

Neopatrimonialism in Africa and Beyond edited by DANIEL C. BACH and M. GAZIBO

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There is a growing recognition that the concept of neopatrimonialism is deeply flawed. An emergent critical literature underscores its flaws and theoretical thinness. Unfortunately, this recently published edited volume by Daniel C. Bach and M. Gazibo fails to take any of the robust criticisms of the concept into systematic consideration. It neither responds to calls by many that the concept be jettisoned altogether, nor does it engage in a serious effort to revamp it. Even though the critiques against neopatrimonialism are mentioned in the introduction and works critical of the concept are cited in the bibliography, the volume unfolds without any real reflections on these critiques.

One of the co-editors, Mamoudou Gazibo, recognises the debates and criticisms of the concept. He even points out some of its flaws. As he states, 'the risk that conceptual elasticity may also turn the concept into a "catch-all" notion should not be overlooked either'. Despite this recognition, he indicates that the volume's objective is to retain 'an analytical thread that stresses differences in responses and points to specific traditions of interpretations associated with these'. The 'ecumenical' use of the concept of neopatrimonialism is precisely the problem. This interpretation that Bach and Gazibo give to the concept belies its conceptually stretched reach and theoretical vacuity. Bach celebrates its mid-range level of analysis. He claims that this has allowed it 'to promote intermediary grids of interpretation that invite caution, without calling for the straight-forward rejection of grand theories and exclusive agency-focused perspectives'.

The volume and the literature *writ large*, however, show otherwise. Broad and unreflective theoretical propositions regarding the purported macro-dynamics and pathologies of neopatrimonial states, patrimonialised African norms, and individual level agency grounded in personal predation, are common in the book and the literature without any clear sense as to how they interact and diverge from one another. In fact, the concept travels too widely if not deeply in the sense that it is used to explain everything from failed African states to warlordism to rampant corruption to lack of economic development. While the volume attempts to move the concept beyond its African confines, its expansiveness conceptually has largely been limited to the continent. As Bach pointed out in an article in *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, neopatrimonialism has become synonymous with the continent in ways that have emptied it of any comparative range.

Part I starts with chapters that reflect on the concept itself, with Hinnerk Bruhns providing an excellent analysis on how the concept was developed in Max Weber's *Economy and Society*. In Chapter 2, Bach sets out to explore how it has been used to explain political and social phenomena in Africa and beyond. Part II explores specific dimensions of the concept as it relates to Big Man rule, warlordism and patron-clientelism, and Part III focuses on its use outside the African context.

As with many edited volumes, the quality of the essays is uneven. Some are quite good and informative; others are much less so. Taken together, however, none of these chapters constitute a serious effort at rethinking the concept of neopatrimonialism. While the concept has many issues, there are two fundamental ones that this volume fails to address. The first is that neopatrimonialism is constructed on the thin ice of Weber's ideal-type of patrimonial and legal-rational authority. Ideal-types are abstractions that might help point to certain core aspects of a phenomenon, but do not constitute empirical benchmarks of these things in the real world. Nor are ideal-types grounded theoretically in themselves. In other words, ideal-types have to be based within some theoretical framework of power, administrative functioning, human agency, etc. Neopatrimonialism has evolved from Weber's ideal-types as if they were its theoretical bases and empirical benchmarks. The second problem with the concept is a level of analysis issue. Certain authors in the book and in the literature more broadly use the concept to suggest that it indicates a personalised mode of authority or power, while others suggest that it reflects social norms or social networks of some kind. At other points, it is invoked as an analytical way to understand weakly institutionalised institutions. Hence in this volume we have chapters on local, regional or national bosses, and their personalised forms of authority and control, alongside a chapter by Bøas and Jennings, 'Rebellion and warlordism', in which they argue that neopatrimonialism is an intentional mode of mis-governance. Like the literature broadly, the chapters in the book move between the three levels of analysis without any clear conceptual methodology and epistemological logic.

Overall, this volume is a missed opportunity. Since the editors believe that the concept has merit, they should have taken the opportunity to produce a book that reflected on neopatrimonialism in a more critical and constructive way, in order to improve its analytical depth and comparative range. Sadly they and the other authors did not accomplish this task.

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The New Scramble for Africa by P. CARMODY

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At this time of cyclical global financial crisis, with far-reaching ramifications for the core countries of an inter-linked and inter-dependent global economic system, the need to capture its implications for countries of the periphery of the global market is pertinent. This book explores ramifications of the intensified globalised competition for Africa's resources and markets by the world's established and emerging powers. It provides an empirically rich and analytical overview of the roles of 'the drivers, actors, nature and impacts' of the 'new scramble'. Of note is the book's radical theoretical perspective to socio-economic geography in critiquing dominant explanations for Africa's underdevelopment, and providing an informed alternative that shows how 'resource dependency and lack of value addition in Africa are central to the continent's underdevelopment'. Its analysis of the roles of the old economic powers