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Book Review: Africa Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow: Exploring the Multi-dimensional Discourses on 'Development'

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Andrews, N., Khalema, N.E., Oriola, T., and Odoom, I (2013). *Africa Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow: Exploring the Multi-dimensional Discourses on 'Development'* Cambridge Scholars Publishing. ISBN(10):1-4438-4184-6

Reviewed by Yoliswa N. Mzobe¹ and Mlekeleli H. Ngcongo²

The book *Africa: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* is an edited book, which accounts for the multifaceted discourses of development on the African continent. It does so, in a way that makes the reader to first begin by understanding the historical context first before delving deep into understanding the discourses of which, in a way, hinder or stand in the way of development on the continent today. The book is made up of fifteen chapters and these chapters are divided into four parts. Carried through in these four parts is the attempts and somewhat progress which has been made in deconstructing western ideas or constructs of development in order to foster development on the continent. The major questions asked in this book are around development and what this concept actually means to African citizens as well as whether or not Africa can develop uniquely, following a different path rather than that which has been imposed.

As I have already mentioned above, the book is divided into four parts—each part carries its own theme. The themes are as follows. Part one: Theoretical/Historical Framework: Poverty & Development; Part two: The African state, Freedom and People Power: Good Governance and Stability; Part three: Regionalism Regionalization and Emergent South-South Relations and Part four: Non-State Actors, Informal Markets and Gender Equity. The cardinal purpose of these themes is to grapple with reasons as to why African development has proved to be so complex in its nature.

To begin with we shall look at part one, titled: *Poverty in theory vs. Poverty in reality: A critical review of concepts and measurements* – written by Nathan Andrews. Andrews emphasizes the fact that the way in which development was understood in the 1940's need not be the way it is understood today. The main focus in this chapter is to understand the concept of poverty and suitable ways in which one can measure it. According to Andrews, one should not limit their understanding of poverty to money only. The Human Development index as it incorporates more than the monetary aspect is suggested to be the more appropriate measure of poverty. Andrews takes us back in time by looking at the monetary explanation of poverty, followed by the basic needs approach (and its critiques) and lastly the multidimensional approach which Andrews is quite fond of. Another argument put forward, is that the way in which development is operationalized as well as theorized stands in the way of the ability of Africans to come up with any meaningful alternative ways of developing as a continent. It is posed that perhaps ignoring cultural practices and indigenous knowledge systems in the context of Africa could be what is working against Africa in finding their own successful path towards development.

Olabanji Akinola speaks about *Africa's Third Independence: A Sine Qua Non For Development*. Akinola raises a good point here and draws specific attention to South Africa, its struggles during the Apartheid era, and its independence from that era. Akinola poses that Africa

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has not failed, however what has failed Africa is the historical background shaping the idea of development, secondly, Africa is by far not a poor continent, however, its governance is poor. South Africa's transition from Apartheid to Post-Apartheid is analysed in part two, more specifically, the marginalized parties in the era of Apartheid and their valued contribution. A distinction is made between parties such as PAC and APLA and IFP. Racial dissimilarities are also looked at, after all, talking about South Africa and not mentioning anything about race can be considered a rare occasion. However, the second part of the book begins with a very insightful chapter five; *Governance in Pre-colonial African Societies*. Governance today is said to be a European construct failing to embody some of the valuable cultural knowledge in which pre-colonial governance embodied. Here, we learn how Europeans meticulously laid down the foundations for the perceptions in which people hold for Africa and its people. European settlers marginalised anything 'African' which brought about a plethora of power struggles. Chapter five provides one with an interesting take for possible reasons for failure of governance in Africa. The promotion of democracy is also touched on, where concerns of the exclusion of citizens are raised. One can expect to learn about the growth of democratic and good political governance.

Also discussed in part two is: *The Rentier State Theory: A Critical Realist Assessment* This provides the reader with a very critical approach in looking at the resilience of Arab monarchies in the Middle East. The theory of the rentier state is unpacked and critiqued using a threefold approach. To begin with, an explanation of critical realism is provided secondly, a critique on the ontology is given thus revealing a reductionist foundation and thirdly, a critique on the methodology of rentier state research is given thus providing the reader with a general understanding of the rentier state.

Part three explores continental and regional government organization's roles in promoting democracy in Africa and regions as well as an approach to development Aids provision by so called "developed" countries. The first two chapters of section three hold the view that such international governance structures, AU and SADC have a good vision for Africa however need to strengthen their power over individual member states and be able to make binding decisions and override States sovereignty where necessary in order to achieve its democratization roles in the continent and regions. Chapter twelve warns Africa about developed countries deceiving Africa with development aid so that they can enjoy limitless access to African natural resources.

The fourth and last part focuses on developmental role of non-State actors. A common theme in this section is that if non-State actors such as NGOs and citizens are given the tools and enabling environment to flourish, they can help accelerate development efforts. This theme is discussed in the context of NGO involvement and success in Botswana at the time development aid providers pulled out; and development challenges in Ghana that are linked to poor education status of women which the author believes Ghana's development approaches has to take into consideration, as well as the role of community based financial groupings in improving economic well-being of the stokvel members and development in general. The book concludes by stating that African countries are different and that has to be respected; however, suggest that African natural resources belongs to Africa as a whole and African countries collectively shall strive to protect its natural resources against depletion by developed countries.

Although the book highlights some of the major difficulties Africa faces as a continent with regards to development, it does not give clear guidelines as to how this continent can attain such development. For instance, chapter five raises a valid point in saying that pre-colonial Africa was fully functional without the influences of western governments and that this kind of

way of life encompassing cultural values worked well with governance. However, it is impossible to expect Africa to go back to this way of life after so many years of infiltration by western ideas. In other words, no way forward is given. In addition, it is fascinating to learn that the book recognizes that Africa has to find alternative ways to improve rather than following development trajectories prescribed by Western governance and financial institutions as this has proved to be unsuccessful in Africa. Nevertheless, it would be much better if the book had shed light on how Africa can improve alternatively.

On the aspect of democratization of Africa, Authors are correct in saying that continental governance organization such as AU needs to be able to override State sovereignty and make binding decision to member states in order to be able to realize its democratization responsibility in the continent.