopatrimonialism. Next, it links neopatrimonialism to the concept of patronal presidentialism, which has been used in the Eurasian space. It then analyzes the societal and economic mechanisms of these patronal regimes, deconstructs the links between patronage and “clan politics,” and insists on the hybrid character of the norms and legitimacies of these regimes, thereby asserting that there is room for change and innovation. It concludes by discussing the cumulative knowledge offered by this special issue examining Central Asia.

The concept of patrimonialism is both multidimensional and multidisciplinary. Its origins lie in Max Weber’s sociology of domination and legitimacy, which defines three types of authority: traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational bureaucratic. According to Weber, institutions are the impersonal source of individual bonds in Western democracies, while the

separation of public and private does not exist in ancient or medieval patrimonial societies.<sup>1</sup> In the 1960s, African independence revived debates on “modern patrimonialism” and the personal rule that seemed to define many sub-Saharan African regimes.<sup>2</sup> In 1973, following the work of Guenther Roth on “modern patrimonialism,” Shmuel Eisenstadt proposed to employ the prefix neo- in order to dissociate a patrimonialism based on the traditional legitimacies from contemporary regimes that rely on more diverse mechanisms of legitimation, for example, taking into account the influence of external actors and a more binding international legal system.<sup>3</sup> Although this addition makes sense at the empirical level, it has remained controversial because the border between “traditional” and “modern” is slippery.

By the 1970s, the concept of neopatrimonialism quickly gained quasi-hegemonic status in the study of sub-Saharan Africa, largely through the work of Jean-Francois Médard. However, the term became a kind of catch-all concept, “in danger of losing its analytical utility”<sup>4</sup> and encompassing very diverse and sometimes poorly defined phenomena. In their seminal work *Democratic Experiments in Africa*, Bratton and van de Walle have advanced the discussion by stating that neopatrimonialism, unlike patrimonialism, co-exists with rational-legal legitimacy. The success or failure of transitions in sub-Saharan Africa must therefore take into account contingent factors like military interventions, political protests, and pro-democratic opposition, as well as international dependence.<sup>5</sup> More recently, the reflections of Erdmann and Engel have demonstrated that neopatrimonialism can be defined primarily by its conflicting norms. It is based on the close interaction between patrimonialism (all power relationships are personal relationships) and legal-rational bureaucratic domination (the distinction between the public and the private formally exists and is accepted, even if it is not respected).<sup>6</sup> Neopatrimonialism is therefore defined primarily by the hybridity between two logics of

<sup>1</sup> Hinnerk Brunns. 2012. “Weber’s Patrimonial domination and its interpretations.” in Daniel D. Bach and Mamoudou Gazibo, eds., 2012. *Neopatrimonialism in Africa and Beyond*. London and New York: Routledge, 9-24.

<sup>2</sup> Guenther Roth. 1968. “Personal Rulership, Patrimonialism and Empire Building in the New States.” *World Politics* 20: 2: 194-206.

<sup>3</sup> Shmuel Eisenstadt. 1973. *Traditional patrimonialism and modern neopatrimonialism*. London: Sage.

<sup>4</sup> Robin Theobald. 1982. “Patrimonialism.” *World Politics* 34: 4: 555.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Bratton and Nicolas Van de Walle. 1997. *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press; Frederick Solt. 2001. “Institutional Effects on Democratic Transitions: Neo-Patrimonial Regimes in Africa, 1989–1994.” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 36: 2 (Summer): 82–91.

<sup>6</sup> Gero Erdmann and Ulf Engel. 2007. “Neopatrimonialism Reconsidered: Critical Review and Elaboration of an Elusive Concept.” *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 45: 1: 95-119.

domination and legitimacy, a characteristic—hybridity—that is also found within the debates on the post-Soviet space that interest us here.<sup>7</sup>

The concept of neopatrimonialism is multidimensional because it is multidisciplinary, which may explain its catch-all character, but also guarantee its heuristic scope. A product of political science, neopatrimonialism also spread to economics and has ventured into the lands of anthropology and sociology—neopatrimonial practices as an extension of patriarchal domination beyond the boundaries of kinship. The dominant economic reading has emphasized the weight of neopatrimonial practices in order to understand the poor performance of many developing countries, or even their underdevelopment, the so-called “low” equilibrium or poverty trap.<sup>8</sup> The concept also has been frequently used in the debate over rentier economies, as rent-seeking and neopatrimonial practices are mutually reinforcing patterns toward non-productive economic activities.<sup>9</sup> However, economics has been slow to actually include this concept in its theoretical studies because it requires a non-quantitative approach to economic developments and invites major international financial institutions to consider the human factor in their development strategies.<sup>10</sup> The more conventional concepts of corruption, weak institutions, and poor governance were selected to express the human role in economic mechanisms that are often elaborated in an abstract and decontextualized manner.

Paradoxically for a concept coming from political science, the place of neopatrimonialism in the typology of political regimes and of regime changes was discussed only recently.<sup>11</sup> For some, neopatrimonialism is compatible with all types of regimes and is not characteristic of authoritarian states. Its mechanisms can reproduce themselves in regimes that are more accountable to public opinion and even be strengthened by efficiency reforms, as shown in the case of Zambia.<sup>12</sup> However, several scholars challenge this assertion; they consider the link between neopatrimonialism and authoritarian regimes to be obvious, and that phenomena described as neopatrimonial in democratic societies with rational-legal

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<sup>7</sup> Henry E. Hale. 2010. “Eurasian politics as hybrid regimes: The case of Putin’s Russia.” *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 1: 33–41.

<sup>8</sup> Alice Sindzingre. 2010. *The Concept of Neopatrimonialism: Divergences and Convergences with Development Economics*. Hamburg: German Institute of Global and Area Studies: 2.

<sup>9</sup> Peter M. Lewis. 1994. “Economic statism, private capital, and the dilemmas of accumulation in Nigeria.” *World Development* 22: 437–451; Catherine Boone. 1994. “Accumulating Wealth, Consolidating Power: Rentierism in Senegal.” In Bruce Berman, Colin Leys, eds., 1994. *African Capitalists in African Development*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 427.

<sup>10</sup> Sindzingre. “The Concept of Neopatrimonialism.”

<sup>11</sup> See Conor O’Dwyer. 2006. *Runaway State-Building: Patronage Politics and Democratic Development*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

<sup>12</sup> Christian van Soest. 2007. “How Does Neopatrimonialism Affect the African State? The Case of Tax Collection in Zambia.” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 45: 4: 621–645.

bureaucratic rules could be better specified as cronyism, or corruption. Although there are “neopatrimonial multi-party systems”<sup>13</sup> in Africa, Latin America, or Eurasia, Richard Snyder has pointed out that the transition from neopatrimonial rule is most likely to result in the continuation of non-democratic rule.<sup>14</sup> However, in his article “Can Neopatrimonialism Dissolve into Democracy?” Mamoudou Gazibo discusses the specific case of “new democracies” or “third wave democracies” in Latin America and the post-Communist space, which precisely because of their hybrid nature, can produce combined neopatrimonialistic and democratic features.<sup>15</sup>

Despite recent theoretical advances, the concept of neopatrimonialism remains multidimensional since it refers to processes simultaneously political and economic, individual and collective, and that are part of local social functioning, with their own cultural codes. It calls for the consideration of the endogeneity of political and economic transformations and the experience of individuals. In addition to the need for global theories of political change, projections of economic developments at the global level, statistical calculations of levels of wealth, and a comprehensive approach to the functioning of societies, using the concept requires one to take into account path-dependency, historical legacies, the personalities of leaders, specific historical moments, and the strategies of actors and “political entrepreneurs.”<sup>16</sup>

### **Terminological Intersections and New Developments on the Archetypical Definition**

Neopatrimonialism defines the informal interaction of state with private interests. It is therefore often used as a synonym for corruption, clientelism, patronage, cronyism, nepotism, the “big man” syndrome, godfatherism, warlordism, capture, predation, kleptocracy, prebendal regime, etc.<sup>17</sup> However, most of these terms are narrower than the concept of neopatrimonialism.

Corruption refers to specific practices that may occur in non-neopatrimonial states. It can be widely non-politicized and decentralized, thus

<sup>13</sup> Gero Erdmann and Ulf Engel. 2007. “Neopatrimonialism Reconsidered: Critical Review and Elaboration of an Elusive Concept.”

<sup>14</sup> Richard Snyder. 1992. “Explaining Transitions from Neopatrimonial Dictatorships.” *Comparative Politics* 24: 379-400.

<sup>15</sup> Mamoudou Gazibo. 2012. “Can neopatrimonialism dissolve into democracy?” In Bach and Gazibo, eds., *Neopatrimonialism in Africa and Beyond*, 79-89.

<sup>16</sup> Jean-François Médard. “Charles Nonjo: the portrait of a ‘big man’ in Kenya.” In Bach and Gazibo, eds., *Neopatrimonialism in Africa and Beyond*, 58-78.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Evans. 1992. “The State as Problem and Solution: Predation, Embedded Autonomy and Structural Change.” In Stephan Haggard, Robert R. Kaufman, eds., *The Politics of Economic Adjustment: International Constraints, Distributive Conflicts, and the State*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 139-181.

indirectly ensuring a certain balance in the distribution of wealth in the absence of state-enforced legal property rights. By contrast, neopatrimonialism supposes centralized and hierarchical corruption that operates in a pyramidal fashion, and serves a political legitimacy strategy. Cronyism is also found in all societies, including legal-rational democracies, because it is based on an exchange of services between business groups and political circles, especially when it involves the allocation of public funds.<sup>18</sup> Cronyism does not consistently prevent economic growth, as it can operate in systems that produce wealth, while neopatrimonialism is not productive since the exchange is not fair. The latter therefore does not allow wealth to flow, as market mechanisms are designed only to meet the rulers' needs.<sup>19</sup> According to the World Bank, countries with neopatrimonial systems are among those with the largest Gini coefficient, which is indicative of the unequal distribution of wealth.<sup>20</sup>

Capture, predation, or clientelism are some of the central dimensions of neopatrimonialism, which supposes the confiscation of public property for personal purposes. While Médard states that clientelism and neopatrimonialism are two competing models (the former being a traditional legitimation to the patron-client relationship, while the latter is not),<sup>21</sup> on the contrary Eisenstadt, Bratton and van de Walle, and Erdmann and Engel involve them closely. They, however, emphasize the need for finer terminological dissociation between clientelism and patronage. According to Erdmann and Engel, clientelism "implies a dyadic personal relationship between patron and client, while patronage refers to the relationship between an individual and a bigger group."<sup>22</sup> The former may be present at all levels of society and determine individual relations and the exchange of personal goods and services, while the latter defines a mode of governance and function of intra-elite relations, and concerns mostly the transfer of public goods to private persons.

Recently, other non-qualitative contributions to political science and sociology have given more substance to the traditional ideal type of neopatrimonialism. This is schematically defined as a regime headed by a single

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<sup>18</sup> On the Berlusconi regime, for instance, see Mauro Barisione. 2012. "Berlusconismo as a case of 'hybrid neopatrimonialism.'" In Bach, Gazibo, eds., *Neopatrimonialism in Africa and Beyond*, 197-206.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher Clapham. 1982, "Clientelism and the state." In Christopher Clapham, ed., *Private Patronage and Public Power*. London: Francis Pinter.

<sup>20</sup> Branko Milanovic, "Is inequality in Africa really different?" *World Bank Development Research Group*. Washington D.C.: The World Bank.

<sup>21</sup> Jean-François Médard. 1982. "The Underdeveloped State in Africa: Political Clientelism or Neo-patrimonialism?" In Christopher Clapham. *Private Patronage and Public Power: Political Clientelism and the Modern State*. London: Frances Pinter, 162-189, here 165.

<sup>22</sup> Gero Erdmann, and Ulf Engel. 2006. "Beyond a Catch-All Concept," *GIGA Working Papers* 16 (February): 21.

ruler, who controls access to public resources for private purposes, and distributes material and symbolic rewards in exchange for political loyalty, and who segments any would-be elite opposition through the mechanisms of wealth rotation and power balance.<sup>23</sup> This ideal-typical view has been criticized because it emphasizes the stabilizing aspects of a regime without giving the means to take into account changes within the regime or what makes it legitimate. Moreover, this vision too often has been limited to the personality of the leader and his family. Analyzing neopatrimonialism as a top-down system does not allow one to understand the societal fabric and bottom-up logics. Several studies therefore worked to enrich the concept by highlighting other governance mechanisms: A neopatrimonial regime can be accepted because its mode of allocation of wealth is validated by citizens, especially in societies based on rent-seeking behavior. It can set in motion a politics of participation, and a politics of identity and ideological symbols which are shared with the population, therefore widening its basis for legitimacy.

### **From Africa to Eurasia, from Neopatrimonialism to Patronal Presidentialism**

The concept of neopatrimonialism found its greatest success in the study of sub-Saharan Africa, where it is seen as a core feature of local politics. Its use for other parts of the world has never achieved such unanimity, even if it is found in several studies of Latin America, Southeast Asia, southern Europe, the Middle East,<sup>24</sup> and post-Communist countries after the 1990s. At the end of his career, Médard himself extended his work on the French case through his analysis of the *Françafrique*, the French-African networks.<sup>25</sup> Published in 2012, the collective volume edited by Daniel C. Bach and Mamoudou Gazibo, *Neopatrimonialism in Africa and Beyond*, revived the debate examining the different contexts in which to apply the concept, recognizing that a “cross-cutting grid of analysis [is] still missing.”<sup>26</sup>

This latest work insists on the idea that comparison with non-African cases is not only principally welcome, but necessary to avoid the trap of

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<sup>23</sup> André Bank, Thomas Richter. 2010. “Neopatrimonialism in the Middle East and North Africa: Overview, Critique and Alternative Conceptualization.” Paper presented at the workshop “Neopatrimonialism in Various World Regions,” August 23, 2010, Hamburg: German Institute of Global and Area Studies.

<sup>24</sup> Christian von Soest. 2011. “Persistence and Change of Neopatrimonialism in six Presidential Systems in Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia.” IPSA/ECPR-Joint Conference “Whatever Happened to North-South?” Sao Paulo, February 16-19.

<sup>25</sup> Jean-François Médard. 2002. *French African Policy: The End of “françafrique”?* Paris: CDR.

<sup>26</sup> Bach, Gazibo, eds., *Neopatrimonialism in Africa and Beyond*, 2

an African-centered reading of the concept. Indeed, neopatrimonialism has been in danger of becoming a doxa, something that is taken for granted in any particular society. It has paid the price for being over-used as an easy explanation of the failure of development strategies in sub-Saharan Africa, and a demonizing notion. As noted by Daniel Bach, the concept has become a “teleological explanation of the decline of the state,” comparable to the notion of the “anti-development state,” but analysis in other parts of the world shows many more complex examples of states that are simultaneously patrimonial and developing. One must therefore separate neopatrimonialism within the state from patterns of neopatrimonialism that permeate the entire state.<sup>27</sup>

In each region where it is applied, the concept of neopatrimonialism interacts with specific debates, for example Sultanism in the Middle East. In the post-Soviet space, it has interacted with the analysis of the Soviet regime and especially Stalinism, which combined bureaucratic logic with the broad and discretionary use of power.<sup>28</sup> The hybridity of the Soviet regime, which was both highly personalized but with well-elaborated politics of popular participation, weighed heavily on the formation of the post-Soviet regimes. The two Brezhnev decades (1964-1982) left a major imprint on contemporary societies via a bloated bureaucracy, understood as a state within a state, with its own internal logics that do not respond to those of the rest of society, alongside a subtle combination of formal rules and informal practices. All of the elites who currently rule Central Asia were socialized in the late Soviet period, and have been part of patronage networks since the beginnings of their careers, embodying what Kitschelt et al. call “patrimonial communism.”<sup>29</sup>

After the Soviet Union’s collapse, neopatrimonialism became wrapped up in thinking about the capture of the state by powerful vested interests, this time with the archetype of Yeltsin’s Russia in the 1990s. Hellmann and Kaufmann have decrypted the penetration of the state by interests and private lobbies that could influence the content of public policy in shaping the rules and legislation and providing “illicit private

<sup>27</sup> Daniel C. Bach. 2012. “Patrimonialism and neopatrimonialism. Comparative Receptions and Transcriptions.” In Bach, Gazibo, *Neopatrimonialism in Africa and Beyond*, 25-45.

<sup>28</sup> James Hughes. 1996. “Patrimonialism and the Stalinist system: The case of S.I. Syrtsov.” *Europe Asia Studies* 48: 4: 551-568. Yoram Gorlizki. 2002. “Ordinary Stalinism: The Council of Ministers and the Soviet Neopatrimonial State, 1946-1953.” *Journal of Modern History* 74: 4: 699-736.

<sup>29</sup> Herbert Kitschelt, Zdenka Mansfeldova, Radoslaw Markovski, Gabor Toka. 1999. *Post-Communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation, and Inter-Party Cooperation?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See also Henry E. Hale. 2007. “Correlates of Clientelism: Political Economy, Politicized Ethnicity, and Post-communist Transition.” In Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson, eds., *Patrons, Clients, and Policies. Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 227-250.

gains” to civil servants.<sup>30</sup> At the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, this notion of state capture gained visibility through World Bank and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development publications.<sup>31</sup> After the “power vertical” that Vladimir Putin introduced during his first presidential term, the concept of state capture faded from international usage, but the study of interactions between bureaucracies, oligarchs, and ruling families have confirmed the relevance of the neopatrimonial approach.<sup>32</sup> Bach and Gazibo also correctly point out the contemporary thematic shift that minimizes the previous focus on the dynamics of institutionalization in favor of an emphasis on relations between institutions and markets.<sup>33</sup> This framework of analysis applies in the post-Soviet space, where economic assets are based largely on trading mineral and agricultural resources on now-globalized markets.

The comparative nature of the neopatrimonialism concept allows one to move beyond traditional area studies boundaries. A detailed comparative analysis of Central Asia and sub-Saharan Africa would, for instance, probably prove relevant. These two regions have their neopatrimonial historical roots in the colonial legacy: the legal-rational sphere was confined to the colonial power, while the colonized populations were under a classic patrimonial system. Once independence was achieved, in most cases the regimes in place were run by elites who previously had been the representatives of the central/colonial power and maintained economic systems based on the export of raw materials. Today, the case of Nigeria, where 80 percent of oil revenues benefit 1 percent of the population, can shed interesting light on the unsuccessful redistribution of Azeri oil wealth and its failure to prepare for a post-oil era. The Central African Republic under the Bokassa regime, where deinstitutionalization and the rise of informal practices challenged the very notion of the state, also could be discussed in parallel with certain aspects of the Kyrgyz situation.

However, this—relevant—focus on markets and globalizing mechanisms, while advancing our knowledge of neopatrimonialism as an economic practice, neglected some key political science debates about

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<sup>30</sup> Joel Hellman, and Daniel Kaufmann. 2001. “Confronting the Challenge of State Capture in Transition Economies”, *Finance and Development* 38: 3: 31.

<sup>31</sup> European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. 1999. *Transition Report 1999: Ten years of Transition*. London: EBRD, coll. “Transition report”; Joel S. Hellman, Geraint Jones, Daniel Kaufmann and Mark Schankerman. 2000. *Measuring Governance, Corruption, and State Capture: How Firms and Bureaucrats Shape the Business Environment in Transition Economies: results of a firm-level study across 20 transition economies*. Washington DC: World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, no. 2312.

<sup>32</sup> Susan Stewart, Margarete Klein, Andrea Schmitz and Hans-Henning Schroöder, eds., 2012. *Presidents, Oligarchs and Bureaucrats: Forms of Rule in the Post-Soviet Space*. Farnham: Ashgate.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*



regime cycles, patterns of legitimacy, and regime change. How then does neopatrimonialism contribute to our definition of post-Soviet regimes? As Alisher Ilkhamov notes, “Whereas the concept of neopatrimonial regime has been widely used with respect to developing countries, it was surprisingly neglected by scholars studying the state-building process in Central Asia and the post-Soviet space more generally.”<sup>34</sup> The range of terminology used to define post-Soviet regimes is usually large, going from electoral authoritarianism, and illiberal democracy to rentier state.<sup>35</sup> A large part of the literature devoted to post-Soviet regimes focuses on Russia and on “color revolutions” countries—Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan.<sup>36</sup> However, the dissociation between countries that have had color revolutions and the others tends to be mistaken, as color revolution is interpreted as a democratic breakthrough and not as part of a regime cycle.<sup>37</sup> In addition, those countries without such a “revolution” tend to be less studied than the others.<sup>38</sup>

Yet it is relevant for the social sciences to underline comparative elements and to build a general theory of regime evolutions in the Eurasian space. Henry E. Hale’s concept of patronal presidentialism, defined as “the exercise of political authority primarily through selective transfers of resources rather than formalized institutional practices, idea-based politics, or generalized exchange as enforced through the established rule of law,”<sup>39</sup> is probably the concept used for the post-Soviet space that is closest to neopatrimonialism for other regions of the world. Both concepts

<sup>34</sup> Ilkhamov. 2007. “Neopatrimonialism, interest groups and patronage networks: the impasses of the governance system in Uzbekistan.” *Central Asian Survey* 26: 1: 65–84, here 67.

<sup>35</sup> For the Central Asian and Caucasus case, see among others Anja Franke, Andrea Gawrich, and Gurban Alakbarov. 2009. “Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan as Post-Soviet Rentier States: Resource Incomes and Autocracy as a Double ‘Curse’ in Post-Soviet Regimes.” *Europe Asia Studies* 61: 1: 109-140; Jonathan Wheatley, Christopher Zurcher. 2008. “On the Origin and Consolidation of Hybrid Regimes: The State of Democracy in the Caucasus.” *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* 4: 1: 1-32; John Ishiyama. 2002. “Neopatrimonialism and the prospects for democratization in the Central Asian republics.” In Sally N. Cummings, ed., *Power and Change in Central Asia*. London. Routledge, 42-58.

<sup>36</sup> Neopatrimonialism has been used in the Ukrainian case before the Orange revolution. See Oleksandr Fisun. 2003. “Developing Democracy or Competitive Neopatrimonialism? The Political Regime of Ukraine in Comparative Perspective.” Presentation prepared for the workshop on “Institution Building and Policy Making in Ukraine”, October 24, 2003, Centre for Russian and East European Studies, University of Toronto.

<sup>37</sup> Henry E. Hale. 2006. “Democracy or autocracy on the march? The colored revolutions as normal dynamics of patronal presidentialism.” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 39: 305-329.

<sup>38</sup> Andrea Gawrich, Inna Melnykovska, and Rainer Schweickert. 2010. “More than Oil and Geography – Neopatrimonialism as an Explanation of Bad Governance and Autocratic Stability in Central Asia.” Paper presented at the workshop “Neopatrimonialism in Various World Regions” August 23, 2010, Hamburg: German Institute of Global and Area Studies.

<sup>39</sup> Henry E. Hale. 2005. “Regime Cycles. Democracy, Autocracy, and Revolution in Post-Soviet Eurasia.” *World Politics* 58 (October): 133–165, here 138.

do not entirely overlap, maybe less by objective differences than by the confused and muddying character of the catch-all neopatrimonialism concept. Studies on neopatrimonialism are more inclusive of economic mechanisms, while those on patronal presidentialist regimes answer mainly political science questions. The former have an already long tradition of comparativism between areas studies, while the latter is still to be developed outside its original Eurasian space. But the neopatrimonialism concept tends to confuse or at least to embrace too many phenomena while that of patronal presidentialist regimes is better defined, and allows for a more sophisticated analysis of the rooting of political legitimacy mechanisms in the social fabric.

### **Patronal Presidentialism in the Central Asian Region**

#### **Regime Definition and Regime Change Patterns**

Despite their considerable differences in terms of economic development, the five Central Asian states can all, to varying degrees and with their own specificities, be regarded as patronal presidentialist regimes.<sup>40</sup> Based on “strong man” politics, their presidentialism has been reinforced by legal reforms, but also by supplementary mechanisms (referendums, extensions of the term of office, etc.) that have made them plebiscitary regimes. Many of them have developed specific traits. Turkmenistan under Saparmurat Niyazow distinguished itself from its neighbors by the extreme isolation of its leader and by his ability to free himself from dependence on traditional patron-client relationships amongst local and provincial elites<sup>41</sup> in order to establish an absolutist—sometimes called Sultanistic—regime where everyone seemed to be directly subordinate to the person of the president. His successor, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow, largely erased these traits and has reinstated the regional tradition of classic patronage.

The Kyrgyz case is clearly specific, as since the second revolution of April 2010 and the subsequent June referendum, the country has become the first parliamentary system in the Central Asian region. However, under Presidents Askar Akayev and Kurmanbek Bakiyev—that is over nearly two decades, the country followed the presidentialist pattern of its neighbors.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Ildar Gabdräfikov and Henry E. Hale. 2006. “Bashkortostan’s Democratic Moment? Patronal Presidentialism, Regional Regime Change, and Identity in Russia.” In Ieda Osamu and Uyama Tomohiko, eds., *Reconstruction and Interaction of Slavic Eurasia and Its Neighboring Worlds*. Hokkaido: Sapporo University Slavic Research Center, pp. 75-102.

<sup>41</sup> Theresa Sabonis-Helf. 2004. “The Rise of the Post-Soviet Petro-States: Energy Exports and Domestic Governance in Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan.” In Dan Burghart, Theresa Sabonis-Helf, eds., *In the Tracks of Tamerlane: Central Asia’s Path to the 21st Century*. Washington DC: National Defense University, 159-186.

<sup>42</sup> Eugene Huskey. 2002. “An Economy of Authoritarianism? Askar Akaev and Presidential

The failure of Kyrgyz presidentialism can be explained by a smaller, more egalitarian distribution of wealth between the hands of competing elites, whereas leaders indeed sought the “strong man” model of their neighbors. Today, while many Kyrgyz political parties campaigned for a return to a presidential regime and praise Putin’s “power vertical” model, the mechanisms of competitive elections have led to a parliamentary system. This reopens the debate on the role of institutions in changing the practices of the actors themselves. The other three countries—Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan—follow similar patterns of classic presidentialist patronage with high levels of simultaneously concentrated political, economic, and symbolic power: constantly strengthening presidential powers through multiple quasi-legal and legal means; increasing control over primary economic assets; and the myth of the founding father of the nation, visible on the ideological level through the daily practices of the cult of personality.

These regimes have been rather successful in terms of longevity, with the exception of Kyrgyzstan. However, despite their similarities, all have managed or are preparing to manage the difficult question of succession in relatively different ways. So far Kyrgyzstan in October 2011 has been the only country in the region to have a successful democratic transition with the peaceful election of Almazbek Atambayev. The only other country that has had to deal with the question of succession, Turkmenistan, also managed it successfully, by way of the consensual appointment of a member of the president’s inner circle by those close to power following the sudden death of President Niyazov in December 2006. However, the degree of consent needed for his successor’s appointment is subject to debate: The purges and turnover that followed may indeed be interpreted as the normal operating mode of the regime, or as a post-succession reckoning and exclusion of unhappy competitors.

The other three countries—Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan—are currently postponing the issue of succession, as their presidents have refused to appoint dauphins. All have had or have been drawn toward dynastic logics. In the first half of the 2000s, the two eldest daughters of the Uzbek and Kazakh presidents, respectively Gulnara Karimova and Dariga Nazarbayeva, tried to break onto the political scene. They used their stranglehold on the media (for Dariga) and charitable or academic institutions (for Gulnara) to create images as public figures. They also have become MPs and took the lead of political formations that were more liberal than their father’s presidential parties. Blaming their respective failures on cultural arguments—a woman in power in patriarchal societies—is not very convincing. The reasons probably lie elsewhere: inability to achieve

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Leadership in Kyrgyzstan.” In Sally N. Cummings, ed., *Power and Change in Central Asia*. London. Routledge, 74-96.

consensus and support among ruling elites; internal rifts in the presidential families, especially the loss of support from their fathers; and changes in strategy. Dariga Nazarbayeva has been weakened by the disgrace of her husband Rakhmat Aliyev, despite their divorce. Meanwhile, in the second half of the 2000s, Gulnara Karimova changed tack and decided to prepare for her exile by focusing on both tangible and symbolic assets—real estate, diplomatic status, and jet set networks in Western Europe. The other daughters of the two presidents, Lola Karimova, and Dinara and Aliya Nazarbayeva, have not inserted themselves into the political arena. Like the seven daughters of Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon, they have built shadowy careers as successful businesswomen. Since 2010 in Tajikistan, the dynastic scheme has been tried with the rise in power and visibility of the very young Rustam Rakhmon (born in 1987) and attempts to impose him on the public stage as a legitimate actor. However, these dynastic scenarios, or “presidential monarchies,”<sup>43</sup> are unlikely to be sustained over the long term, and it is plausible that the reins of power ultimately will go to the technocratic figures who managed to reconcile local oligarchies.

### Economic Mechanisms of Patronal Presidentialism

In order to ensure their longevity, the Central Asian regimes have put in place strategies of creeping state capture. These plans have been organized in a phased manner by adopting selective institutions of a market economy, which has helped to legalize the seizure of resources, but to avoid the usual balancing powers of a classic market economy. This capture works on similar terms, but on very different scales, according to the riches of each country. The regimes in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have been consolidated on the basis of hydrocarbons—mainly oil for the first and gas for the second. Kazakhstan has a much broader portfolio than its Turkmen or Uzbek neighbors; it is inclusive of other highly profitable sectors and potentially more durable than hydrocarbons alone: mineral extraction, in particular uranium; a booming construction sector; and financial and banking sectors. Uzbekistan is a more complicated matter. Its portfolio is diversified—comprising cotton, gold, uranium, and oil—but with a reduced capacity to diversify exports. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have access to three limited revenue-generating domains (not including remittances from migration): Soviet era mining operations (aluminum for Tajikistan, gold for Kyrgyzstan) that are decreasingly profitable; control over the re-export of Chinese products (booming in Kyrgyzstan, less so in Tajikistan), which since 2011 has been restrained by the Russia-led Customs Union; and narco-trafficking that feeds the local shadow economy.

<sup>43</sup> Mehran Kamrava. 2001. “State-Building in Azerbaijan: The Search for Consolidation.” *Middle East Journal* 55: 2: 216-236.

The rent-seeking mechanisms are therefore not necessarily all related to the traditional sector of minerals extraction. Everywhere in the region, especially in Turkmenistan, construction is a highly visible sector for the misappropriation of public projects for private purposes. Areas closely related to the new market economy—and that on the paper could be better regulated by laws or international practices, such as banking and investment institutions, and the communications sector—are also the subject of increasing attention on the part of the regimes, who do not want to let this financial windfall escape. Thus all of the states in the region have become allocation states,<sup>44</sup> or distributive states, responsible for privately redistributing public goods through various mechanisms: the diversion of funds through offshore shell companies; selling public assets to foreign investors at reduced prices in exchange for bribes; and underground negotiations for all public contracts.

In this context, the question arises of whether these regimes belong to the category of “anti-development states” that Daniel Bach discussed for some sub-Saharan African countries. A large majority of countries in Africa experienced significant economic growth in the 2000s, but as the examples of Nigeria, Angola, and Equatorial Guinea have shown, growth that is driven by the fluctuation of international commodity prices can go along with very poor performances in terms of implementation efficiency and capacity to produce public policies. The structural reforms undertaken in Central Asia in the 1990s—from radical shock therapy in Kyrgyzstan to quasi-stagnation in Turkmenistan—and those made in order to improve the investment climate during the economic boom that preceded the 2008 crisis were decided according to the interests of the ruling elites. Governments have accepted or rejected reforms based on their domestic political calculations more than for abstract development goals. Even when they inaugurated reform programs, their implementation has been unsatisfactory since the chain of decision-making gradually weakens as one moves down the corporate ladder. Moreover, all governments have managed to turn their dependence on foreign aid to their advantage by making it virtually impossible to track implementation or pursue retaliation in case of failure. Local forms of patronal practices thus have led to what is traditionally defined as a “low equilibrium”<sup>45</sup> in which economic performance and state-building are reduced or weakened, and the incentives for a productive and competitive environment are warped by financial inflows from hydrocarbons or international aid.

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<sup>44</sup> Benjamin Smith. 2004. “Oil Wealth and Regime Survival in the Developing World, 1960–1999.” *American Journal of Political Science* 48: 2: 232–46.

<sup>45</sup> Jean-François Médard. 1991. “Autoritarismes et démocraties en Afrique Noire.” *Politique Africaine* 43: 92–104.

### The Patronal Regime and the “Clan Politics” Construction

I follow Erdmann and Engel’s dissociation between clientelism and patronage—clientelism is a relationship between two individuals exchanging services, patronage is a grand mode of state governance implying a transfer of public goods to structured private groups.

The five Central Asian regimes all operate according to systems of both nepotism and cronyism. All of the Central Asian presidents have allowed close and distant members of their families to enjoy the bounties of the patronage system, and this practice is widespread at all levels of power. Clientelism, defined as “networks of dyadic relations centered on power figures, the patrons, who control resources essential to the survival and well-being of dependent groups, the clients,”<sup>46</sup> is also a key feature of the regimes’ functioning. The president distributes administrative positions, official political functions (government, diplomatic), and economic assets according to unwritten rules. The shifting boundaries are thus constantly renegotiable in exchange for various forms of loyalty, and again this mechanism is reproduced at all levels of the hierarchy and in all sectors. The distinction between Kyrgyzstan and its neighbors, visible when discussing the formal regime, is then no longer relevant when looking at informal tools of power because the country operates along the same mechanisms as the others and corresponds to the schema of a “neopatrimonial multi-party system.”<sup>47</sup>

Clientelism drastically affects the state administration. In none of the five countries does public service function as a meritocracy, rather people are hired through personal connections, favors, promises, and privileges. Posts are for sale at prices known to those seeking to acquire them, but the candidate negotiates the value of the position based on his/her membership in a network, which offers symbolic contributions on top of the price paid. There is no distinction between office and officeholder: subordination to a position is the same as being subordinate to a man, and bureaucrats have a kind of property right over their position. When a boss departs, contracts must be renegotiated with his successor. The continuity of public service is therefore fragile, as an agreement may suddenly be called into question, whether this be a contract between a regional governor and a foreign investor, or more modestly, an agreement between a citizen and the municipal authorities. The constant change of rules, to which all actors must submit, creates massive uncertainty, which in turn requires the establishment of networks as social “safety nets.” The system’s flexibility and

<sup>46</sup> Barry H. Michie. 1981. “The Transformation of Agrarian Patron-Client Relations: Illustrations from India.” *American Ethnologist* 8: 1 (February): 21-40, here 23, quoted by Hafiz Boboyorov in his article in this issue.

<sup>47</sup> Erdmann and Engel. “Neopatrimonialism Reconsidered: Critical Review and Elaboration of an Elusive Concept.”

ability to adapt to evolving standards can therefore be explained precisely by a combination of formal rules and routinized informal social practices. The authorities have every incentive to maintain “gray” institutional and legal areas, which offer opportunities for their own rule as they monitor wrongdoing.<sup>48</sup> Clientelism and corruption are thus control mechanisms that the state uses to ensure the dependence of the elites and officials on the incumbent leadership. The concept of the “blackmail state”<sup>49</sup> seems appropriate for the whole region, and partly explains the weak institutionalization of political life.

Studying the patronal nature of the Central Asian regimes is more complex than its clientelistic traits. Conventionally, patronage in Central Asia is usually studied as “clan politics,” founded on the idea that kinship, family and/or ethnic ties (kinship for former nomadic societies in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan; and regional solidarities and neighborhood communities for sedentary societies in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) play a major role at the highest levels of the state and provide a relevant means by which to study local politics.<sup>50</sup> This clan politics assumption is a construction of the Soviet period, particularly of perestroika, and was amplified in the 1990s by the mutual validation of Western studies and local narratives. However, the actual role of clan politics has never been demonstrated compellingly, and the use of clan terminology has created more problems than solutions.<sup>51</sup>

Clan covers two phenomena that may share some features, but are clearly distinct: clan as a genealogical or identity tool, and clan as a network or political tool. One of the potential explanations of the tendency to confuse both clans can be found in Henry E. Hale’s thesis about “ethnicity [being] about uncertainty reduction while ethnic politics is about interest.”<sup>52</sup> Both clan-ethnicity and clan-patronage are indeed

<sup>48</sup> Christian Timm. 2010. “Neopatrimonialism by default. State politics and domination in Georgia after the Rose Revolution.” Paper presented at the workshop “Neopatrimonialism in Various World Regions,” August 23, Hamburg: GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies.

<sup>49</sup> Keith Darden. 2001. “Blackmail as a Tool of State Domination: Ukraine under Kuchma.” *East European Constitutional Review* 10: 2/3: 66–71.

<sup>50</sup> Kathleen Collins. 2004. “The Logic of Clan Politics. Evidence from the Central Asian Trajectories.” *World Politics* 56: 224–261; Kathleen Collins. 2006. *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Sally N. Cummings. 2005. *Kazakhstan. Power and the Elite*, London: I.B. Tauris; Edward Schatz. 2004. *Modern Clan Politics: The Power of “Blood” in Kazakhstan and beyond*, Seattle, University of Washington Press; Martin Spechler. 2008. “The Economics of Central Asia: a Survey.” *Comparative Economic Systems* 50: 1: 30 – 52.

<sup>51</sup> David Gullette. 2007. “Theories on Central Asian factionalism: the debate in political science and its wider applications.” *Central Asian Survey* 26: 3: 373–387.

<sup>52</sup> Henry E. Hale. 2008. *The Foundations of Ethnic Politics. Separatism of States and Nations in Eurasia and the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 5.

based on the same logics of reducing uncertainty in societies and regimes where weak predictability is the rule. Ethnicity is a cognitive tool used to interpret the world and one's place in it; patronage is a practical tool used to secure social safety networks against political, social, and economic unpredictability. As both are related to fighting uncertainty, they tend to be closely associated in scholarly works, especially when the grid imposed on the countries being studied is one of a "survival" of "archaic" or "traditional" identities. To reduce the culturalist assumption that clan-identity and clan-patronage are similar, the concept of patronal presidentialism, which emphasizes communal and comparative mechanisms rather than the cultural specificities of the Central Asian region, proves useful.

Clan in the genealogical sense plays a certain role in Central Asian societies, even if patrilineal references changed greatly during the Soviet era, particularly in urban areas, and have lost some of their relevance today. Questions of descent and kinship may be important in marriage strategies; they are used as symbols during rituals and individual and collective commemorative events. However, not only is their impact limited by other criteria of belonging, but these kinship solidarities are necessarily localized since they are based on trust and reciprocity (that is, that a service will be repaid later). They are therefore far from the definition of clan politics that confuses genealogy and network. The clan in the anthropological sense is not a clan in the political sense. Belonging to a clan in the political sense is based on diverse criteria unrelated to questions of parentage: old personal friendships, solidarity from high school or college (a Soviet tradition that continues today), integration with a *komanda* (professional team), or common private economic interests.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, contrary to the genealogical clan, the political network is vulnerable. Familial membership is immutable in principle, but network membership is not guaranteed. A network may disappear if the leader loses his access to power; one can also be excluded. Moreover, each individual belongs to several networks at once and must rank them when they compete with each other. The political game is thus never stabilized since the network is actually a flexible and temporary entity.

In addition, the value of the political clan differs according to the level of government (national or local), and the branch in question (executive or legislative). Throughout the Central Asian region, authorities have to face one key challenge: to be sure the decision-making process works down the chain of implementation. To implement the decisions taken in high places, executive authority cannot rely on coercion alone, as it is politically and financially costly, but must also employ networks of different natures, which have the ability to mobilize people and shape public opinion.

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<sup>53</sup> David Gullette. 2010. *The Genealogical Construction of the Kyrgyz Republic: Kinship, State and 'Tribalism'*. Kent: Global Oriental.



The regional elites are one of these necessary networks. The assumption that the central executive's relationship to regional elites is top-down and uni-directional is an optical illusion due to the authoritarian nature of these states. In reality, regional elites are powerful because they occupy a key intermediate level and are in daily contact with local power brokers. The case of Kyrgyzstan, where Bishkek is unable to remove the controversial, ultranationalist mayor of Osh, Melis Myrzakmatov, reveals the weakness of the Kyrgyz central state. But even in strongly authoritarian and hierarchical Uzbekistan, President Islam Karimov has had trouble parachuting his followers into key regional positions without provoking reactions from local elites, who have the ability to resist decisions made in the center.<sup>54</sup> In Tajikistan, the authorities in Dushanbe engage in regular combat with some recalcitrant local elites, for example in the Rasht Valley, and in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO), and must use the argument of the fight against Islamic terrorism to try to settle local tensions by force of arms.<sup>55</sup> In Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow had to bring an end to the solitary exercise of power of his predecessor in order to boost state capacity to implement decisions, while maintaining the social consensus by better taking into account the expectations of local elites.<sup>56</sup> Regional elites, in turn, seek to be heard in the central bodies, both for reasons of advancing their personal political careers as well as directing public subsidies or obtaining financing for large infrastructure projects.

Negotiations between central and regional elites are not formalized or institutionalized. The central authorities have only a vague idea of their ability to impose their decisions in the regions. Thus one cannot interpret each appointment of a minister or governor as part of a clear, conscious strategy that is shared by all stakeholders. The regional criterion for the distribution of posts comes into effect in competition with many others: personal ties between the candidate and the president or his close advisers, ability to raise funds for his appointment, strong links to security circles or business groups or support from the largest regional company or industry. No actor can be sure he is putting forward enough good arguments or material wealth to win the position, and the central authorities cannot

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<sup>54</sup> Lawrence Markowitz. 2008. "Local elites, prokurators and extraction in rural Uzbekistan." *Central Asian Survey* 27: 1: 1-14; İdil Tunçer-Kılavuz. 2009. "Political and social networks in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan: 'clan', region and beyond." *Central Asian Survey* 28: 3: 323-334.

<sup>55</sup> John Heathershaw, and Sophie Roche. 2011. "Islam and Political Violence in Tajikistan: An Ethnographic Perspective on the Causes and Consequences on the 2010 Armed Conflict in the Kamarob Gorge." *Ethnopolitics Papers* 8 (March).

<sup>56</sup> Nicholas Kunysz. 2012. "From sultanism to neopatrimonialism? Regionalism within Turkmenistan." *Central Asian Survey* 31: 1: 1-16; Sebastien Peyrouse. 2011. *Turkmenistan. Strategies of Power, Dilemmas of Development*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe.

know in advance if they will succeed in imposing their decision, or if it will create controversy.

The bias of defining politics in the Central Asian region through the confusing clan criteria is therefore dangerous because it is restrictive. Clan is merely one political tool among many, and if it is not associated with financial or economic arguments, it is unlikely to be given priority on behalf of a primordialist conception that would make someone responsible toward a person with whom he shares a “blood” relation. Moreover, clan cannot be dissociated from the issue of the efficiency of the decision-making chain. In Turkmenistan, Berdimuhamedow has distributed key positions to members of the Ahalteke clan, and in Uzbekistan Karimov has privileged elites from Samarkand and Bukhara and marginalized those from the Ferghana Valley, not due to any kind of primordialist clan solidarity, but because these decision-making chains are seen as more functional. Even though a foreign observer might see these choices as evidence of “archaic” traditional solidarities; seen from the inside, the president’s choices respond mostly to the rationally-based criterion of looking for the most efficient decision-making chain.

Regional elites’ appeal competes with other kinds of influential networks. In each country in the region, but especially in Turkmenistan and in Kazakhstan, presidents cajole loyalty from oligarchs who belong to national minorities (mostly people of Russian, Jewish, Korean, or Armenian descent) or from foreign nationals in order to maintain balance. These personal/business-related networks allow them to weaken the pressures coming from the regional elites. In the 2000s, as in Russia, the role of the security service networks also greatly increased, coming to constitute a state within a state, especially in Uzbekistan. These particularly powerful structures, responsible for internal security, law enforcement, tax collection, customs, finance, and export procurement, have their own logics of centralizing powers and their own loyalty system. They therefore added to the already-complex dynamics between the executive and regional elites, and weaken the narrative about clan as a relevant interpretative framework.

Central Asian political systems must also manage a democratic façade consisting of elections and referendums. They pay attention to public opinion, even if Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan cannot really be classified as electoral patronal systems, while Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and obviously Kyrgyzstan can.<sup>57</sup> Election campaigns are a “harvesting season” for the electorate, and cannot be ignored by politicians who run for office. Here again, hybrid legitimacy tools interfere with the conventional reading

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<sup>57</sup> Edward Schatz. 2006. “Access by Accident: Legitimacy Claims and Democracy Promotion in Authoritarian Central Asia.” *International Political Science Review*, 27: 3: 263-285. Sean Roberts. 2012. “Doing the Democracy Dance in Kazakhstan: Democracy Development as Cultural Encounter,” *Slavic Review* 71, 2 (Summer): 308-330.

on a purely top-down clans politics. More importantly, the deputies and locally-elected elites must manage daily relations with their constituencies, and thus are more engaged with realities on the ground, but also more dependent on them. To mobilize people, especially ones living in rural areas, to vote and participate in necessary activities (such as farming, tax collection, and distribution of social benefits), local elites rely on power brokers of various kinds: company directors, leaders of former *kolkhozes*, neighborhood community leaders (*mahalla* in the Uzbek system), councils of elders (*aksakals*), respected religious figures (men and women), and the former Soviet middle class, mostly people with specialized technical knowledge and teachers. All of these intermediate elites are a key element in the success or failure of the implementation process. Although their cooptation is based on trade in material or symbolic services, it nevertheless requires a shared and collective staging that is consensual, therefore largely based on the initiation of traditional (actually re-traditionalized) solidarities, and genealogical, kinship, regional, or ethnic identities, but also Soviet-style valorization (even if declining) of technical/educational prestige.

“Traditional” loyalties are therefore largely irrelevant to the highest echelons of the state, where corporate mentalities, private interests, and individual loyalties to the presidential figure and his close advisers dominate. They are used more often, but not exclusively, at the local government level; however, they must be understood mostly as one governing tool among others, and as a politics of symbolic participation, more than as a primordialist factor that pushes people to privilege their own kinship. These “traditional loyalties” are indeed staged to legitimate social, economic, or political factors that must be periodically renegotiated. They are a political construct, not a given, as seen in Kyrgyzstan, where political elites were the first to identify a north-south divide as an explanation of the country’s vibrant, but unstable, political life.

### Conflicting Norms, Hybrid Practices

One may not be content to analyze the legitimacy of patronal presidential regimes solely on the basis of their redistribution mechanisms, which would suppose that the consensus between “society” and “state” can be explained only by rational and utilitarian choices by all actors. State resources are also used for symbolic legitimacy.<sup>58</sup> Power contesters have sometimes been eliminated by physical means (targeted political assassinations were commonplace in Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan in the 2000s); by legal and

<sup>58</sup> A. Rustemova. 2011. “Political economy of Central Asia: Initial reflections on the need for a new approach,” *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 2, no. 1: 30-39. L. L. Adams, A. Rustemova. 2009. “Mass Spectacle and Styles of Governmentality in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 61: 7: 1249-1276.

quasi-legal pressures (invitations to go into exile or imprisonment); and by cooptation (distribution of positions of high symbolic value but little political power, such as prestigious diplomatic and academic appointments). The Kazakh regime was particularly successful in this last area, managing to sustain a broad consensus around the president and disarming his historical opponents (Olzhas Suleimenov, Murat Auezov, etc.).

However, the regimes' legitimacy also rests on their relatively successful management of shared conceptions and worldviews, ideological production, and consensual identity. The traumas of independence—civil war in Tajikistan, for instance—weighs heavily in maintaining collective fears (Islamic terrorism in Uzbekistan, interethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan) and in defining enemies. The control of the information space, which is filled with conspiratorial theories denouncing collusion between foreign and domestic enemies and insisting on the fragility of the country in a challenging regional environment where great powers have only hidden agendas, contributes to reinforce the apparent unanimity between the regime and the majority of its citizens.<sup>59</sup> Orchestrated political mobilization—creating a façade opposition, the rapid development of GONGOs, sponsored demonstrations, youth activism, corporatist movements according to profession, age or gender, etc.—provides a creative framework for citizens who want to participate more actively in the development of a shared public space without challenging the modalities of the patronal regime. Finally, the creation of a national mythology, based on that developed for each of the republics during the Soviet era, but adapted to the conditions of independence, has been widely successful. This has strengthened a sense of identity—and thus representation—between citizens and leaders through classic nation-building tools.<sup>60</sup>

Yet to varying degrees, the Central Asian regimes have all sought to improve their modes of operation and have relied on hybrid logics. In the 1990s, the Uzbek authorities struggled to keep their Soviet cadres in strategic technical occupations, particularly in the extractive industries. At a time when Soviet domination was criticized as colonization and the “revival” of the Uzbek nation was loudly praised, the authorities also gave priority to cajoling these cadres, mostly representatives of so-called European minorities. The immense Navoy mining combine—the world's second-largest after Indonesia's Grasberg, one of the emblems of Uzbek

<sup>59</sup> See the “Conspiracy theory in the post-Soviet space” cluster in *The Russian Review* 71 (October 2012).

<sup>60</sup> Laura Adams. 2010. *The Spectacular State: Culture and National Identity in Uzbekistan* (Politics, History, and Culture). Durham: Duke University Press; Sally Cumming, ed., 2010. *Symbolism and Power in Central Asia. Politics of the Spectacular*. London: Routledge; Bahvna Dave. 2007. *Kazakhstan. Ethnicity, Language and Power*. London: Routledge. Sally N. Cummings. 2006. “Legitimacy and Identification in Kazakhstan,” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 12: 2: 17-204.

industry bestowed by the Soviet regime, and an employer of more than 60,000 people—has, for instance, become both one of the leading sources of rent for the Karimov family (uranium and gold exports), but also one of the last refuges for Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian technicians trained in the Soviet era. Neopatrimonial logics and rational-legal logics can therefore coexist. In the 2000s, Tashkent also tried to boost the training of intermediary cadres through a dense network of vocational schools and technical institutes in provincial towns, this time with limited success, because the depletion of human capital had already occurred.

Kazakhstan has also sought to take into account the need for skilled cadres, and wanted to maintain a minimal level of professional qualifications in strategic industrial areas. As in the Soviet era, the mechanisms of conciliation between patronal logics and the need for rationality led to a duplication of functions. In government and private corporate hierarchies, a jobholder belonging to the titular nationality and embodying the patronal system coexists with a second, who holds the knowledge needed to operate the service or the company, and whose status is not linked to patronage networks, but to a more personal cliental dependency on his superior. The Kazakh authorities also have encouraged the emergence of middle classes of civil servants, especially in the new capital Astana and in the non-hydrocarbon parts of the private sector, and have been tempted to create a certain degree of pluralism within the intellectual elite, particularly within think tanks. For example, the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies, established under the presidency, faces competition from the Institute for World Economics and Politics, which is under the auspices of the Foundation of the First President of Kazakhstan. Even Turkmenistan has tried to develop professionalism within its bureaucracy after Berdimuhamedow complained about the overall incompetence of his ministers and their staff.

These tensions between contradictory logics are multiple and regular, and signal the core instability of these regimes and their hybridity. Improving capacity-building skills and pluralism in the shaping and implementing of public policies is developed not out of ethical concern by leaders who are suddenly conscious of their mission to provide social welfare to their citizens, but by their pragmatic need to run the state on an everyday basis. In order to capture the rent that is necessary for a patronal regime, one must first produce it, levy taxes, and then be able to redistribute it. As in Russia, where despite “power vertical” rhetoric, Putin has had to travel in person to implement the Kremlin’s decisions regarding mega projects, such as the 2012 APEC summit in Vladivostok or the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Central Asian leaders struggle to rule a dysfunctional state. Their ability to redistribute state services and public wealth is based on a constant tension between their patronal legitimacy and a weak power infrastructure that reduces their ability to capture rents.

This tension can produce hybrid innovative adaptations, as seen in the case of post-2010 Kyrgyzstan, where state failure to provide social welfare is coupled with the strengthening of the formal bureaucracy, and the emergence of a pluralist political debate. Or in Kazakhstan, where the Zhanaozhen riots of December 2011 pushed the authorities to take a fresh look at everyday issues related to the redistribution of income. Although this tension can produce innovation, the destructive elements of patronal presidentialist systems can take over as well. In Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan, the combination of increasing economic fragility, the depletion of presidential legitimacy in preparation for succession struggles, and the end of the Soviet legacy in terms of infrastructure and human capital suggests that political innovation will be difficult to implement without severe upheavals. Furthermore, unlike post-Soviet states near the border of Europe, such as Ukraine or Moldova, external incentives coming from the European Union are not influential in southern Eurasia, reducing the attraction for political dissent or the odds of defection for some part of the elites.

### **New Contributions on Patronal Presidentialism in the Central Asian Region**

In addition to this introductory essay, this *Demokratizatsiya* special issue includes five articles. While each one is dedicated to a particular country, with the aim of better capturing the dynamics of each society, they also seek to discuss the different aspects that comprise patronal regimes, and to build cumulative knowledge.

Erica Marat's article provides insight into the specifics of Kyrgyzstan, which is both an exception and the norm. It is exceptional for its parliamentary system, which despite its flaws and weaknesses has prevented the emergence of an absolutist presidential authority, and forced the elite to re-organize relations with its constituencies in a more democratic manner. It is the norm because the country continues to be a particularly illuminating prism of patronal practices, particularly in the intrinsic link between business interests and political strategies. Kyrgyzstan is divided into several patronal networks: those based on the leaders of various parliamentary factions, those from political forces not represented in the parliament, and those arising from non-political sources, mostly business ventures. However, the new political and constitutional conditions provide an original framework for formal competition based on informal mechanisms, particularly by enhancing the intermediate structure of a vibrant political party system.

Sebastien Peyrouse focuses on the patronal aspect of the Kazakhstani political system and on the consolidation for two decades of a neopatrimonial state based on harnessing major economic sectors. He investigates the

three main political and economic circles that make up the central ruling elite (the “family,” the oligarchs, and the technocrats), and discusses the balance between, and close interactions among, these three groups. The presidential “family” is further divided according to personal strategies and appears to be a unified actor only when directly opposed to other groups. The oligarchs, in addition to their own market-based competition, have established contradictory dynamics, some by relying on indirect confrontation and others on cooperation with the patronal state. Finally, the role of technocrats is central, because they allow these economic competitions to find an institutionally-framed formulation, and serve as “go-betweens” between private interests and their politicized or administrative mediation.

Shedding light on another aspect of patronal regimes, Slavomír Horák’s article returns to Berdimuhamedow’s construction of a new relationship with the Turkmen elites. Turkmenistan’s second president no longer promotes a solitary approach to power, but rather a pyramidal scheme that gives decision-making positions to key members of his extended family and persons from his region of origin, and that reveals his deference to regional hierarchies. However, as noted by the author, these kinship or regional solidarities remain conditional on loyalty to the person of the president and are not a guarantee of promotion *per se*. Moreover, the place occupied by some shadowy figures belonging to national minority groups or foreigners who mediate between Ashgabat and foreign investors, and the maintenance of some cadres with technical skills from the Soviet era confirm the failure of clan theories as an explanatory logic—even for a country like Turkmenistan, at least at the highest political level—and the presence of some degree of rationality in the operation of the state apparatus.

Although patronal presidentialism is often studied from the top, as a mechanism that mainly concerns the central ruling elite, it can only function through its ability to reproduce itself throughout the entire decision-making chain. In Central Asia, rural elites’ ability to coerce workers in cotton production are a key engine determining the success or failure of the patronal regime. The two articles on Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, based on first-hand field research, take on this local perspective, which too often is missing from analysis, and confirm the relevance of more micro-oriented studies at the sub-national level. Lawrence Markowitz goes into detail on elite appointments in several regions of Uzbekistan and demonstrates the limits of presidential power on the appointment of regional cadres in their area of influence. In the 2000s, Tashkent retreated from its previous methods for influencing local politics and returned to ruling them through classic patronage structures. Linked to mechanisms associated with these patronal mechanisms, Markowitz also studies their impact on the malfunctioning of the Uzbek court system and the pivotal role that the procurator

plays in defining and dispensing justice.

Hafiz Boboyorov's goes to an even more local level, that of the rural elites who continue to command political and economic influence in the cotton-producing region of Khatlon, Tajikistan. He analyzes how state elites only maintain their monopoly over the cotton sector by relying on the former Soviet technical elites, senior family members, and religious notables. These local masters earn their cliental status in exchange for their ability to mobilize cotton workers through their patrilineal, familial, and ethnic networks. They also are in charge of reinventing genealogies in order to legitimize or delegitimize strategic properties, and to stigmatize as disloyal toward their kinship those who protest against the social inequality caused by the cotton economy. Finally, they are also the bearers of local agricultural knowledge, and distribute this knowledge according to their own interests—far from the idyllic image of a “neutral” indigenous expert. Boboyorov thus opens up the unexplored field examining the relationship between knowledge distribution and patronal regimes.