Chiefs, Chieftaincies, Chiefdoms, and Chiefly Confederacies: Power in the Evolution of Political Systems

Timothy Earle
Northwestern University, Evanston

ABSRACT

Chiefdom is a social category, continuous with non-stratified social groups and states. The defining process of chiefdoms is an emergent political economy that mobilized resources used to finance institutions of rule and social stratification. Chiefdoms are highly variable, but they are all about power. This article reviews concepts of chiefs, chiefdoms and chiefly confederacies, and illustrates how Polynesian chiefdoms operated prior to state formation. The chief is a political actor seeking to control rather opportunistically the elemental powers of economy, warrior might, and ideology. The history of Kamehameha, first King of the Hawaiian Islands, illustrates how a chief fashioned a state superstructure. Following the formation of states, chiefs continue to operate as sub-state actors controlling interstitial spaces (illegal operations, rural areas, and the like) in competition and collaboration with an overarching state.

This personal essay summarizes my understanding of chiefdoms and their related concepts in evolutionary perspective. Since the 1970s, I have built on ideas developed and long abandoned by Marshall Sahlins (1958 *vs.* 1976). Those interested in social evolution know what I have written, and I will not repeat that long history (Earle 1987, 1997, 2002a). This is what I believe after forty years of research on chiefdoms. They should be considered tied to particular political processes by which power becomes centralized. Typological exercises in evolutionary studies are arbitrary divisions of human organizations, and the focus should shift toward

how chiefs come to power. Chiefdoms represent an emergent ability to concentrate power and extend it over thousands of people. The extent and institutional form of chiefdoms grade rather seamlessly along alternative lines from egalitarian small-scale societies into state societies. We should study the full range of variation from the aggrandizer of Hayden (1995) to the city-states of the Middle East (Yoffee 1993), and the orthogonal variation based on history and economy (Blanton *et al.* 1996; Scarborough and Burnside 2010).

MY APPROACH TO SOCIAL EVOLUTION

To deny social evolution is folly. Societies constantly change, and common processes channel those changes. In one world area after another, archaeologists have documented a rough chronology from small forager camps to village communities, regional political societies, and formally instituted states (Johnson and Earle 2000). These systematic, independent histories show alternative pathways of social change making social evolution a topic of great importance in cross-cultural studies.

Social evolution is sometimes wrongly equated with biological evolution based on natural selection. Rather societies must be understood as open and interrelated social fields that change systemically (Kohl 2008; Wolf 1982), and social evolution has more in common with ecosystem change, involving energy flows, predation, mutual dependency, and increasingly anthropogenic interventions (Earle 2002b). The challenge of social evolution is to study societies in terms of their internal and external agency set within the dynamics of the environment. This statement comes close to a consensus among a diverse set of American processual scholars now studying social evolution (*e.g.,* Johnson and Earle 2000; Kirch 2007; Scarborough and Burnside 2010; Spencer 1990; Yoffee and Sherratt 1993).

Typologies arranged as stairs steps of social evolution are misguided, although many of us fall back from time to time on these schemes as shorthand to ease communication. During the twentieth century revival of evolutionary thinking to understand social histories, the most cited books (Service 1962; Fried 1967) were aimed at general audiences, most importantly undergraduates. They were written by serious academics, who simplified their rich understanding for those with little background. The results have proven catas-

trophic for evolutionary studies. Second rate academics fell into the trap of typologies, more sophisticated scholars developed a proliferation of idiosyncratic types, and anti-evolutionists had a field day criticizing a classificatory approach, which the nineteenth century social philosophers developed prior to the existence of detailed ethnography and archaeology.

The value of typologies is limited. Constructing ideal types, à la Max Weber, can serve effectively to identify key processes that link variables. Probably best, typologies group ethnographic societies of similar scale, looking for systematic differences and insights into suspected evolutionary processes. For example, Feinman and Neitzel (1984) look at ethnographic chiefdoms and find some common patterns. Blanton and Fargher (2008) compare variable structures in states, looking at the role of collection action. The comparative analysis of ethnographic cases has been productive (Ember and Ember 1998). But, archaeology has led us in a different direction. Archaeologists can look at actual changes through time, rather than attempting to classify individual cases for comparative purposes. As I will describe in a moment, for example, whether the polities of the prehistoric Hawaiian Islands are classified as chiefdoms or states becomes largely irrelevant. The issue is whether the political processes result in increasing or decreasing political centrality and scope, along with a host of other systematic changes.

Evolution is multilinear. Steward (1955) sought to identify many parallel lines of development under contrasting ecological, historical, and economic condition. Inspired by Wittfogel (1957), Steward, for example, looked at the unusual evolutionary conditions created by the dependency on irrigation *vs.* more dispersed forms of agriculture. Also stressing multilinear lines for social development, Blanton *et al.* (1996) argue that societies are structured fundamentally differently according to corporate *vs.* networked strategies that are orthogonal to the classic stages of development. Such differences may reflect aspects of ecology, political economy, or simply different organizational options. Many argue that social evolution represents a ramp of continuous variation in quantitative variables and not separate steps (Johnson and Earle 2000), although events of rapid institutional transformations are evident (Spencer 1990; Beck *et al.* 2007).

Critical to understanding social evolution is to understand how it operates both for change and for continuity. New social formations are built from existing organizations of economy, society, and politics. Thus the institutionalization of a state involved formal changes to handle new scales of integration, but the organization of pre-existing social forms changed only selectively. In our studies of the Wanka in prehistoric Peru, for example, Inka imperial conquest introduced extra-ordinary changes in state superstructure with building new administrative centers, road systems, staple finance with massive warehouses, a military presence and elaborate ceremonies. In the villages and towns, however, little changed (Costin and Earle 1989; D'Altroy and Hastorf 2001). Although close at hand and unimaginably powerful, the Inka Empire was peripheral to the everyday lives of most people in highland Peru. The state superstructure existed on top of sub-state organizations that operated with considerable independence.

To understand social evolution is to visualize a nesting series of social and political forms. Villages are constructed from family groups, chiefdoms – from villages, and states – from chiefdoms (Johnson and Earle 2000). As more inclusive sociopolitical forms are built, the social forms out of which they are formed remain only partly transformed. Chiefdom is constructed from a multi-scalar assortment of social groups including families, kin associations, and village-like local arrangements that each have degrees of independence in their spheres of action. At each organizational level, much of what goes on below is left unchallenged, because it is irrelevant to the operation of the higher level or it is prohibitively costly to change.

CHIEFS, CHIEFTAINCIES, CHIEFDOMS, AND CHIEFLY CONFEDERACIES

Power dynamics in the world of chiefs require some definition of terms and concepts. Each word has a long and often confused history of usage and meaning that I will not attempt to summarize. For the sake of clarity, I present how I use the terms: chief, chieftaincy, chiefdom, and chiefly confederacy.

The *chief* is the original political agent, he or sometimes she is able to amass and extend power over populations larger than the intimate, village-scale community. In a seminal article, Sahlins (1963)

defined the difference between the big man and chief according to scale, stability, and institutionalization of political leadership. A big man is seen as a political entrepreneur, who personally builds his power by amassing prestige; in contrast, a chief comes to a position of power in an established social structure. This typological division has been criticized, because a continuum exists in leadership forms throughout Melanesia and elsewhere (Terrell 1986). As power becomes increasingly consolidated, the numbers of people, who can become chief is constrained, but chiefs like big men must create and extend their support base much like an unusually successful big man. Rule may be consolidated in a single paramount or divided among a ruling pair or council of chiefs. Chiefs grade into kings to the extent that they are able to expand the scale of their control and their political economy and to stabilize rule through institutionalization.

A *chieftaincy* is the chiefs' political body, a personalized network of supporters, who act as agents for his or her rule. They are the chief's warriors, priests, managers, and others involved in the collection of revenues and support for power strategies. Although often based on principles of kinship and rank, the chieftaincy is better understood as personalized through patterns of fealty as described for the early stages of feudalism.

Chiefdom is the society associated with the chief's polity. The social forms of chiefdoms can often be quite heterarchical, meaning that competing hierarchies and spheres of action exist, as between a political, religious, and social hierarchies, between the regional polity and constituent communities and kin groups, and between ethnic and gendered divisions (Ehrenreich *et at.* 1995). Views of chiefs as central redistributors, organizers, and governors of everyday life are most probably false (Earle 1977, 1987). The chief is involved in things chiefly, and could be expected to meddle with community and household activities in only quite specific ways that affect the operation of the chieftaincy. This means that the chiefdom as a form is highly variable (Feinman and Neitzel 1984) based on conditions of household and community structure, each with their own histories. Chiefdoms thus have little coherence as a type, except for the flexible power strategies of chiefs and their chieftaincies.

Chiefly confederacies are pragmatic associations of chiefly polities, typically involving alliance, intermarriage, and specialists

(warriors, priests, architects, and the like), who move between polities relatively freely. Such confederacies are highly contingent, based on common interests between chiefs and their chieftaincies; they are inherently dynamic, forming and dissolving opportunistically according to changing strategic openings and interests in the political arena. They have no permanent structural form.

All relations of chiefs to chiefs and to non-chiefs in their chieftaincies and confederacies are political, contingent and negotiated. The degree of formal political institutional development in chiefdoms is limited and unstable, creating a constant cycling of political structures (Anderson 1994). Although chiefs would love to consider themselves the centers of stable and persistent polities, the reality is structural instability. The weakness of chieftaincies as institutions is, however, part of their continuing strength, as they rapidly adjust to changing political and economic realities.

THE CHIEF AS A POLITICAL ACTOR

The chief comes to power because of his or her ability to access, centrally control and manipulate elemental power through his personalized chieftaincy of supporters. Political strategies rely on an emergent political economy. All complex societies, both chiefdoms and states, require finance grounded in their economies. To understand the nature of political complexity, I argue, requires a description of the currencies, channels, and conversions in the flows of goods used in finance and particularly a description of the bottlenecks whereby flows of currencies can be interdicted and mobilized to support and institutionalize political power. The currencies of finance in chiefdoms and states could have been staples including cereal grain and domestic animals, wealth such as metal display items and weapons, and/or money.

The chief's supremacy is based on elemental powers derived from the economy, warrior might, and ideology (Earle 1978, 1987, 1997; Mann 1986). These powers are elemental in the sense that they are evident and without protest from social actors. The chief with such powers made requests not easily refused. Economic power is based on the ability to give or deny necessary and desired goods, which included food, housing, and prestige goods and wealth. Goods mobilized from the political economy support many diverse actions of the chief as he distributed his largess to his fol-

lowers. Warrior power is based on an ability to coerce by force or the treat of force. No one questions armed muscle. 'Fear is maintained by a dread of punishment, which never fails' (Machiavelli 1950: 61). And ideological power was based on the ability to present followers with religiously sanctioned narratives for compliance and support. Those familiar with Mann's (1986) analysis of the sources of power note that I do not include institutional power. This omission recognizes the flexible nature of chieftaincies, for which institutional forms are less significant as a source of power. With the emergence of states, however, leaders established 'permanent' (long lasting) institutions of governance, bureaucracies, and law, and these institutions provided a fourth source of political power built on the elemental three.

Elemental powers are distributive, meaning that they tend to spread out evenly, or at very least broadly, across society's members. Thus a freeholder farmer could act largely as an independent agent responsible for defending his family, animals, and other possessions (Netting 1993). Attempts to concentrated power are problematic; long in human history, leadership was small scale, group sanctioned, and largely situational. For an egalitarian society as existed prior to the emergence of stronger chiefs, individuals had fairly open or at least corporately sanctioned access to all powers to retain independence of action. The ideology of American governance actually stresses similar principles encapsulated in the freedom to bear arms, free markets, and religious freedoms. Framers of the Constitutions saw the evils of dominant state powers and so wanted constitutional limits on their intrusion into private and local spheres. This political opposition to the state is a return to the primitive in terms of the nature of power. In the political process, however, leaders whether of the state or below try to centralize power by controlling access to the sources of power. Sometimes they are successful, and often they fail. They regulate economies, limit access to weapons, and establish religions, but their abilities to monopolize access to one or more of the sources of elemental power depend on the distribution and creative fashioning of bottlenecks in the political economies on which power is based.

Bottlenecks, or choke points, are limits to flows of resources, personnel, and knowledge. In the economy, bottlenecks are created when production is limited by technological knowledge or resource

available or when trade must flow through narrowed channels as along roads, caravan routes through deserts, or a few major rivers. Chiefs enforce a trade bottleneck, acting as stationary raiders or pirates requiring payments for safe passage. Commodity chains describe the highly variable routes, along which goods are produced and transported (Earle 2009). Because of the highly dispersed nature of many commodity chains, production and trade is often difficult to control, but conditions arise or are created that make control possible. Systems of property, for example, provide ideal bottlenecks in the agricultural base, common to most primary (independently developing) chiefdoms and states (*Idem* 2001). For warrior power, bottlenecks are created by circumscription, whereby natural or political boundaries limit possibilities of escape, the ability to protest with one's feet (Carneiro 1970; Earle 1991). The institutionalization of religion with elaborate ceremonies and a built landscape of temples and sanctuaries similarly create limits on who has access to or interpretation of sacred knowledge and its meaning (DeMarrais *et al.* 1996).

The sources of power become closely interlocked by flows of resources, personnel, and knowledge. Thus surplus generated from an economic bottleneck can be invested in training and supporting specialized warriors, who protect the chief and his ownership over lands. The warriors are controlled by their chief's patronage with special weapons and training. Finance of ceremonial events and temple construction further created the chief's control over religion that justifies rule; religion establishes social order including correct pattern of property ownership and warrior loyalty. The power strategies of the chief involve a creative and constantly changing intersection of flows based on bottlenecks for control that maximized surplus extraction, military might, and religious legitimacy.

THE CHIEF BEFORE STATES

Before the emergence of bureaucratic states and their rules of law, the primary political institution was the chieftaincy. Starting perhaps, 7000 years ago, chieftaincies developed independently and variably throughout the Americas, Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Pacific. Chieftaincies have also retained separate power in some regions down to modern times. We know details about how they operated from archaeology, historical accounts, and ethnographies

from the colonial period of European expansion. Although highly variable according to specific historical, ecological and economic conditions, the ingredients of chieftaincy can be summarized. A paramount chief or a group of chiefs organized and directed a network that dominated more or less successfully populations in thousands and tens of thousands. Prior to chieftaincies, most polities were fairly small with populations typically in the hundreds, a village-size group that had characterized much of the Neolithic Age. Chiefs, in contrast, came to power by their ability to extend rule laterally over many formally independent groups and their headmen to create the regional chiefdom with a scalar jump in polity size. The two essentials of the new chieftaincy were: first, elemental powers of central rule; and second, new structures of rule. Both were highly variable from place to place, but the essential adaptive strategy of chieftaincies was remarkably similar.

Although elemental powers of chiefly rule were intertwined and self-reinforcing, they were necessarily based on bottlenecks in the economy that generate 'surpluses', which the chief 'reinvested' in power strategies. The most common bottleneck was probably ownership of highly productive lands. As described for the Hawaiian case, intensification of land often created a constructed bottleneck in the highest productive lands improved with irrigation, terracing, drainage and the like. Alternatively, higher volume trade often created bottlenecks in either the best transport technology (long-distance boats) or in the best transport routes, often rivers or caravan roads. In the changes from Europe's Neolithic to the Bronze Age, for example, trade shifted from primarily land-based transport to higher-volume water based transport of wealth (especially metals) along major rivers (Earle and Kristiansen 2010). The surplus derived from the political economy could then be invested in an attached warrior elite who could expand and retain the chiefs' ownership rights and dominate trade in wealth. The mobilized surplus was then invested in the priests who presented the ideology of chiefly rule, materialized in sumptuous ceremonies and in a burial and monumental landscape of permanence (Earle 2004). In northern and western Europe, for example, over the course of a few generations, a landscape of elite burial monuments and housing was built to represent the emergent social hierarchy and probably claimed ownership over the most productive pasture lands critical for the

society's wealth in cattle. Of course, the surplus could also be used to develop the economic base, by the construction of irrigation systems or of ships to ply the waters of commerce.

The success of ruling chiefs depended on a continuously creative balancing of powers and interests, dealing with circumstances that could change at any moment. Chieftaincies were highly variable and adaptive, and, as a result, in different areas they have taken on historically variable forms, distinguished by specific types of leadership; those types, however, obscure their common political nature. Probably most important, chieftaincies were based on a positive feedback mechanism that reinvested surpluses to expand power in a competitive political world. In this ways, chiefdoms and early states were quite similar; the Inka Empire was based on a staple-based political economy that looked very much like a chieftaincy. Chieftaincies tend to expand until they were broken by a competitive power, reaching a barrier to further expansion such as state superstructures, but I am getting ahead of myself.

Governance of the chiefdom depended on fashioning new institutions of rule that could reach down to the local communities. Typical of chieftaincies, the hierarchy of chiefs was either of two levels (villages and the region), typically ruling a few thousand, or of three levels (villages, districts, and the macro-region), typically ruling tens of thousands. In either case the hierarchy itself was highly personal, the local leaders at the village and region being closely bound (often by kinship or pseudo-kinship) directly to their ruling chief. The chieftaincy as an institution of rule maintained a family-like ethos that fits Weber's (1978 [1922]) concept of patrimonialism. This ethos was part of a chief's legitimacy, but it depended first and foremost on power strategies. Included in chieftaincies were the specialists of power, including highly trained and ruthless warriors, irrigation managers who put people to work, priests responsible for monumental constructions and ceremonies, and various attached specialists making special dress, culturally significant symbols, and weapons. Although typically conceived in kinship terms, such political hierarchies, like those found in the feudal world, were in fact highly malleable and based rather on personal commitments of fealty. When states were first created, typically one chieftaincy conquered competing neighbors and promoted itself to govern a new superstructure (Flannery 1972). At least at its begin-

ning and often continuing, states can be visualized as a ruling chiefdom extending power through state institutions of marshal law and established religion.

KAMEHAMEHA: CHIEF AND KING

Chiefs and chieftaincy in prehistory can be illustrated by the proto-historic political organization of the Polynesian Islands, of which the Hawaiian Islands chieftaincies developed a state-like political organization (Earle 2010; Hommon 1976; Kirch 2000). In 1778 on his third voyage of discovery into the Pacific, Captain James Cook crew spotted the Hawaiian Islands. Polynesian societies were organized as chieftaincies. Following colonization and subsequent population expansion, some, like the isolated tiny island of Tikopia, became very small-scale chieftaincies with little centralized power. The largest and most fertile island groups, including Tonga, Society Islands, and the Hawaiian Islands supported the growth of remarkably complex chiefdoms that dominated individual large islands and island clusters. Polynesia is a laboratory of how human societies develop (Sahlins 1958; Goldman 1970; Kirch 2007); sharing a common culture history, chiefs and their chieftaincies created alternative strategies for power based on variations in island size, productivity, and opportunities for bottlenecks in emergent political economies.

On the Hawaiian Islands, chieftaincies came to considerable size and power approximating archaic states. From early accounts written by Captain Cook's discovering expedition and by later explorers (Beaglehole 1967; Vancouver 1798), from a rich history (Kamakau 1961; Kuykendall 1938; Malo 1951), and from extensive prehistoric archaeology (Earle 1978; Kirch 2000), I sketch the development of chieftaincies prior to external world-systemic impact. At contact, the Hawaiian chiefdoms represented a complex society impressing their European 'discoverers'. Hawaiian chiefs (*ali'i*) were thought to be gods. They dressed in feathered cloaks and helmets, symbolizing their identity as gods on earth. Each paramount chief would move about surrounded by 60 or so attendant warriors and personal specialists, who carried his symbols of office, personal regalia (such as his spittoon and flyswatter), and answered to his every whim. When a high chief passed by, people fell prostrated out of respect and fear. Politically, each major island

(Hawai'i, Maui, O'ahu, and Kaua'i) was organized as an independent chiefdom, often controlling nearby smaller islands. The chieftaincies consisted of rather loosely structured hierarchies with a paramount chiefs, who was sovereign; regional chiefs, close associates of the paramount, who were his intermediary to the lower levels in the hierarchy; community (*ahupua'a*) chief, an assortment of high-ranking chiefs, who received local community territories for their support and provided support in labor and goods to the paramount; and then a retinue of specialists, including warriors, priests, crafts specialists, and land managers attached to the paramount and other chiefs.

The Hawaiian landscape was heavily engineered: clusters of walled house were built in the lower valleys; irrigation systems fed artificial pondfields on the valley floors, fishponds ringed the shores, and elaborately walled and terraced dryland gardens blanketed some hill slopes; religious monuments with stone terraces, buildings, towers, and god figures looked down from visible heights; and well constructed trails linked the valleys. Ceremonies of fertility and of war were dramatized by human sacrifice. Life was ordered, with basic principles of power, rule, and sanctity that reinforced the dominance of the chieftaincy. How did this archaic state-like society arise, so distant from parallel developments of states on the world's continents? Archaeology documents the evolution of Polynesian chieftaincy, which helps unravel the basis of political development.

The earliest radiocarbon dates from sites suggest first discovery and settlement by Polynesians about 600 CE. First populations were small and scattered, living primarily near the coast and subsisting on a mixed diet of fishing, domesticated animals (pig and chicken), and a variety of horticultural crops (taro, banana, coconut, and later sweet potato dominating). Although the soils and waters of the Hawaiian Islands were fertile, useful animal and plants had to be brought to the Islands as a 'transported landscape' (Kirch 1984). Through the subsequent thousand years, population of the Islands grew from a few hundred to several hundred thousand. Small coastal settlements spread throughout the islands and expanded to the interiors. And, in the process of population growth, subsistence shifted away from fishing and towards root-crop agriculture and animal husbandry, eventually emphasizing the intensive, irrigated

farming of taro. These demographic and subsistence changes provide the basis for understanding the rise of Hawaiian chiefs, chieftaincies, and a state-like structure.

A structure of inequality divided chiefs from commoners in all Polynesian societies, but the development of complex chieftaincies in Hawaiian Islands requires an explanation. The Hawaiian chiefs' relative success rested on elemental powers. Most basic was economic power, and the bottleneck was in intensified staple production. As population expanded, staple production initially remained quite dispersed and diverse, conditions that would have made control problematic. But, as dryland farming increased in the uplands, deforestation and soil exhaustion lead to erosion and the abandonment of settlements (Hommon 1986; compare Spriggs 1986). Populations relocated near the coast, and irrigation systems were developed on the new alluvium created by the upland erosion. The engineered landscapes of irrigation concentrated highly productive lands on but a fraction of the overall island landscape. Chiefs asserted and retained ownership of productive irrigated lands by coercive force.

The chief's land managers distributed subsistence plots on the irrigation system in return for rent delivered as corvée labor. Each farmer was assigned chiefly *koele* land, irrigated plots near his subsistence holding, and he was obligated to farm those plots as well as providing other labor services. In testimony from the 19th century land reform, village farmers were 'put to work' by their community land manager (*konohiki*), who was typically a lower ranked chief and often a former warrior. Surplus derived from the chief's land provided subsistence crops that the chief 'redistributed' to support his chieftaincy. Parts of the surplus supported the land managers, while other surplus provided for festive labor projects, especially the construction of new irrigation systems, fishponds, and other productive facilities that would increase the available surplus for the chief. The irrigation systems created the productive economy with the bottleneck of ownership on which a staple-finance political economy was based. The engineered landscape of fields, houses, religious shrines, and trails was a carefully marked and divided landscape. The political economy relied on chiefly ownership and control, permitted by the highly concentrated and productive nature of intensive (especially irrigated) agriculture.

Similar to the Polynesian chiefdoms, most chiefdoms that formed outside of the spheres of states probably rested on intensive agricultural production and a system of staple finance (Earle 1987).

The alternative sources of power in Hawaiian chiefdoms derived from warrior might and a chiefly propagated ideology. Warfare was common through Polynesia (Kirch 1984), and wars offered opportunities to paramount chiefs to expand their revenue sources. Wars of conquest were fought for control of communities, their agricultural lands, and the surplus that they generated. Succession of a paramount chief usually involved fierce war among competing heirs. To become a warrior thus was a common option for a person of chiefly status to find standing in a chieftaincy and thus secure personal advantage for himself and his family. The ruling chief surrounded himself with a specialized warrior cadre of trained and gifted fighters. By providing the warriors with lands for their support, personal weapons and regalia, the paramount bound his warriors to him. Support, however, often turned to treachery in the game of elemental power, and few paramount chiefs died peacefully on their sleeping mat. In his book *The Wet and the Dry*, Kirch (1994) argues that the Polynesian chiefdoms that did not rely on irrigation agriculture depended on expansionist warrior might to solidify the more dispersed and difficult to control dryland agriculture zones. Within the historically shared Polynesian chiefdoms, the emphasis on one source of power or another thus can be seen to have shifted opportunistically.

Ideology stabilized Polynesian chieftaincy by emphasizing a cosmology, which placed the chiefs as god figures on whom the society depended. Ideology served to naturalize resource extraction from the farmer and the interpersonal relationships among those in the chieftaincy. In the Hawaiian chiefdoms, religious shrines (*heiau*) were constructed by community labor, which was mobilized as part of the broader corvée labor responsibilities. Monumental construction and associated ceremonies required substantial labor and food; they were a central expenditure of revenues. Archaeology can date the patterns of construction and ceremonies, and the timing of these suggests a clear political staging. Following the uniting of Maui by conquest into a single chiefdom, ceremonial constructions peaked, followed by a falloff in construction activities replaced by elaborate ceremonies (Kolb 1994). The shrines

were dedicated to different gods, whom were served by specialist priests. Like the warriors, priests were chiefly people who found their place of service here in the chieftaincy. They staged politically important ceremonies, as well as ceremonies of more local importance (Valeri 1985).

The ceremonies of the chieftaincy dealt with fertility and war. The fertility of the soil and its people was thought to depend on a particular annual ceremony that the paramount sponsored and directly participated in. In the person of the god Lono, with his retinue he proceeded around the island of rule following a carefully constructed ceremonial road. The processional route crossed all communities, and, as the procession approached a community, it stopped at its local shrine, where the paramount received his tribute as gifts to Lono. The gifts were displayed and inspected at the shrine, and, if not adequate, the chieftaincy's warriors could ransack the community to punish it for a paltry 'gift' and seize what was expected (Malo 1951). Other ceremonies were conducted to gain the support of the war god Ku. Elaborate and impressive, these took place on the largest shrines of the paramount and involve human sacrifice. Construction of the religious monuments built a cosmic order, on which the new political order rested. The priests, however, never acted simply as agents of the paramount; they could stage ceremonies that tested the paramount's abilities through demands for particularly impressive ceremonial displays or warfare.

Chieftaincies were not established institutions for governance. Rather they were highly dynamic, used creatively by entrepreneurial chiefs. Yes, chiefs came to power within cultures of expected centrality and stratification, but their rise to power was always contested. It depended on highly personal and creative manipulation of power to build and maintain central authority by whatever means necessary. The life of the Kamehameha illustrates well how the successful chief operated (Flannery 1999; Mellem 1949; Saxe 1977).

Early in the historic period, Kamehameha became paramount chief of the Big Island of Hawai'i. He rose to power by ambition, ability, and ruthless might. A paramount chief 'should' come to power through inheritance, as the highest ranked son to succeed the father, but rarely was such kin calculation adhered to, and open

conflict typically determined succession. This was the case for Kamehameha. Our story is filled with names that most do not know and will soon forget. They are important, however, to illustrate the kin-closeness and highly personal nature of the Hawaiian chieftaincies. In the mid 18th century, Kamehameha was born to the family of Keoua, nephew to the Hawaiian paramount Alapai. Rumors circulated that Kamehameha was fathered by the competing Maui paramount, and this made Kamehameha a competitor for the Hawaiian paramouncy. Fearing that Alapai would kill the child, his parents sequestered him out of view. As Alapai grew old, however, Kamehameha went to live with his uncle Kalaniopu'u, a high-ranking chief and close cousin to Alapai. Probably looking to the future, Kalaniopu'u trained Kamehameha as a warrior. When Alapai died, his highest-ranking son assumed the paramouncy, but, when he was 'not well liked', Kalaniopu'u seized the opportunity to rebel. He relied heavily on Kamehameha, who showed great promise as a fierce warrior. By defeating and killing the 'rightful' heir, Kalaniopu'u assumed the paramouncy of Hawai'i, and he attempted to expand his chiefdom by invading the adjacent island of Maui. This invasion was a rather typical example of how chieftaincies try to expand to the absolute limits imposed logistically.

As he was dying in 1782, Kalaniopu'u divided his powers – his chieftaincy to his highest ranking son, a large estate to a second son, and his war god to Kamehameha. Sole rule, however, went to the victor in a war of succession. Kamehameha killed the 'legitimate' heir and forced the second ranking son to flee. To solidify the legitimacy of his rule, Kamehameha followed the advice of his priests to build a new temple to his war god Ku. Construction 'required' human sacrifice to the hungry god, and Kamehameha lured back the second son of Kalaniopu'u and killed him as an offering at the new temple. Warrior might and religious sanctity were combined in a ruthless assertion of power. Such is a rather typical story of the succession of a new paramount chief.

Following the beginnings of European contact after the 'discovery' of the Islands (Cook 1778 in Beaglehole 1967), the desires of the paramount chiefs to expand beyond the limits of their main islands was realized by acquiring the new European weapons of war that made inter-island invasions possible (Saxe 1977). Through trade, paramount chiefs of Hawai'i, Maui, and O'ahu

amassed new European war-making technologies and personnel. Offering pigs, sweet potatoes, and other supplies, the chiefs obtained boats, metal swords, and guns from European ships needing supplies in the ocean deserts. Chiefs lured sailors, gunners, and salemakers by offers of an earthly paradise complete with Polynesian maidens. Many jumped at the chance, and a new age of inter-island warfare began. The western weapons and personnel provided a key strategic advantage in battle. Kamehameha conquered Maui and then O'ahu, invading with a 1000 war canoes, 12,000 warriors, new European steel-edged weapons and guns, and specialized European mercenaries. He proved to be the most savvy or perhaps only the most ruthless. In 1792, still early in his conquests, Kamehameha visited the ship of the British navigator Vancouver (1798) and sat with him to discuss British government. Kamehameha listened carefully and designed his new state on a British state model. Such is the creativity of the successful monarch to be.

To understand, the success of Kamehameha, we need to return to the problem of finance. How did Kamehameha control the economic bottlenecks necessary to generate the necessary surplus? The strategy proved quite simple. He used the existing pattern of chiefly ownership over agricultural production to generate staple surpluses to support many specialized fighters. The new opportunities for trade with western explorers, military, and traders were also critical. The chief's control over land and staples gave him a monopoly over the goods desired by the Europeans, and this monopoly translated into controlled access to the new weapons of war. At least equally important was the strategic investment in intensifying agricultural production with newly constructed field systems. Thus the initial invasions of Maui probably depended on the protohistoric construction of extensive dryland field systems along the west coast of Hawai'i, where irrigation was impossible. Where irrigation was possible, as on western O'ahu, Kamehameha supported the building and expansion of field systems to finance his planned invasion of Kaua'i (Kirch and Sahlins 1992). Warfare and the construction of an engineered agricultural landscape went hand in hand. Surplus from the fields supported the warriors, who fought to expand the chieftain's territory, the extent of productive agriculture, and the populace to support it. Success probably went to the largest island Hawai'i, with the potential for the largest surplus production.

All that was needed was an effective leader, access to western technologies, and a little luck. And so states are made.

THE CHIEF AS SUB-STATE ACTOR

In the article on modern-day chieftaincy, Derlugian and I (2010) look at how chief-like leaders retain substantial power both in collaboration with and in opposition to modern states. Back to my earlier evolutionary model, a multi-scalar organization for states is expected; expansive organizations assemble and only partially dominate the existing sociopolitical formations. The myth of the modern state rests on the exclusivity of territorial control, a monopoly of force, and effective judiciaries and bureaucracies. Using these measures, all states are in some conditions of failing. These ideal principles of governance are an unrealized dream of state bureaucracies. Rather states are a patched together thing with uneven sovereignty over space and activities at multiple scales. Vast areas of everyday life and political and economic action are given over to sub-state actors. Chiefs inhabit these interstitial spaces, where states either cannot or decide not to exert control. Many of these spaces are illegal, as for example in the movement and provision of drugs, guns, sex, untaxed commodities, and the like. When it declares a desirable thing illegal, the state creates unimaginable problems in enforcement and ideal opportunities for chieftaincies-like Mafia. The state actually unintentionally creates bottlenecks that modern chiefs can exploit with impunity.

Furthermore, many functions within the state are difficult for the state to manage or control directly. These are given over to sub-state, chief-like entrepreneurs, who effectively govern outside of the established order. Administering the patchwork of regions and localities within a state proves to be almost impossible. Modern states include expanding spheres of dense urban cores, surrounding rural areas, and distant regions in which state presence is often symbolic or irregular. Modern-age chiefs, each with distinctive characteristics, operate within these spheres of state control: corrupt government officials within the core, weakly controlled regional governors, and distant allied operatives. What makes these chiefs similar is the highly opportunistic, personal, and non-bureaucratic nature of their power.

Distance may make the heart grow fond, but distance creates incredible challenges for state superstructures and opportunities for

our modern-day chiefs. Within the modern state, the reach of state police and bureaucratic reach is incomplete, and opportunities for corruption abound. Within democratic Latin American states, for example, regions outside of the core are ruled by chief-like, auto-cratic governors, who trade off regional political support for state revenues that are redistributed to support a chieftaincy (Gibson 2006). At greater distances, as in modern Afghanistan, local con-trol is a mixture of local polities and alliances of interests between tribal factions, warlords, and jihadist insurgents in opposition to or in alliance with the state and its revenues from the West. To run economies in the modern age, much of the wealth of nations flows independently of the state apparatus, creating potential for chiefs to craft themselves as warlords, drug lords, machine politicians, oli-garchs or the like.

To understand the operations of modern states is to understand the operation of chieftaincies, stories of which fill the daily news-papers. I take two examples from recent *New York Times* articles to illustrate the political strategies of modern chieftaincies. The first article concerns insurgent Taliban, which function as a decentral-ized and highly effective organization that quickly and creatively adapts to new NATO military actions. Taliban flexibility is re-markably similar to chiefly confederacies as existed historically in Europe outside of Greek or Roman rule. At the base of the Taliban, just like any chieftaincy, is its ability to finance its political strate-gies. 'The Taliban in Afghanistan are running a sophisticated fi-nancial network to pay for their insurgent operations, raising hun-dreds of millions of dollars from illicit drug trade, kidnappings, extortion, and foreign donations…' (Schmitt 2009: A1). Key is their ability to recognize and seize pop-up revenue prospects. The article looks specifically at how each step in the opium trade creates revenue opportunities for the Taliban's political economy:

At the farm: 'Taliban commanders charge poppy farmers a 10 per cent tax, and Taliban fighters can make extra money harvesting poppy from fields.'

At the lab: 'The Taliban get taxes from traders who collect opium paste from farmers and take it to labs, where it is turned into heroin. The Taliban are also paid to protect the labs.'

On the road: 'Truckers pay the Taliban a transit tariff on opi-um paste or heroin as it is smuggled out of the country.'

At the top: 'Drug trafficking organizations make large regular payments to the Quetta Shura, the Taliban governing body' (*Source:* Senate Foreign Relations Committee. *NYT* 10.19.09).

Each step in this illicit commodity chain has controllable bottlenecks dominated by the Taliban: the farms and labs are vulnerable, because their permanent locations outside of established state control (required to avoid state suppression) make them in need of 'protection'; the roads are limited to only a few routes capable of carrying trucks to transport the crop; and exports requires peaceful transshipment spots where the drugs can be picked up by foreign traffickers without undue fear of interdiction. The western coalition's desire to suppress drug traffic has had the unintended consequence of creating ideal opportunities for the Taliban to offer up their services. Any time new opportunities crop up, the chieftaincy quickly steps in to mobilize the resources to support and expand its activities. But is not this example just applicable to failed states as typify areas of Central Asia and Africa?

The second article concerns the operations of illegal drug cartels, operating much as classic chieftaincies, effectively dispersed through a patchwork of poorly controlled areas in the not so 'failed' states of Mexico and the USA. The article focuses on La Familia, a drug cartel that finances political and business operations with drug profits in marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamines, and heroin. The article describes a major National Drug Enforcement raid, capturing 303 suspects and large drug and weapons stashes through the US. 'Staging raids in 19 states, the Justice Department struck this week at one of Mexico's most ruthless drug-trafficking organizations, a cult-like group known as La Familia Michoacana and notorious for beheading it enemies' (McKinley 2009: A1). Three things are immediately evident: first, the cartel supports a network of semi-independent transport and sales operatives, which functions much as a chiefly confederacy through Mexico and the United States. Arrests were made in all US regional areas, both blue and red states, ranging from Seattle and Riverside in the West, through Minneapolis and Dallas in the Mid-west, to Atlanta in the East. The nineteen states are a mosaic of America, with little apparent regional, ethnic, or political commonalities. This network controls nodes in a network of procurement, processing, and distribution, because illegality created potential bottle-

necks yielding incredible profits. Second, the cartel relies heavily on images of fierce warriors, heavily armed and brutal. To go against the cartel is to face gruesome torture and death by beheading. Third is the semi-religious stance of these groups. The leader is known as El Mas Loco; he carries a bible, from which he often quotes, and requires his operatives to attend church. Throughout Mexico, shrines to pseudo-saints of the drug world protect the 'just' from imminent death. Unlike the chieftaincies of prehistory, the modern drug cartels control little territory, but they control the territorial flows of drugs, money, weapons, and the like through the interstitial spaces of illegality within modern states. The drug cartels may have a different motivation, more business-like, than the Taliban, but their remarkably flexible and adaptive organization for mobilizing resources for finance, using warrior might in a reign of terror and legitimizing their actions by reference to religion, directly compare one to the next. All are untamed chieftaincies operating within modern state structures.

Chiefs within the structures of modern states represent many personages, who creatively develop changing relationships to the state. These two examples represent only one extreme, most like the prehistoric chieftaincies, but modern chief-like figures involve a spectrum from mutual antagonism to careful accommodation with the state, as seen, for example, in the range from the warlords of failed states, the tribal leaders of mosaic state, the mafia and urban gangs, to the corrupt officials and oligarchs working within a lax regulatory environments. Chieftaincies that start as illegal operation quickly search out ways to invest in molding the state to their needs and in legal business to launder and expand their financial base. Chieftaincies reach up to the state to corrupt and tailor legal structures to enforce their advantages, but state also reaches down to use its imbedded chieftains to outsource state responsibility to meet the needs and desires of its populace. The relationship between chiefs (Mafia dons, oligarchs, and local political bosses) and the state continually morphs through negotiated power derived from the economic and political landscape. The goal of the chieftain is to create freedom to operate effectively with minimum oversight. The goal of the state is to tame and sometimes co-opt the aggressive and creative initiative of the chiefs, whose ability to quickly maneuver around the restrained actions of state bureaucracies is legionary (Winters 1996).

CONCLUSIONS

I conceive of societies as diverse networks of social relationships and fields of power. Concentration and institutionalization of that power is always problematic, but some individuals always seem to want to push their agenda. Chiefs are powerful political actors, emergent in prehistory and continuing with the fractured reality of archaic and modern states. To understand the political process of chiefs, I emphasize that several elements combine: the high flexibility and personalized relationships that chiefs use to construct a loyal cadre, the primary goal to maximize power advantage against competitors by opportunistically constructing power strategies that morph with changing conditions, and the ultimate dependence on their political economy. Economies involve highly dispersed flows of energy, labor, and materials; they are inherently hard to control, because commodity chains form a decentralized web that can circumvent attempts to control them. However, intensified economies tend to be built on facilities and channelled flows of key resources that create the bottlenecks, by which to interdict and mobilize the surplus to fuel political strategies. Chiefs emerged in prehistory at these strangle points. The multiple and fractured character of the emerging regional, nation and international economies creates many bottlenecks that allow the continued concentration of wealth and its investment by sub-state political actors, who operate much like the prehistoric chiefs. Although chiefs in modern states exist within a state-structure environment, they rely on highly personalized and informal relationships that allow for the most flexibility in political movement and adjustment to opportunities that range from the illegal to the legal.

Chieftaincies have inherent growth, as wealth is invested to expand their reach for new revenue sources and new power. They are stopped only by limits to their sources of power, as takes place either in the character of the political economy or the effective rule of a state superstructure. Chiefs dream of becoming kings, but personal capabilities, resource availabilities, and structural placement limit their possibilities. As they did once before, the Taliban may seek to replace the central government of Afghanistan, but their ability to do so depends on creatively expanding revenues, effective balancing competing interests among their partners, pushing their ideological position, and ultimately inserting themselves into

the state superstructure. When we look at chiefdoms in prehistory or within the modern state, we need to focus on the key elements that permit them to succeed or fail in their quest for power. Often they become tamed, satisfied with their privileged place within an established order, but the desire to extend power never dies and is rekindled as new opportunities emerge.

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