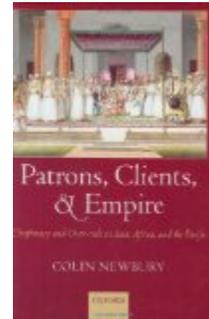


# H-Net Reviews

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Colin Newbury. *Patrons, Clients and Empire: Chieftaincy and Over-Rule in Asia, Africa and the Pacific*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. ix + 328 pp. \$105.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-925781-2.

Reviewed by Ty Reese (Department of History, University of North Dakota)  
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## Imposing Authority and Establishing Empire

An interesting question in the construction of empire through imperialism concerns how the imperial powers were able to exercise authority over vast expanses of territory and establish lasting control over so many indigenous states and peoples. It is this question concerning the system that European states utilized to establish their authority with which Colin Newbury deals in *Patrons, Clients and Empire*. Newbury begins by explaining that one of the limitations of utilizing social science theories to understand over-rule stems from the difficulties scholars have in using them to explain the influence of local and regional dynamics on the exercise of imperial power. And yet, in Newbury's view, the most effective impositions of authority developed when the imperialists clearly understood and took advantage of these very same local and regional political structures. Given this utility, Newbury seeks to explore the history of over-rule through a series of short case studies, to show "the politics of colonial over-rule as exchange, argument, continuity and transformation" (p. 16).

Newbury divides his work into four regional sections, India, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and maritime Southeast Asia, and within each he develops detailed case studies of the development of European over-rule. This division allows the book's various sections to be read either individually or as a whole. The first section on India, the most detailed and largest of all of the case studies, is divided into four chapters that trace the development of British over-rule. The first section, "Trade and Dependency," explores the arrival of Britain in India and the

development of British dependency upon the Mughals within an economic context. It is in this period that the relationship between Britain and the Mughals brought the British into local affairs while teaching the British that abusing the established system was detrimental to their coastal position. The next section, "Reversal of Status," explores how Britain, by developing not only a patron status but also power over local and regional political figures, shook off dependency by imposing itself upon the existing political system in India. This new relationship depended upon British control of India's wealth and its ability to distribute patronage to traditional leaders. The next step involved turning the traditional leaders into clients who became dependent upon Britain's goodwill to maintain their traditional positions. This then culminated in the final stage in the development of British hegemony in India, in which Britain protected the position of the traditional elite in a system of "mutual advantage for unequal partners" (p. 70).

From India, Newbury turns to North Africa where Egypt and Morocco provide examples of patrimonial clientage that show that over-rule cannot simply be divided into cases of direct or indirect rule. In both Egypt and Morocco European intervention created new hierarchies of control whereby some benefited and others lost out and resisted their demotion. These new imperial arrangements, in turn, dictated what happened to these areas upon independence when some tried to hold onto power while others attempted to regain lost power.

Sub-Saharan Africa proved to be very different from North Africa in terms of the nature of the patronage systems that existed prior to the advent of European imperial rule. While Newbury examines West, East, and South Africa separately, in each of these cases he finds that the imperial powers were able to adapt existing indigenous structures to gain control. West Africa, for example, had a long tradition of patron-client relations and the development of West Africa's participation in transatlantic trade allowed for various European powers to establish a patron status along the coast. At the same time Newbury is alive to the reality that imperial powers did not have things all their own way. While the newly minted European patron status occurred within a context of dependency for peoples in West Africa, for example, the abolishment of the slave trade and the rise of legitimate trade allowed for the creation of new power structures that over-rule needed to recognize and utilize. An example involved the British practice of instituting recognized chiefs within communities where power was divided. In these situations the British placed one chief above all others. While useful in some situations, it caused problems in others. What Newbury clearly shows within sub-Saharan Africa was the ability of European states to utilize existing political structures, which they sometimes changed over time, to establish their authority. By making patrons into clients, while supporting and upholding their traditional patron status, the imperialists effectively utilized existing systems to their political and economic advantage. Throughout the remainder of the work, Newbury continues to examine how local/regional circumstances and political systems dictated the system of over-rule that developed. In Malaya, over-rule "without the formality of a colonial protectorate" (p. 175) developed while in the Pacific Islands chieftaincies were "utilized or destroyed by European over-rule" (p. 179).

It is clear, throughout the text and the bibliography,

that Newbury has mastered the numerous sources available from these various regions and has therefore been able to show convincingly that a "one size fits all" social science theory of over-rule does not work. At the same time, Newbury's work is dense and detailed and, at places, if one is not familiar with the history of the region, the detail can become overwhelming and overshadow the argument. In a work combining synthesis and case studies, then, this wealth of information can occasionally become frustrating. Another strength of the work is that it shows, within these various regions, that, as the power relations between European and indigenous states started to change in favor of the Europeans, the elites of both developed systems that allowed them to coexist. Newbury's study illustrates that in many places the indigenous elite saw subservience to the European power as a means to maintain a façade of power over their subjects and, thus, their traditional position. But while Newbury explores the development of these relationships within the broader context of over-rule, his focus on elites does mean that we lack an understanding of how the people of the region viewed this transfer of power. Still, these are minor critiques of a work that successfully seeks a broad understanding of the process of empire. Newbury's examination of how European states gained power shows that while military might played a role, it was the ability of colonial administrators to take advantage of local structures that proved most effective. Indeed, Newbury's approach allows us to see the development of over-rule as a human process in which actors on both sides clearly saw what was occurring and hoped to protect their position as much as possible. By doing this Newbury demonstrates that imperialism was not a one-sided process of European states forcing their way in. Rather it involved both direct and indirect negotiations and compromises between the two sides to develop a working system.

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