

## Criticizing Neopatrimonialism

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During the last two decades neopatrimonialism has become the convenient, all purpose, and ubiquitous moniker for African governance. The Neopatrimonialism School has produced an impressive literature on the continent and its intellectual triumph is indicated by the fact that its analysis has become part of the commonsense of policy makers and its language has permeated the public media in a striking manner. The idea of neopatrimonialism has not only had a strong academic presence in Africa studies but has profoundly influenced how the aid establishment relates to African states and publics and how it perceives its own role and failure of its own endeavours .

Neopatrimonialism has been part of development studies from the very beginning of development studies but it is only in recent times that it has assumed politically and economically exigent status. In its earlier incarnation as patrimonialism or clientalism it confined itself to political practices and made few claims on its interplay with the economy. To be sure there were speculations that the pervasiveness might act to brake modernisation. In this paper i will confine myself to how neopatrimonialism relates to the economy. The school not only confines itself to analysis and description but also identifies causal links between neopatrimonialism and economic performance and makes predictions draw from what is commonly referred to as the “logic of neopatrimonialism”. Neopatrimonialism is said to account for trade policies, for hyperinflation, for economic stagnation, for low investment in infrastructure, for urban bias , etc. The School often also makes policy recommendations that include reducing the remit of the African state, encouraging a little more wars to strengthen African state, recolonisation, less aid, more aid, etc. Because it has been focussed on failure the analysis attributes any case of success to a *Deus ex Machina* which can be donors, exceptionally “wise leaders”, ring fenced enclaves within the order (so called “change teams”) , or simply good luck.

In this paper I will argue that while descriptive of the social practices of states and individuals that occupy different positions within African societies the concept has little analytical content and no predictive value with respect to economic policy and performance. The term itself is deployed as self-explanatory and its users do not seem particularly bothered by the fact that the "logic" has produced a wide range of outcomes in different places and at different times within the same country.