

## Reviews

**Routledge Handbook of African Politics** edited by NIC CHEESEMAN, DAVID ANDERSON and ANDREA SCHEIBLER  
New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis, 2013. Pp. 456. £140 (hbk)  
doi:10.1017/S0022278X1400007X

The three editors of the *Routledge Handbook of African Politics* have produced an admirable volume. The Handbook seems ideally suited for graduate level and possibly upper division undergraduate courses on African politics. At the same time, the Handbook will prove valuable to scholars as the essays capably capture the state of inquiry in the areas each addresses. The volume's six parts include sets of essays on the major contemporary areas of inquiry in the study of African politics: the politics of the state, the politics of identity, the politics of conflict, democracy and electoral politics, the political economy of development, and international relations. The essays in each section address most if not all that topic's major themes and issues. The editors have chosen recognised experts to write each of the book's thirty-two chapters.

As the editors would be the first to acknowledge, no single text, even one of this book's 437-page length, can be expected to include absolutely every subject that deserves inclusion in a course on African politics. Thus, while this reviewer has chosen the Handbook as the central text for a masters level course for Spring 2014, I have also included works on central features of African political history from colonial and pre-colonial times and works that more directly place the study of African politics in broader frameworks of theories of comparative politics and contemporary international relations.

The editors might have considered expanding their brief overview chapter to explore in more breadth and depth the broader themes reflected in and cutting across all the chapters. In a similar vein, each of the sections might have included an overview chapter on the central phenomenon of that section itself, components of which the individual chapters address. For example, the section on the politics of the state might have been introduced by a chapter on the deeply problematic condition of the African state, its manifestations, consequences and causes, and theoretical significance; the section on identity on the significance of empirically clashing and overlapping identities for the condition of African politics; that on conflict an essay on its dimensions in contemporary Africa and the record and implications of peace-building efforts to date; and the section on democracy an overall comparative assessment of its condition in Africa and progress toward meeting challenges to its sustainability and further advancement.

Each of the essays individually places its subject in the larger context of the political science discipline's current literature on its particular subject. In that respect, the book advances the cause of establishing the importance of the study of African politics to the task of increasingly grounding the political science

in the political experience and circumstances of all world regions. In that respect the book contributes importantly to overcoming the discipline's still heavy reliance upon the historical experience of Europe and the Americas. Implicit in this project remains the opportunity to pinpoint specific important respects in which the study of African politics has changed, and continues to change, the conversation in the discipline.

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**Globalization and the Cultures of Business in Africa: From Patrimonialism to Profit** by SCOTT D. TAYLOR

Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012. Pp. 247. £17.99 (pbk)

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This book sets out to slay some classic shibboleths about what African business looks like and hence what its economic prospects are. Taylor's key arguments can briefly be expressed as follows: there is more than one kind of African business culture, and African businesses are both more various and healthier than we may have imagined. He provides a clear-eyed review of the current state of business on the course, steering a careful course between a hopeful and over-determined Afropessimism, and a giddy, reckless boosterism about its prospects. Nonetheless, his tone remains refreshingly upbeat and pragmatic.

This book forms part of two recent shifts in much writing about Africa: a more bullish view of Africa's economic prospects, and a resurgence of interest in the continent's business sector. Both shifts are significant and their rough coincidence may not be entirely accidental. The upswing in growth rates and inflows of FDI in many states across the continent have highlighted the importance of business as a key economic actor – and how little we actually know about it, due to the historical lacunae on this subject in the broader study of Africa.

Critics of the notion of 'African culture' might bristle at the book's title, but Taylor's use of the plural form is deliberate. Indeed, as rapidly becomes clear, much of the book eschews a singular and deterministic usage of that term. Taylor systematically critiques the view that there is such a thing as African capitalism that is 'culturally distinct and culturally deficient' (p. 6). His argument here is closely tied to his critique of the term neo-patrimonial – a term that has come under increasing fire. He points to the way in which arguments that stress the neo-patrimonial nature of business in Africa can produce a monotonal, deterministic and fundamentally inaccurate view of business in Africa.

Taylor is intent on bringing into view a much larger number – and variety – of enterprises, than we generally consider. His definition of 'African business' is not restricted only to firms run by black/indigenous Africans. Instead he includes two additional and important sectors. First he includes minority and settler businesses too; second, he includes in his definition not only legitimate firms but also so-called crony capitalists. He hereby reminds us that business in Africa (as elsewhere) has many different origins, including some rooted in practices of crony capitalism. However this does not determine how those firms