

## NEOPATRIMONIALISM AND ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE IN AFRICA: CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

Thandika Mkandawire

London School of Economics, 2011

### • Introduction

During the last two decades neopatrimonialism has become the convenient, all purpose, and ubiquitous moniker for African governance. The idea that neopatrimonialism is central to unravelling the facts behind Africa's poor economic performance has been advanced by what I shall call the "Neopatrimonialism School" (or *Neopat* for short). *Neopat* has produced an abundant flow of literature on the continent and its intellectual triumph is indicated by the fact that its analysis has become part of the common sense of policy makers and its language has permeated the public media in a striking manner<sup>1</sup>.

*Neopat* not only confines itself to analysis and description but also makes predictions drawing from on what is commonly referred to as the "logic of neopatrimonialism" on the that causation runs from neopatrimonialism to economy. It also makes policy recommendations on how to improve governance or, some suggests, to accept that the task is inherently a futile one. In order to make its claim credible *Neopat* needs to specify its effects on fundamental or proximate causes of economic growth. This is an inherently difficult task but *Neopat* has not shied away from asserting the implications of "logic of neopatrimonialism on economic growth and structural change.

In this paper I will argue that while descriptive of the social practices of states and individuals that occupy different positions within them the concept has little analytical content and no predictive value with respect to economic policy and performance. I do this by looking at a number of assertions about how the "logic of neopatrimonialism" leads to certain social and

---

<sup>1</sup> One has only to read say, the *Economist* essays on Africa or the more recent journalistic accounts of corruption side by side with the more academic tomes to see this interpretation of ideas.

economic outcomes. To understand this “logic” we have to step back and look at the pre-analytic *Weltanschung* and the stylised facts that are deemed true and therefore need not further investigation and the “mood” that guides the research programme. This allows us to grasp the pre-analytical predispositions of the approach and the rather problematic relationship the approach has with empirical evidence. One feature of *Neopat* has been an “Afropessimism” that borders on ontological despair about the prospects of the African continent. This is perhaps not surprising given that the paradigm has flourished during Africa’s “Lost Decades”, an era of disillusionment with African elites and the grand narratives and aspirations of the nationalist movements. Some members of *Neopat* saw the new approach as a direct attack on “Third Worldism” and the Dependency School whose extroversion blinded it from internal causes of the crisis and the agency of the African themselves. Internal problems of tradition, cronyism or neopatrimonialism were now seen as the root causes of underdevelopment and mismanagement.

- **Definitions and functions**

There are many definitions of neopatrimonialism and a diverse range of things are often thrown into them: clientelism, ethnicity, tradition, tribalism, nepotism, rent-seeking etc. The concept itself was first used by Eisenstadt (1973) to distinguish between patrimonialism in traditional and in modern contexts. In its earlier incarnation patrimonialism was not about corruption or weakness of the state. Rather patrimonialism was simply one form of exercising power and a form of “social capital” appropriate to a certain stage of development. The coexistence between the modern and tradition -- the dualism, if you like -- was an inevitable but not necessarily restraining phase in the march towards the teleologically procribed end state of modernity. By the 1980s neopatrimonialism was tethered to a new problematique – that of Africa’s poor economic performance. The new view seems to be that somehow in this road to modernity Africa had managed to combine features of tradition and modernity that have turned out to be debilitating. For those of a Panglossian bent the current Africa was the best of all possible Africa’s. The institutions that have emerged in Africa are what one would expect from Africa’s historicity and that is how Africa “works”.

The concept of neopatrimonialism as used in Africa has been described as “mushy”, “ill-defined” Ottaway (2003); “elusive” (Nicholas Van de Walle, 2001). This elusiveness has pushed scholarship towards “injudicious redefinition” and “inventions of new and ever-more abstruse

terminology” [Martz, 1996 #12240: 152] . The preferred mode of presentation is “thick description” that often consists of imaginative descriptions of the local scene, with a kind of anthropological knowingness suggested by use of Africa proverbs, popular humour about power. The literature is redolent of colourful metaphors and characterised by unbridled recourse to anecdotes, pejorative vocabulary, and vivid vignettes of the all too many cases of egregious abuse of state resources and power in Africa. As if to ensure the political correctness of the accounts, there is recourse to copious citations of African themselves whose orality never fails to bring to any attentive traveller's ears delectable tales of mischief in the tropics.<sup>2</sup> The empirical academic validity of the approach and the verisimilitude of the analysis is underscored by a tight mesh of cross-citation. However all this cannot conceal the fact that much of the evidence comes from sporadic empiricism that is largely anecdotal.

### *Micro-foundations of African failure*

The default World Bank positions about what was good policy became the norm or functional necessity against which African politics were judged even when the Bank's certainty about its models was fraying at the seams. Neoliberalism was what Blyth (2007: 762) calls a "crisis defining idea" that not only defined policies but that also posed the freighted question to which so much energy has been expended: why is it that African leaders refuse to implement what are obviously “Good Policies” ? Two responses have dominated analyses: the public choice view around rent-seeking seminally applied to Africa by Robert Bates and by *Neopat* that appeals to cultural attributes. In both cases the quest is for the microfoundations of macroeconomic or national level policies. The public choice school builds on methodological individualism and seeks to derive macro-level phenomenon from individual rational utilitarian behaviour. While *Neopat* does not always state this as clearly but its forays into economic policies suggest that it can be interpreted as building on “methodological communalism” in which the community serves as the foundational unit of analysis and from whence macro level phenomenon are derived. This is not an unfait inference. Lemarchand (1972) was clear about his intention with the idea of clientelism was

---

<sup>2</sup> For some these stories by Africans themselves adds objectivity to the account, the apparent premise being that self-deprecation is more objective than self-adulation or self-exculpation. Africans who argue that Africans are afflicted by "unacceptable signs of backwardness" (A. Kabou, 1991), “ lazy, irrational, fatalistic” and engage in "convivial excesses" (Daniel Etounga-Mangué), are extensively cited as refreshing: "What is new about such arguments is a self-critical approach rejecting the habitual exculpating explanations of Africa's predicament and focusing attention both on the putative incompatibility of African culture(s) with modern economic development and on the hitherto virtually taboo question of mentalities". [Chabal].

to provide “a useful theoretical connection between micro-and macro-level or state-centred analyses or theories of development”. Hydens’s “Economics of affection” are also said to provide the microlevel foundation that myriad of invisible micro-economic networks which, if allowed to penetrate society, gradually wear down the macro-economic structures, and eventually the whole system. "(Göran Hyden, 1983. The "politique a la bas" is one extreme attempt at deriving the micro-foundations of macrolevel institutions and outcomes.). And to rival or proximate the parsimony of the rational choice approach and the logic of rent seeking as exemplified by the work of Robert Bates, *Neopat* has also advanced its "logic of neopatrimonialism" , which in the more formulaic provides a parsimonious framework for reading Africa politics and their effect on economic performance.

One problem that arises in both approaches is that of aggregation of individual or communal pursuits poses formidable problems. -Neoclassical economic analysis resolved the problem by assuming a “representative individual”. The *Neopat* achieves the same by assuming the representative “African community” or the “representation Africa” in a manner that is profoundly reductionist or even essentialist. This legerdemain then obviates any need to spell out how the aggregation of individual or communal interests actually takes. But, as Keynes argued, macroeconomics is not reducible to micro-foundations. There are simply no nontrivial algorithms (such as those assuming a "representative individual" that proxy’s society) that will establish a one-to-one correspondence between microeconomic behaviour and macroeconomic outcomes. Similarly, there is simply no way we can derive from the myriads of African communities and their encounter with modernity the macroeconomic ups and downs of African economies.

In addition, the complexities of the communities from which the logic is supposed to emanate renders the exercise an extremely complex one. Since in terms of governance African societies range from the nearly acephalous societies to highly centralized regimes, so that the possible permutations of neopatrimonial states will be quite complex and will vary in significant ways. Tradition embraces such a broad repertoire of actual and potential practices as to allow any social practice to be accounted for by reference to that culture. Given the wide range repertoire of African political practices the neopatrimonial model involves a selective choice of elements in culture. The selection process is itself never specified. (Frank A. Kunz, 1991). The subjective choice of cultural elements to include often leads to idiosyncratic conclusions with no particular logic.

Neopat assumes forms of reciprocity between the “Big Men” and their clients that often underestimates the problem of collective action or time inconsistency. Why would either the patrons believe that the clients will continue to be loyal after they have gained from the patronage and how would the clients believe their support will be rewarded? One solution to the collective action problem is an appeal to ethnicity through which politicians care for the welfare of their own ethnic group but then this reduces the issue to ethnic politics and tribalism, an entirely different dynamic in which "passions" and primordial solidarities rather than simple self-interest take charge and what parsimony the "logic of neopatrimonialism" may have provided simply goes under. Another solution is to suggest the complicity of the poor in their own exploitation. This is often achieved through arbitrary restriction of the domain over the rational behaviour of individuals. Much of what is described as the “logic of neopatrimonialism” is the rational pursuit of self-interest by the “Big Man” in a context where the majority are driven by affection, primordial ties, ritual and superstition. Thus the “Big Man” and his immediate cronies are portrayed as Mancur Olson’s rational, calculating stationary bandits while the subalterns are so beholden to their culture or mesmerised by the “Big Man Syndrome” that they often act in ways at odds with their own interest.

- **The Pathology of African Neopatrimonialism.**

. While in some writing neopatrimonialism is treated as an African specialty, in general there is an understanding of its universality. Now, as has been pointed out the Asian form of neopatrimonialism (“cronyism”) has been associated with very high rates of growth. And so one recurring question in this development literature has been: “Why did corruption and cronyism impede growth in some developing countries but not in others?” (David C. Kang, 2003: 439).. More specifically what is with African neopatrimonialism that accounts for the dismal economic record and the product of the “African Tragedy” (William Easterly and Ross Levine, 1995, Patrick Guillaumont Sylviane Guillaumont Jeanneney Jean-Louis Arcand, 2000, Pater Lawrence, 2010). The literature is full of hedging and qualifying asides. The rhetorical device deployed is that of perfunctory concession through which one argues that there is really nothing peculiar “African”

about clientelism. The authors are usually at great pains to state that the cultural attributes and the political follies they have identified are not exclusive to Africa. After all notions such as “pork-barrel”, “cronyism” “revolving door” was coined to designate practices outside Africa. Having made the necessary politically correct qualifying remarks, the analysis then proceeds with the assertion that more pervasive . It is “the core feature of politics in Africa and in a small number of other states.” [Bratton, 1997 #12852] and more pathological (Ergas, 1986). African neopatrimonialism is said to be characterised by three features: untoward deference to authority that produces the “Big Man Syndrome”, [Booth, 2006 #12853; 9]’.; The "Big Man" sobriquet covers not only Mobutu, Idi Amin, Charles Taylor, Marcias Ngwema, Babanginda. Mandela is not just a great leader or decent man but a “Big Man”. So is Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah (Todd J. Moss, 2007)<sup>3</sup>. I submit that placing all African leaders in the big tent of “Big Men” is to erase significant differences among them. The second feature draws on all the stereotypes about life in the tropics – greed, excessive conviviality and feasting, criminality and, of course, sex . The final aspect is the acceptability of corruption and cultural normalcy or "banalisation" and the complicity of the poor to this particular order. Bayart had earlier captured this point by appealing to the African proverb “A Goat Grazes around the tree to which it is tethered” while eliding the counterpoint that it was precisely around that same tree that the serpent got the goat

### **Specific effects**

Neopat makes the claim that its approach can “explain what is actually happening on the ground in Africa,” (Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, 1999> xvii). And yet Neopat are prone toward encounter with discomfiting facts. And it to this that I now turn.

Perhaps the single most important assertion of the *Neopat* is the impossibility of a state that can play a developmental role which, requires an autonomy from societal interests. To the Asian “autonomous state” is juxtaposed the African “lame Leviathan” (Callaghy, 1987), which is so porous and “penetrated” by society, so beholden to particularistic interest groups, so mired in patron-client relationships, and so lacking in “stateness” it cannot pursue the collective task of development, which demands insulation from such redistributive demands. And on the ideological level, African states and elites are said not only not to be interested in development, they actually

---

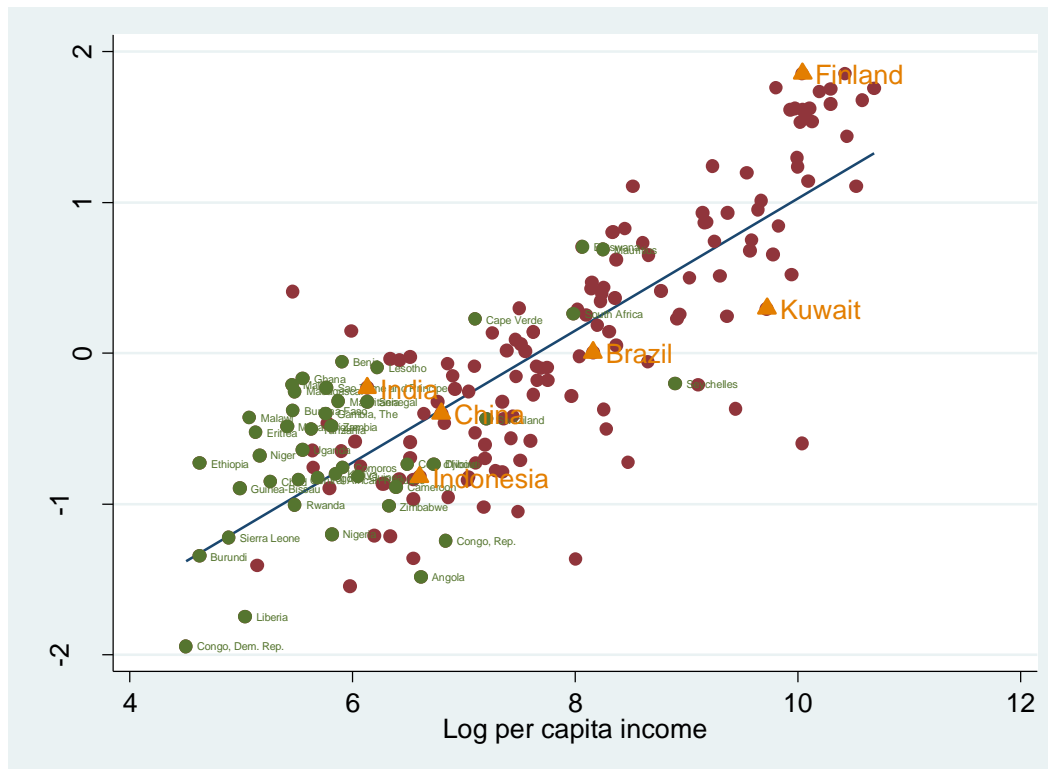
<sup>3</sup> For a longer list of “Big Men” see (Todd J. Moss, 2007).

make deliberate attempt to block development. In fact, Herbst (2000) argument that leaders in many African nations have incentives to prevent development in order to perpetuate the system of “ins” and “outs.” I have in an earlier paper questioned this view and I can only refer that earlier paper (Thandika Mkandawire, 2001).

In some of the operationalisation of the concept of neopatrimonialism it is said to *reduce voice and accountability*, *weaken government effectiveness* and *regulatory control*, *undermine the control of corruption*, *dilute the rule of law* and *compromise political stability*. The implication is that African countries would atypically perform worse according to these italicised and widely used indicators of good governance. However, as Figure 1 shows, most African countries actually perform better than they would be expected for their level of economic development, clustering above the trend line.

FIGURE 1

# RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PER CAPITA INCOME AND GOVERNANCE



### *Bloated States*

The second assertion is that the “logic of neopatrimonialism “leads to “bloated” bureaucracies in order to create jobs for the clientelistic networks (C. Gibson and B. Hoffman, 2002). This is so taken for granted that there is no attempt to look at the numbers. By the mid 1990s, Africa actually had fewer government workers per capita than any other developing region. Table 1 clearly shows that Africa may indeed be under governed. Significantly Mauritius and Botswana, the two most successful economies, had more than 5 percent each.



TABLE 1

CIVILIAN PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYMENT DEVELOPING COUNTRY REGIONS  
(PERCENT OF POPULATION)

	Sub-Saharan Africa	Latin American and Caribbean	Middle East and North Africa	Asia and Pacific
Circa 1980	1.9	4.6	4.9	3.1
Mid-1990	1.9	3.5	4.0	2.4

Source: [Goldsmith, 19xx #122]

*Obstructing the emergence of a capitalist class*

One effect of neopatrimonialism is said to be the discouragement of productive investment by the private sector. Potential productive elites have been drawn into this web of neopatrimonial strategies that undermine productive activities as entrepreneurs respond to “perverse incentives” (Peter M. Lewis, 1994, Richard Sandbrook, 2005: 1123). Furthermore neopatrimonialism has not been able to provide the bureaucratic order and predictability that capitalists need if they are to engage in long-term investment. Instead neopatrimonialism has undermined institutions which ensure property rights and thus undermined investment and growth and increased uncertainty. In addition it is argued that neo-patrimonial states are against their national bourgeoisie because they are a potential source of countervailing power (Roger Tangri, 1998). Apparently even privatisation, which would have spurred the emergence of a capitalists class, has been slowed by the neopatrimonial logic has led to increased foreign ownership. All this may be true but we ought to also consider the way the problem has been posed has virtually reduced policy to being “pro-market” but NOT “pro-business” since that later suggests cronyism, clientalism and downright corruption. The relationship between the state and national capital has involved forms of “embeddedness” of the state that are close to clientelism. Many of the features of the African state highlighted by this literature have been a salient aspect of successful developmental states. Accounts of spectacular corruption in the high performing East Asian economies have become frequent in the press following the financial crisis. So, obviously, neo-patrimonialism is not a robust independent variable in explaining low economic growth.

## Macroeconomic policies

### *Inflation*

The “logic of neopatrimonialism” is supposed to produce high levels of inflation because of the “high expenditure” “low tax” regime it produces. Governments will also seek revenue “seignorage” through recourse to the printing press to finance the deficit. Callaghy (1990: 362) went as far as to suggest the “Logic of neopatrimonialism” will lead to something even worse -- “crony hyperinflation”. Inflation rates during the pre-crisis decades remained low in Africa and the standard deviation suggests widely divergent experiences that do not suggest any “crony hyperinflation” (see Table 2). As to the easy recourse to the printing press, in its 1994 report the World Bank was constrained to observe “Most Sub-Saharan Africa countries have had low or moderate seignorage, consistent with the fact that inflation has also been relatively low. The median rate of inflation was just 10.6 per cent before the adjustment period, certainly lower than in Latin America and no higher than in other developing countries. By 1990-90, it had dropped to 8 percent Even among the flexible exchange rate countries, which have the highest inflation rates in the region, the median has hovered around 20 per cent—high by international standards but not a sign of major macroeconomic imbalance” (World Bank, 1994: 50).

TABLE 2

### CONSUMER PRICE INFLATION RATE 1960-1980

Region	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
East Asia Pacific	235	16.32	78.10	-6.04	1136.25
Latin America and Caribbean	468	16.63	45.29	-100	504.73
Middle East and North Africa	186	7.87	10.21	-21.68	78.31
South Asia	74	7.00	7.01	-7.63	28.60
Sub-Saharan Africa	386	10.16	13.00	-10.03	116.45

### *Fiscal Matters*

Neopatrimonial regimes are said to have « a structural tendency for fiscal crisis [Van de Walle, 1992 #184: 135]. This is due to their failure to tax citizens [Callaghy, 1990 #194: 362; Lindberg, 2001 #1271; Soest, 2007 #5507 ; Chabal, 2002 #1269; Englebort, 2000 #5225;; Gibson, 2002 #5446]. Neo-patrimonial policies are also said to favour current government consumption at

the expense of investments in physical and human capital which have few, if any, short-term returns to the ruling elite in terms of power.

One measure of the size of the state is the share of public expenditure in GDP. Available evidence suggests that “African states do not stand out as singularly prone to spend large shares of GNP, to employ high ratios of the population in bureaucratic jobs, or to own extensive state-owned enterprises. [Goldsmith, 2000]. As for taxation *Neopat* comes up with two contradictory positions on tax collection. On the hand it is frequently argued that neopatrimonial states may need high revenue to cover their redistributive policies. This is then used to account for the heavy-handedness of the state and its monopsonistic control of key markets etc. Generally, however it argued that neopatrimonialism will lead to low tax revenue and due to the avoidance of personal taxes and which then compels countries to rely on trade taxes. (Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, 1999). These assertions also ignore fact that there are huge differences in tax efforts among African countries and most of the variations can be explained by the structure features of these countries including the "tax handles" at their disposal and their colonial legacy (Thandika Mkandawire, 2010). Furthermore , as Auriol and Warletrs conclude:

“...everything else being equal African countries tax more than their other economic and political economy variables would suggest. In view of the level of their per capita GNP, the density of their population, their poor democratic record and the level of their sunk cost to market entry, they are able to tax relatively well. This result came as a surprise to us. (Emmanuel Auriol and Michael Warlters, 2002: 23)

The claim that neopatrimonialism accounts for the reliance on trade taxes ignores the evidence that fiscal needs of many less developed countries (LDCs) are met by a greater reliance on indirect taxes than on direct taxes; principally because of the relatively high collection administrative costs associated with the latter (Prest, 1971 ; Due, 1970). Within the category of indirect taxes, trade taxes can play an especially important part (Greenaway, 1980). This has nothing to do with neopatrimonialism.

In this context one would expect that higher tax collection would be laudable. However evidence of good performance in terms of tax collection has been used to establish the neopatrimonial nature of Africa states. Thus increased collection in Zambia is said to merely fuel neopatrimonialism. Apparently the strengthening the administration, ” been detrimental to its original intentions ... strengthening the collection of central state revenue has been consistent with

a neopatrimonial rationale, and may even have fed neopatrimonialism overall, by providing increased resources for particularistic expenditure [von Soest, 2007 #5507].

### *Trade and industrial policy*

In an era where it has been strongly suggested that open economies perform better than inward-looking ones, the poor performance of African economies has been attributed to their “inward looking policies”. According to the “Logic of “neopatrimonialism”, in their quest for new “areas of predation”, neopatrimonial states will tend to interfere in trade and foreign exchange pricing and allocation leading to price distortions (P. Englebert, 2002, B. Levy, 2007). All this has presumably undercut Africa’s trade with the rest of the world. This assertion goes against the fact that Africa trade as much as would expect given their levels of per capita income and industrialisation (Dani Rodrik, 1997). As is other attribution of policy to neopatrimonialism the assumption here is that nothing else could have caused what is being wholly attributed to neopatrimonialism. Although these policies are attributed to the “logic of neopatrimonialism” a case can be made that they were the results of orthodox understanding of what import substitution industrialisation entailed.. Virtually all “late industrialisation” (with perhaps the exception of that of the City states) has been preceded by a period of vigorous policy-driven import substitution industrialisation. (Ha-Joon Chang, 2007, 2002, Erik S. Reinert, 2007, Rune Skarstein, 2007). The theoretical basis for such strategies and the affinity of the strategy to nationalist aspiration for industrialisation has been extensively demonstrated. As Waterbury argues import substitutions industrialisation “was “overdetermined;” that is, there are too many independent variables to explain, parsimoniously, the dependent variable of its widespread adoption. (John Waterbury, 1999: 323)

One outcome of the “Logic of Neopatrimonialism” is that African policy makers routinely squander opportunities provided by international markets. Empirical studies question this conventional view and suggest instead that while governments may not usually handle commodity fluctuations properly, the effects of price increases have been generally benevolent (Angus Deaton and Ron Miller, 1996). Deaton and Miller’s conclusion is that much of the evidence is not consistent with the negative tone in the literature which suggests Africans waste gains from price “booms”. Increases in prices are associated most strongly with increased investment and, subsequently with increased consumption and output. In other words, “Commodity

price booms have generally favourable effects on African economies; they stimulate investment and generate additional GDP. There is no obvious evidence that booms trigger a GDP decline, nor do windfalls get immediately converted into government expenditure, at the rate of one for one or even higher. Nor is there any sign of long-term trade imbalances beyond the initial effects of some of the windfall being used to pay for imports. Admittedly the evidence is relatively weak, and doubts there are some countries where there have been horror stories. But the horror stories do not appear to generalise to all countries in sub-Saharan Africa” (Angus Deaton and Ron Miller, 1996: 142)

## **Social Policy**

### *Neglect of Human Capital*

It is sometimes suggested that the neopatrimonial state will underspend on human capital formation and will not invest much in health and education (Alice N. Sindzingre, : 15-15). If we examine the matter closer we find that this presentation is misleading. The low expenditure on these items has probably more to do with levels of income than neopatrimonialism. Using regressions analysis to determine the health expenditure per capita and GDP per capita controlling for population over 65, we find that African countries are spending much more than would be expected at their level of per capita income. (see

Table 3)

TABLE 3

## HEALTH EXPENDITURE PER CAPITA / ACTUAL AND EXPECTED

Region	Actual Expenditure	Expected Expenditure	Actual Share	Expected Share	Per Capita income
East Asia & Pacific	47.7	13.7	2.6	2.4	906.7
Europe & Central Asia	128.0	140.7	4.0	2.6	2,039.7
High income	2,766.2	2,805.4	5.3	7.0	26,532.2
Latin America & Caribbean	254.5	329.4	4.2	2.9	3,819.0
Middle East & North Africa	91.8	157.3	4.9	2.6	2'245.8
South Asia	23.7	-37.0	2.9	2.3	453.8
Sub-Saharan Africa	32.6	-33.4	3.4	2.2	499.6

The expected values are derived from the panel regression of

$$He = \beta_0 t + \beta_1 Y + \beta_2 Age + u_{it}$$

Where

HE Health Expenditure per capita

Y per capita Income

Age Ration of population over 65

A Similar analysis on education shows that Sub/Saharan countries spend slight more than would be expected given their per capita income and demographics (Table 4 and Table 5)

TABLE 4

## EDUCATION EXPENDITURE BY REGION \*AVERAGE FOR 1998-2002(

COUNTRY	Actual	Expected
East Asia & Pacific	2.6	3.6
Europe & Central Asia	4.0	3.7
High income	5.3	5.6
Latin America & Caribbean	4.2	3.8
Middle East & North Africa	4.9	3.7
South Asia	2.9	3.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	3.4	3.5

TABLE 5

## PUBLIC EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION AS A PERCENTAGE OF GDP, 2004

<i>Region/World</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Middle East and North Africa	4.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	4.5
Latin America and Caribbean	4.4
South and West Asia	3.6
East Asia and Pacific	2.8
World	4.3

Source: UNESCO Global Education Digest 2007.

. .

## • Overall Economic Effects

Neopat makes the claim that its approach can “explain what is actually happening on the ground in Africa,” (Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, 1999> xvii). And yet is prone toward encounter with discomfiting facts not only about the specific aspects we have discussed above but also about the overall policy regimes and economic performance of African economies

### *The anomaly of growth variations*

We noted above that *Neopat* argued that Africa’s poor economic performance in terms of economic growth was the logical outcome of Neopatrimonialism. Recent growth literature in Africa stresses three features of African growth (Jorge Saba Arbache and John Page, 2007, R. Hausmann et al., 2005, Patrick Imam and Gonzalo Salinas, 2008). First, that African countries have had many periods of “growth acceleration” over periods of eight years; second that these growth accelerations were more frequent before the era of adjustment; third thatthat , growth is volatile was often not sustained over long period of time. This then is the data that the “logic of neopatrimonialism” should be explaining. Instead it has been used to explain why Africa countries have stagnated. Apart from answering the wrong question the approach was not the appropriate one to answer the question posed by these new studies of African growth. One problem arises from attempts to explain something as volatile as economic growth with determinants that are asserted to be almost eternal (e.g. ethnic diversity) or at least stable – e.g. culture. Moshe Syrquin (1997) has observed with respect to many variables used in current cross-country analysis of growth, there is a fundamental problem in relating something with as low time persistence as growth to highly persistent variables such as ethnic diversity, neopatrimonialism etc. Since the culturally determined neopatrimonialism has no temporal variation it is unlikely to determine growth which varies both spatially and temporary.



Much of the link between African political systems and economic performance were derived from the crisis era of the “Lost Decades” and they consequently have problems explaining any recovery. Since the crisis is attributed to that one political variable, it is often difficult to explain recovery other than by appealing to some *deus ex machina* or by simply asserting that that particular determinant has been weakened. This inability to explain the differences in growth between countries and within the same country overtime has previously been raised as criticism against neopatrimonialism as an explanatory variable (Richard C. Crook, 1989, Michael F. Lofchie, 2002: 846, Thandika Mkandawire, 2001). There simply is no sense of conjuncture in *Neopat* analysis.

In light of this obvious intertemporal and interspatial variations in economic performance and the current turn around in some members of *Neopat* now acknowledges this variation and there have been several ways out of this conundrum. Some of the more astute advocates of neopatrimonialism have resorted to a search for varieties of neopatrimonialism that different historical trajectory. It is asserted the particular condition of tradition and modernity produced a more felicitous type of neopatrimonialism. Englebert accounts for Botswana’s success in these terms. Englebert identifies neopatrimonialism that ensures the legitimacy of the state in cases where the colonial order was somehow congruent with traditional sources of authority. Englebert (2000) links the ability to pursue development over the long term to legitimacy by arguing that state legitimacy is an important prerequisite for development. Legitimacy is, of course not an independent factor which determined state performance. It is, in turn, the outcome of state performance so that it is difficult to tell the direction of causality and we run into serious endogeneity issues here.

Cammack and associates find “developmental neopatrimonialism” in Malawi (Diana Cammack et al., 2010). Dr. Banda achieved fairly high rates of growth before the 1970 crisis due to a “centralised long-run horizon rent creation and distribution, a disciplined economic technocracy and inclusive form of ethno-regional politics” (Cammack and Kelsall. and Peter Lewis argues that neopatrimonialism before Babanginda was different from that of the rest of Africa because “was not controlled by an exclusive oligarchy, and there were countervailing influences on the concentration of personal power.” (P. Lewis, 1996). The other approach involves appeals to such *Deus ex Machina* as expatriates or the basic decency of the leaders, or “pockets of

reform/islands of alternative systems” (Derick W. Brinkerhoff and Arthur A. Goldsmith, 2004) that have mysteriously escaped the hold of neopatrimonialism etc. These “enclaves” of rationality in a universe of irrationality and self-seeking are then used to suggest that there might be such a thing “neopatrimonial developmental state”. This not only destroys the notion that neopatrimonialism and predation are logically linked but also raises the question as to what is the difference between the “ neopatrimonial developmental state” and the “developmental state” *tout court*?

### *The anomaly of policy changes*

Recall that the argument for economic liberalisation was that it reduces the monopoly and discretionary power of government officials and favours democratic, rule-based governance by denying the state the largesse it has hitherto deployed to cement its clientelistic networks. Indeed with fewer handouts to disburse the state’s attractiveness to local elites will decline and entrepreneurs will shift to more productive and more efficient activities. With this mind the “logic of neopatrimonialism” ruled out implementation of adjustment programmes by African governments. In the event the theoretically impossible (adjustment) has happened. This apparently poses an “intriguing question” (Michael Hodd, 1987): “ If vested political interest is opposed to market solutions and if the financial leverage of the IMF and World Bank acting alone is not decisive in imposing policy change, why then have so many African countries begun substantial restructuring of their economies on market economy lines?”- To address the question, several ploys are used by way of paradigm maintenance. One is to deny that certain things actually took place. Thus when it has been pointed out that neopatrimonial states have adjusted their economies according to the dictates of Washington Consensus, the response has either been that they have not adjusted enough; or recidivism and is a ruse so as to get hold of aid money which they desperately needed to maintain their clientelistic network and a temporary ploy which is a reflection of the inability of the state to provide anything to clients. Neopatrimonialism would lead to r; recidivism; or that international financial institutions have been hoodwinked into believing that African governments have adjusted (Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, 1999 Hibou, 2000 #5043, Nicolas Van de Walle, 2001). Apparently to conceal the fact that they had been taken for a ride and driven by the perverse incentives that rewarded aid dispersion IFIs became complicit in the charade, pronounced obviously flawed implementation as successful.

One other argument is that while indeed adjustment has taken place other factors related to neopatrimonialism came up and undermined the positive effects as neopatrimonialism has managed to circumvent its full impact. Advocates of SAP are said to have been sanguine about the effects of macroeconomic policy because they assumed the existence of appropriate institutions and a private sector that would respond positively when distortions and other encumbrances were removed. The neopatrimonial institutions, which they had apparently overlooked, are apparently so agile that they invariably always came out on top. No sooner is the ink signed on the agreement than the local elites revert to their retrograde neopatrimonial ways.

But what if indeed the neopatrimonial elites have played against type and actually adjusted? Hood's own answer to the "intriguing question" is that past activities have enriched the elites to the extent that they are able to gain more from the expansion of the economy than from flows of patronage or that they have amassed so much wealth that they have become more generous "analogous to many captains of industry in the 19th century in Europe and North America who turned to increasingly philanthropy in the latter part so of their lives." (Michael Hodd, 1987.). With their bellies busting at the seams, the "Big Men" have decided to reduce their gluttony and have turned philanthropic.

Under normal conditions such incongruities of interpretation of what had happened should dispel notions that African policies were singularly driven by the inexorable logic of neopatrimonialism and the impression of confident knowledge of the inner workings of local cultures and politics. Even where theory and evidence plead against too ready an acceptance of the impact of neopatrimonialism suggested by various authors, the literature itself seems deaf to such pleas. The overall effects of these explanations, caveats and auxiliary reflections is to confirm Therkildsen (2005:41) The neopatrimonialism literature is impervious to empirical falsification. .

- **Overall Implications of *Neopat***

- Flattening of the African Landscape**

The analytical template *Neopat* has forged has had the effect of flattening the African political and economic landscape, Not only has it rendered the many colourful and varied characters that have strutted and fretted upon the African political stages over

the last half century but it has also oversimplified the many contradictions of the continent . What you eventually have is not rich tapestry of case studies but monotonous account of one damned country after another. By reducing the variance of African experience it gives us an impoverished understanding of the complexities of the continent. DiGrassi (Aaron deGrassi, 3008) has observed that the literature on neopatrimonialism nine countries have been used in an ideotypical and emblematic fashion: Nigeria, Senegal, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Zambia, especially Cameroon<sup>4</sup>.

There are interesting parallels between versions of dependency school and the Neopatrimonial School. Both have sought to explain Africa's stagnation and the impossibility of its development-- one by appealing to external factors and their structuration of internal action the other by appealing to internal factors and their strategic extroversion. Both approaches left no room for the cyclical nature of development and were often compelled to drag in *Deus Ex Machina* to explain recovery or economic growth and both undermined the understanding the politics of development – one by externalising the choice-making and the other by imposing a formulaic link between society and economy. And both were confronted with discomfiting facts of great variation of experience in Africa- And both had a levelling effect on the political economies of the continent.

## **A world without ideas and passions**

All human agency presupposes ideas. Policies are shaped not only by interests and structures but also by ideas. In earlier writing on Africa there was considerable interest in the ideas and ideologues that shaped African policies and state formation. Although some of this bordered on the hagiographic it did nevertheless suggest that ideas mattered in African political affairs as elsewhere. Although *Neopat* claims that, unlike the structural determinism of earlier theories such as that of the dependency school, it seeks to give agency to African by permitting them choice something which the approach is predisposed to downplay ideas. Whatever ideas the elite hold are

---

<sup>4</sup> One can add here that even within this limited set it is quite remarkable that one country - Cameroon - has produced some of the major works of *Neopat* – Bayart, Richard Joseph, Nick van de Wale, Englebert, Mbembe, Hibou, Etounga-Manguéle.

dismissed as rationalisation of the neopatrimonial inclinations and crude excrescence of neopatrimonialism. And although much is so said about human agency and individual and collective initiative, it turns out that individual choices are ultimately determined by the ubiquitous and ineluctable "logic of neopatrimonialism" or by huge doses of ignorance. This is very much like the "consumer choice" of neoclassical theory with his/her given preference function, budget, perfect information and rational mind purchasing goods in a perfectly competitive market and bound to rationally choose the one point where the preference function is tangent to the budget constraint. Marrying rational choice to neopatrimonialism produces communities whose members are only attracted by the possibility of material gain. There are no ethnic bonds, sentiments of place and past, no loyalty, no passion and no belonging except perhaps as smokescreens to conceal crass material interests. As Mustapha (2002) notes, this is "a reductionist perspective on African politics which robs non-elite groups of political agency." In other words how agency and choices are brought into play is ultimately limited by the "logic of neopatrimonialism" in a manner reminiscent of the production by neoclassical economics of what Amartya Sen called "rational fools"

### **Anti-democratic and anti-politics thrust**

Right from its inception structural adjustment was seen as a basically technocratic issue over which there was a "Consensus". Informed by a political economy that plagues pursuit of interests for distortions it sought a political order that shield policy makers from incumbrances of politics. *Neopat* prides itself for bring politics to the forefront of understanding Africa's underdevelopment. However informed by a cynical view of politics it too has spouted Weberian ideal type "autonomous bureaucracies". For all its populism and railing against the "Big man" the approach is profoundly suspicious of the culture in which the mass of African people live. And as indicated above, it is the underworld that wreaks havoc on the coherence of the state and political society. Arguing that "ascription has not disappeared with democratisation" Hyden hypothesises that "the more competitive elections are, the greater the risk of falling back on ascriptive criteria for conducting politics". For Chabal and Daloz the notion of representation has no meaning in Africa because when people vote: "they are expected, or 'asked', to do so or perhaps because it is indispensable to be seen to be voting a certain way. On the whole, they do not vote because they

support the ideas of a particular political party but because they must placate the demands of their existing or putative patron” (Chabal and Daloz, 1999, p.39).

The anti-democratic thrust of *Neopat* can be traced back to its Weberian progeny there has always been a strong anti-democratic and militaristic aspect to some of the presentations of legal/rational Weberian framework, not surprising perhaps given its Prussian origins. For as Bottomore (1989) noted “Democracy as a political idea, and as a social movement inspired by that idea, which is valuable in its own right, finds no place whatsoever in Weber’s thought. However, to his credit “Weber saw a permanent tension between the logic of bureaucratic rule, which was inherently rational, and the logic of political leadership and charisma operating through democratic processes.” (Hazel Gray and Mushtaq Khan), Much of this tension is ignored in the current discourse on democracy as their calls to give greater autonomy to enclaves of rationality in the context where democratic politics is taking root.

### **Anti-social policy**

We noted above that in some writing the "logic of neopatrimonialism" leads to redistributive policies which are then said to harm economic growth by placing redistribution above production or by "preying upon productive activity".. On closer inspection it turns out that one of the objects of attack of *Neopat* literature was the rudimentary welfare regimes that emerged in postcolonial Africa (J. O. Adésinà, 2009). In some writing patronage is actually measured as the share of subsidies and expenditure of wages and associates urbanisation with increases in patronage presumably because the agglomeration of people puts pressure on the state (C. Gibson and B. Hoffman, 2002).

Now, there is a vast literature suggesting that social expenditure usually grows with economic growth and urbanisation, the reasons advanced for such changes range from the purely functional ones to the “power resources” arguments about the growing strength of the working class etc. Many of the social welfare systems in Africa can be traced either to the “social pacts” spawned by nationalist movements, or to the struggles waged by workers, or the acceptance of internal social conventions etc. The management of these systems may be, as they often are,

corrupt and clientelistic but neither this corruption nor clientelism are the the origins nor are the the basis of their persistence. The discourse of clientalism tends to delegitimize such system as simply an aspect of “patronage”. It is also uncannily ly in line with the dominant neoliberal paradigm of the time which has zeroed in on social policy, often from neoliberal populist perspective.

## **Conclusion**

African economies have not done well over recent years and the quest for the way is urgent. Most African talk about corruption, nepotism, tribalism but I strongly doubt is these best captured by the “logic of neopatrimonialism” and I doubt if *Neopat* casts much light on African affairs. Neopatrimonialism, or rather the putative pathological African neopatrimonialism might explain why Africa has fallen behind other regions but it does not help understand the cross-national or over-time differences within Africa itself. There are simply no neopatrimonial buttons that we can confidently press to yield the expected reality of any country and there is simply no isomorphic link between neoptarimonialism and economic policies and performances as the “Logic of Neopatrimoniaism” would suggest. The heady mix of discursive labels deployed often generate more heat than light Economic policy making s a highly complex process involving ideas, interests, economic forces and structures, “path dependence” and institutions and thus cannot be reductively derived from the “logic of neopatrimonialism”. .The oversimplification of African problems has huge implications on how the problems are addressed, how actors are identified or marginalised and what role external actors assign to themselves.

The rejection of neopatrimonialism does not in any way entail a rejection of the consideration of Africa’s cultures or the internal causes of Africa’s malaise. And even less odes this suggest a downplazing of the all too many egregious abuses of power. Rather the argument is trhat neopatrominialism is too blunt an instrument for understanding the great variwes of African experieces and the contradictory interests and motivation of social actoras, The call is call for more concrete studies of the African continent and for an approach that has a healthier relationship with the empirical world than the Procrustean concept that is unfalsifiable. This will require a serious understanding of the ideas and passions that drive African, of the interest that are individually

collectively pursued and of the structures (both internal and external) that shape or hinder Africa's development efforts.

## • References

- Adésinà, J. O.** 2009. "Social Policy in Sub Saharan Africa: A Glance in the Rear View Mirror." *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 18, pp. S37-S51.
- Arbache, Jorge Saba and John Page.** 2007. "More Growth or Fewer Collapses? A New Look at Long Run Growth in Sub-Saharan Africa," In. World Bank.
- Auriol, Emmanuel and Michael Warlters.** 2002. "Taxation Base in Developing Countries." *Journal of Public Economics*, 89(4), pp. 625-46.
- Bottomore, Tom.** 1989. "Max Weber and the State," In *Democracy and the Capitalist State*, ed. G. Duncan, 123-32. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brinkerhoff, Derick W. and Arthur A. Goldsmith.** 2004. "Good Governance, Clientelism, and Patrimonialism: New Perspectives on Old Problems." *International Public Management Journal*, 7(2), pp. 163-85.
- Callaghy, Thomas.** 1990. "Lost between State and Market: The Politics of Economic Adjustment in Ghana, Zambia and Nigeria," In *Economic Crisis and Policy Choice: The Politics of Adjustment in the Third World*, ed. J. Nelson, 257-320. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Cammack, Diana; Tim Kelsall and David Booth.** 2010. "Developmental Patrimonialism? The Case of Malawi," In. London: African Power and Politics Programme, ODI.
- Chabal, Patrick and Jean-Pascal Daloz.** 1999. *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*. London: James Currey.
- Chang, Ha-Joon.** 2007. *Bad Samaritans: Rich Nations, Poor Policies and the Threat to the Developing World*. London: Random House Business Books.
- Chang, Ha-Joon.** 2002. *Kicking Away the Ladder : Development Strategy in Historical Perspective*. London: Anthem.
- Crook, Richard C.** 1989. "Patrimonialism, Administrative Effectiveness and Economic Development in Côte D'ivoire." *African Affairs*, 88(351), pp. 205-28.
- Deaton, Angus and Ron Miller.** 1996. "International Commodity Prices, Macroeconomic Performance and Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Journal of African Economies*, 5(3), pp. 99-191.
- deGrassi, Aaron.** 3008. "'Neopatrimonialism' and Agricultural Development in Africa: Contributions and Limitations of a Contested Concept " *African Studies Review*, 51(3), pp. 107-33.
- Easterly, William and Ross Levine.** 1995. "Africa's Growth Tragedy," In. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.
- Englebert, P.** 2002. *State Legitimacy and Development in Africa*. Lynne Rienner Pub.
- Etounga-Manguéle, Daniel.** *L'Afrique a-T-Elle Besoin D'un Programme D'ajustment Culturel?* Ivry-sur-Seine: Editions Nouvelles du Sud.



- Gibson, C. and B. Hoffman.** 2002. "Dictators with Empty Pockets: A Political Concessions Model of Africa's Democratization'," In *University of California, San Diego, Paper prepared for the 2002 Annual Meetings of the American Political Science Association, Boston*. The 2002 Annual Meetings of the American Political Science Association, Boston MA.
- Gray, Hazel and Mushtaq Khan.** 2010. "Good Governance and Growth in Africa: What Can We Learn from Tanzania," In *The Political Economy of Africa*, ed. V. Padayachee, 339-56. London: Abingdon.
- Hausmann, R.; L. Pritchett and D. Rodrik.** 2005. "Growth Accelerations." *Journal of Economic Growth*, 10(4), pp. 303-29.
- Hodd, Michael.** 1987. "Africa, the Imf and the World Bank." *African Affairs*, 86(344), pp. 331-42.
- Hyden, Göran.** 1983. *No Shortcuts to Progress: African Development Management in Perspective*. London: Heinemann.
- Imam, Patrick and Gonzalo Salinas.** 2008. "Explaining Episodes of Growth Accelerations, Decelerations, and Collapses in Western Africa," In. Washington DC: IMF.
- Jean-Louis Arcand, Patrick Guillaumont Sylviane Guillaumont Jeanneney.** 2000. "How to Make a Tragedy: On the Alleged Effect of Ethnicity on Growth." *Journal of International Development*, 12(7), pp. 925-38.
- Kabou, A.** 1991. *Et Si L'Afrique Refusait Le Développement?* Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Kang, David C.** 2003. "Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks." *International Security*, 27(4), pp. 57-85.
- Kunz, Frank A.** 1991. "Liberalization in Africa--Some Preliminary Reflections." *African Affairs*, 90(359), pp. 223-35.
- Lawrence, Pater.** 2010. "The African Tragedy: International and National Roots," In *The Political Economy of Africa*, ed. V. Padayachee, 21-38. London: Abingdon.
- Lemarchand, Rene and Keith Legg.** 1972. "Political Clientelism and Development: A Preliminary Analysis." *Comparative Politics*, 4(2), pp. 149-78.
- Levy, B.** 2007. "State Capacity, Accountability and Economic Development in Africa." *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 45(4), pp. 499-520.
- Lewis, P.** 1996. "From Prebendalism to Predation: The Political Economy of Decline in Nigeria." *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 34(01), pp. 79-103.
- Lewis, Peter M.** 1994. "Economic Statism, Private Capital, and the Dilemmas of Accumulation in Nigeria." *World Development*, 22(3), pp. 437-51.
- Lofchie, Michael F.** 2002. "Review: [Untitled]." *The American Political Science Review*, 96(4), pp. 844-46.
- Mkandawire, Thandika.** 2010. "On Tax Efforts and Colonial Heritage in Africa." *Journal of Development Studies*, 46(10), pp. 1647-69.
- Mkandawire, Thandika.** 2001. "Thinking About Developmental States in Africa." *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 25(3), pp. 289-313.
- Moss, Todd J.** 2007. *African Development : Making Sense of the Issues and Actors*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Reinert, Erik S.** 2007. *How Rich Countries Got Rich and What Poor Countries Stay Poor*. London: Constable and Robinson.
- Rodrik, Dani.** 1997. "Trade Policy and Economic Performance in Sub-Saharan Africa," In. Stockholm: Swedish Foreign Ministry.
- Sandbrook, Richard.** 2005. "Africa's Great Transformation?" *Journal of Development Studies*, 41(6), pp. 1118-25.

- Sindzingre, Alice N.** "Bringing the Developmental State Back In: Contrasting Development Trajectories in Sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia," In *Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics (SASE) 16th Annual Meeting*. Georges Washington University, Washington D. C.
- Skarstein, Rune.** 2007. "Free Trade: A Dead End for Underdeveloped Economies." *Review of Political Economy*, 19(3), pp. 347 — 67.
- Syrquin, Moshe.** 1997. "Modern Economic (Endogenous) Growth and Development," In *New Theories in Growth and Development*, ed. F. Coricelli, M. Di Matteo and F. Hahn, 155-74. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Tangri, Roger.** 1998. "Politics, Capital and the State in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 36(2), pp. 108 - 22.
- Van de Walle, Nicholas.** 2001. "Rejoinder to Inge Amundsen and Stein Sundstol Eriksen." *Forum for Development Studies* 28 (1), pp. 69-73.
- Van de Walle, Nicolas.** 2001. *African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis, 1979-1999*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Waterbury, John.** 1999. "The Long Gestation and Brief Triumph of Import Substitution Industrialisation." *World Development*, 27(2).
- World Bank.** 1994. *Adjustment in Africa: Reforms, Results and the Road Ahead*. Washington, D. C.: World Bank.