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La CFAO et le commerce en Afrique : de la ‘troque-sous-voile’ à l’ère de la modernité
TAYEB REHAÏL
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Laughter as the Best Medicine: Coping with the Nigerian Tragedy
Ian Taylor
Humour, Silence and Civil Society in Nigeria
by Ebenzer Obadare

University of Rochester Press, 2016, pp. x + 171 pp., $84.98

With regard to Africa, there has been a debate about the applicability of the civil society concept to the continent. The negation of its applicability is usually based on the idea that the most obvious prerequisites for a Western-type civil society (such as a self-confident urban citizenry that has previously achieved some degree of autonomy from the state) are typically missing. That this narrow Eurocentric definition has been assumed by many practitioners of the promotion of participatory African studies. That conventional Western scholars base their study of Africa on the European experience and on how processes match up (or do not) with their societies, has long been problematic, particularly as these are often the gatekeepers of African studies in the West.

Moving beyond their limited field of vision, however, it is more than apparent that civil society, the civic realm, and the civic society concept to the continent. The negation of its applicability is usually based on the idea that the most obvious prerequisites for a Western-type civil society (such as a self-confident urban citizenry that has previously achieved some degree of autonomy from the state) are typically missing. That this narrow Eurocentric definition has been assumed by many practitioners of the promotion of participatory African studies. That conventional Western scholars base their study of Africa on the European experience and on how processes match up (or do not) with their societies, has long been problematic, particularly as these are often the gatekeepers of African studies in the West.

Unfamiliar values and crystallized in the Western state structure. This realm is amoral; one is not obligated to give back. Ekeh argued that Africans are members of the two publics and will use the civic public realm for possible gain, so that they may give to their communities and gain respect. For Ekeh, the primordial realm is not restricted to ‘civic’ public associations, as conventional understandings of civil society would have it, but is much broader.

Clearly, the concept of civil society in Africa is something beyond the usual definition of an associational sphere somehow autonomous of the personal, market and the formalised state. It is thus crucial to move beyond the formal associational realm in our analysis. This means looking beyond the plethora of non-governmental organisations that have sprung up under the tutelage (and pay) of the Western aid industry and to those agents within African society who are active in staking out social goals. Given the condition of many African economies, this has often been expressed through resistance to the elites and the structures that confine the bulk of the continent’s population to poverty and marginalisation. This means delving into what Celestin Monga designated as ‘the anthropology of anger’ of the popular mood.

In Nigeria, there is a lot to be angry about. Regrettably, Nigeria is byword for corruption and mal-governance. The country currently holds roughly half of the Gulf of Guinea’s oil reserves. Yet a World Bank report estimated in 2005 that as much as 80 percent of Nigeria’s oil revenues benefited just 1 percent of the country’s population. Though the Niger Delta region produces 90 percent of Nigeria’s oil and over 75 percent of the country’s export earnings, very little of the wealth has percolated to the residents of the Delta. Since independence, there has been only one Nigerian head of state originating from any of the oil-producing states—Goodluck Jonathan of Bayelsa State. In fact, the northern predominantly Muslim region has benefited in a disproportionate manner from oil resources, contributing to grievances by the rest of the country and ongoing instability. It is in such circumstances, one either laughs or cries.

As Ebenzer Obadare brilliantly shows, humour and mockery have developed as a way by which ordinary Nigerians seek to critique and tease out meaning out of their condition. Obadare demonstrates that jokes in Nigeria serve a double purpose: as a device for the popular classes to disparage and scoff at the state and its parasitical agents and also themselves as victims of the system. Humour is shown to be a way through which a civil society beyond the formal associational life of Western concepts challenges and subverts the Nigerian state and those associated with it. For Obadare, ‘real civil society has to be sought . . . outside the professionalised third sector, and often in the content of collective citizen action rather than in its organizational forms’ (p. 27).

Despite its significance as a type of agency, humour and a dissatisfied silence have been greatly disregarded in extant literature on civil society. Silence is seen as trivial (p. 62). This silence or lack of laughter has been seen as the converse of what expressing a political voice is meant to be about (p. 85). The dominant approach to what constitutes civil society has been in terms of formal organizations; yet humour by its very nature is not organized and is invariably spontaneous and uncontrollable. Equally, the idea of civil society intrinsically implies a respectful and courteous frame. As Obadare shows, Nigerian expressions of humour are anything but that. Indians regard a joke from the Aksop can of Nigerian humour is appropriate:

Aksop found a bottle on the beach. He rubbed it and, sure enough, out popped a genie.

‘I will grant you three wishes,’ said the Genie. ‘But there’s a catch.’

‘What catch?’ Aksop asked.

The genie replied, ‘Every time you make a wish, every politician in Nigeria will receive double what you asked for.’

‘Well, I can live with that! No problem!’ replied Aksop.

‘OK, what is your first wish?’ asked the genie.

‘Well, I’ve always wanted a Ferrari,’ he said. POOF! A Ferrari appeared in front of him. ‘Now, every politician in Nigeria has two Ferraris,’ said the genie. ‘Next wish?’

‘I’d love a billion naira,’ replied Aksop.

POOF! One billion naira appeared at his feet. ‘Now, every politician in Nigeria has two billion naira,’ said the genie.

‘Well, that’s okay, as long as I’ve got my billion,’ replied Aksop.

‘So what is your final wish?’ asked the genie.

Aksop thought long and hard. Finally, he said, ‘Well, you know, I’ve always wanted to donate a kidney.’

The book is made up of four main chapters, as well as an Introduction and a Conclusion. Chapter one is made up of an extensive and impressive melding of diverse literatures to develop a theoretical framework and argument that underpins the book. Essentially, Obadare makes the argument that civil society must be seen as more than an area of political action, a broad complex of diverse actors all expressing forms of agency in the wider public realm. Chapter two examines how the notion of civil society developed in

C

Civil society has been defined as a realm of social interaction between economy and the state, made up above all of the personal sphere (particularly the family), the field of civil associations (voluntary organisations), social movements, and types of public communications. It has also been described as the area of social association in society as distinct from the state, involving networks of bodies through which society and groups within society speak for themselves in cultural, ideological and political ways. Civil society is within the superstructure, and is related to institutions, forms of consciousness and political and cultural practices. With regard to Africa, there has been a debate about the applicability of the civil society concept to the continent. The negation of its applicability is usually based on the idea that the most obvious prerequisites for a Western-type civil society (such as a self-confident urban citizenry that has previously achieved some degree of autonomy from the state) are typically missing. That this narrow Eurocentric definition has been assumed by many practitioners of the promotion of participatory African studies. That conventional Western scholars base their study of Africa on the European experience and on how processes match up (or do not) with their societies, has long been problematic, particularly as these are often the gatekeepers of African studies in the West.
Nigeria in the late 1980s and early 1990s in response to the worsening social and economic conditions brought about by the calamitous imposition of Structural Adjustment Programmes and the intensifying autocracy and misuse of military rule under Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha. The separate but concurrent growth and amalgamation of formalised associations and the discourse of civil society, according to Obadare, illuminates the disregard for the ‘historically robust social life outside of associations’ that has typified Nigerian social existence (p. 49). Chapter three then looks at how humour is but one component of Nigeria’s ‘robust social life’. The author engages in a thoughtful discussion of whether jokes can be seen as politically effective. Obadare argues that the political consequences of jokes and their ability to have any political impression or influence at all is dependent on the context. There is no doubt, however, that jokes serve to de-mystify power relations and can actively ridicule (and thus delegitimize) political actors in the eyes of the populace. In this sense, humour functions both as a coping mechanism for the marginalised individual seeking to come to terms with the daily evidence of the decay of society’s foundations and as a device ‘to puncture the hubris of state power’ (p. 67).

Chapter four looks at the potential of silence as a deliberate and conscious political gesture. The chapter focuses on the case of Bola Ige. Bola Ige was a fearless and independent-minded politician as well as a thoughtful intellectual. During the military regimes of Babangida and Abacha, Ige displayed his independence by rebuffing all overtures from them, at a time when other less principled individuals succumbed to opportunism. Ige used his newspaper column to criticise the military regime and their unpredictable and almost comical rule. Ultimately, Ige deemed the situation so ridiculous that he declared that the best way to cope with the situation was to adopt a silent position on matters, i.e. *siddon look*. *Siddon look* is a pidgin contraction of ‘sit down and look’ and can be translated to mean many things, such as ‘let’s see how it goes’; ‘I am unconcerned with the going-on’; or ‘I will keep watching till I feel it is necessary to talk’. *Siddon look* is a form of political agency whereby an actor adopts a passive protest or feigned indifference to what is going on. Bola Ige was the master of this and, as the ‘Cicero of Nigeria’,13 had a powerful impact on political discourse in that country. Certainly, the power of Ige’s approach stemmed from his pre-existing status in society and it is doubtful that an ordinary person’s *siddon look* stance would have had any effect, although it is interesting to conjecture what might have happened if the mass of Nigeria’s population had adopted this position.

The focus of the book is on the years of military rule, when things in Nigeria reached their nadir and humour was perhaps the best way to cope with the situation. Given that the country has (hopefully) emerged out of that mess, a second volume by Obadare looking at contemporary humour in Nigerian society would be of considerable interest. After all, although the clownish antics of Abacha may have expired in the arms of Indian prostitutes, there is still plenty of material out there in Nigerian political life for scorn and ridicule. Indeed, the thriving media in Nigeria is replete with outlandish stories that, as the saying goes, demonstrate that truth is stranger than fiction. The numerous newspapers in particular are full of puckish columnists with outrageous senses of humour that never cease to mock and expose the goings on of the Big Men and their circles. As everyone knows, jokes are essential parts of Nigerian life, helping ordinary folks to stay optimistic but also intrinsic to conversations and building relations with others. Taken as a whole, this volume is an exceedingly rich and extremely readable discussion of a largely ignored aspect of Nigerian life. Obadare’s definition of civil society beyond formal associations helps us take in the role of humour as an expression of agency and as an intrinsic part of the public realm. Obadare’s key target in the theoretical contribution of the book is his debunking of the ostensible claim by non-governmental organisations to be the chief ambassadors of Civil Society (big C, big S). I completely concur with the author’s assertion that concepts of civil society that delimit the meaning to formalised organisations, be they non-governmental bodies or recognised kinship associations, are excessively restrictive and do not match the reality on the ground in the continent (or elsewhere for that matter). It is demonstrably important to take humour seriously as a means to comprehend popular critiques of the political classes and the socio-economic inequalities that characterise Nigerian (and the wider African) society. Obadare’s inclusion of humour and silence as important aspects of the political, and as types of manifestations of civil society and agential resistance is thus a major contribution to the wider debate.

Overall, the volume is an outstanding and thought-provoking read. I have no doubt that the book will inspire future exploration into an aspect of politics and society in Africa that is usually overlooked. It sets a research agenda that promises a great deal of insight and I hope to see more books of this type examining other African situations.

Notes

13. The Nation (Lagos), December 25.

Introduction

Paul Williams’s book *War and Conflict in Africa* is by far the most comprehensive and richly nuanced study of the causes and consequences of armed conflict in Africa. The book’s ambitious scope is evident in its empirical sweep and analytical rigour. It is by far the most comprehensive and richly nuanced study of the causes and consequences of armed conflict in Africa. Williams ably demonstrates the complex contours of war and conflict. Like all other key empirical puzzles and intractable theoretical questions, the causes and consequences of war and conflict have no easy answers. The tendency to mine findings and deploy stylized models always inevitably yields superficial answers, something that Williams admirably steers clear of. Yet the author’s tendency to see everything in instrumental terms strikes this reviewer as a little over-stated.

No other continent witnessed war and conflict at the turn of the century on the scale and magnitude that Africa did. The intensity of armed conflict spiralled following the end of the Cold War. For example, ‘the average number of armed conflicts in Africa starting each year in the 1990s was more than twice that in the 1980s’ (p. 5). Therefore, Williams’s book is an important contribution to the scholarly debate on a very critical question and empirical puzzle: why have African states and societies been more prone to war and what underlying factors account for the persistence of armed conflict on the continent? The strength of this volume lies in its ontological orientation and theoretical thrust. Like other big social questions, the causes and consequences of armed conflict defy the search for findings and the rush for conclusions. Acutely aware of the complexity of conflict, Williams patiently works through the multiplicity of ‘recipes for making wars and the multiple ingredients which go into them (p. 9).’ This is an important departure from the tendency to mine data and deliver an elegant causal argument based on a supposedly singularly-decisive variable. The rest of this essay proceeds in two broad sections. In the next section, I summarise Williams’s central arguments and the overall structure of the book. The book’s central claim may not surprise a keen student of contemporary African politics, but it is nevertheless compelling in the empirical material it marshals and the theoretical insights it provides. In the second section of this review, I turn to a critical appraisal of the book and some concluding reflections.

Understanding the Dynamics of Violent Conflict in Contemporary Africa

Moses Khisa

*War and Conflict in Africa*

by Paul D. Williams

In the post-Cold War era, the African continent was seen as a theatre of especially low-intensity, yet decidedly destructive, conflict. The destructive theatre caught the imagination of the Western media, the fascination of mostly Western scholars and the glorification of largely Western humanitarian operations. Over the last few decades, the business of war and war-related activities in Africa has produced a legion of experts and researchers looking for answers and tendentious solutions; from scholars and journalists to workers of aid agencies and international organisations. The political economy of this business of war yielded sobering scholarly analyses; but it also distorted and sensationalised representations for Western audiences that are mobilised into trying to ‘save’ Africa.

Williams’s ontological approach focuses on ‘the actors, institutions and processes through which social change occurs,’ and views Africa’s wars as ‘complex social processes which are simultaneously, but to varying degrees, local, national, regional and global’ (p. 43). This raises the legendary ‘level of analysis problem’ (identifying the locations for sources of explanation) in the study of international relations, and by extension the level of explanation problem (assigning explanatory weight to different locations). Williams refers to the pathologies of ideologically astute explanation as scapes and these can be seen as local, national, regional and global warscapes.

Like all matters of socio-political, Africa’s wars were local. In many of the wars across the breadth of the continent, ‘local agendas and the contours of domestic politics played decisive roles in their onset, their sustenance and, ultimately, their endings.’ Wars were fought over and involved changing configurationalities and religiosity – he underscores the importance of these ideologico-narratives and the geo-strategic imperatives especially in the context of the war on terror all coalesced in ways that facilitated war onset and fostered war continuation (pp. 45-6). At the national level, contests over power and the failure of states to effectively broadcast power made possible war outbreak, escalation and recurrence. Regional security complexes driven by porous borders and cross-border kinship ties and commercial dealings played a contributing role in fuelling Africa’s wars. Finally, at the local level, the flouting of the laws and the politics of ethnic domination fuels inter-ethnic conflict (four), the continuation (pp. 85). In a sense, this is the heart of the book. Williams spends more time and covers greater ground in the book, meticulously dissecting the explanatory value each of these five possible explanations for both conflict onset and persistence.

Africa’s neopatrimonial regimes presided over states that were vulnerable to disorder and war in the event of economic and political crises. The logic of neopatrimonial rule entailed pursuing ill-thought-out economic policies that hurt African economies while delivering short-term political dividends. At the nadir of bad economic management under Thabo Mbeki, for example, Williams notes that religious beliefs became a contributing role to war and conflict on the continent. Williams argues that the construction of specific ethnic identities to support particular political agendas has frequently been an important ingredient of Africa’s wars. But the ‘so-called sacred’ ethnic identities ‘are usually the result of political power struggles between elites whose actions do not simply reflect static ethnic identities...’ (p. 141). The political importance of the ‘ethnic card’ is played ‘as a means of justifying extreme acts of oppression and violence.’

Related to this, long-surviving neopatrimonial regimes easily produced conflict during the ‘third wave’ of democratization (1989-1991). Pressures for democratisation created factional struggles and severe political instability was most likely to happen when a country begins the transition from an autocracy to a partial democracy (p. 81). The survival strategies of the neopatrimonial regimes (ethnic marginalization, weak and fragmented state institutions such as the military) ‘often increased the risks of generating economic and political crises and made it harder to deal with insurgencies when they formed’ (p. 85).
The chapters on the OAU/AU/RECs, peacekeeping and peace-operations are each highly empirically informative in the book as they cover areas less theorized and less researched in studies of conflict in Africa. With the final end of the vestiges of colonial rule and apartheid in southern Africa, the AU’s role is expected to fall short. But the chapter on the political market place where political aid and aid agencies often became a substitute for policy action and contributed to weakening already weak African states. In the end, realizing the goal of ‘aiding the poor’ fell short. But it did not matter that the agencies couldn’t actually save the victims, writes Williams, because ‘in the world of humanitarian aid, unlike the corporate world, it was not the satisfaction of the client that determined the financial viability of the humanitarian international; it was the satisfaction of the donors’ (pp. 259-60).

On the other hand, while development aid aimed to reduce the conditions that facilitate insurgency such as extreme poverty, it also provided ‘a life line for various corrupt patronage systems...’ (p. 272). The received wisdom in the international development industry was that poor countries needed a push to overcome poverty and remove conditions that make war possible. Thus, since 2005, development assistance averaged about $50 billion each year, and the predominant thinking was that more aid would yield better results. But critics like the Zambian economist and public intellectual Dambisa Moyo (2009) have compellingly shown that aid and overall development assistance has done more harm than good to African economies. But even if aid and development assistance positively impacted African economies, the Arab Spring uprisings demonstrated that ‘economic growth alone is not an antidote to political instability if people’s basic political rights are stifled’ (p. 273).

**Conclusion: Critical Assessment**

Paul William’s book is easily the most comprehensive and thoroughgoing study of contemporary wars and conflicts on the African continent, their causes, consequences and responses. The author covers the ‘impressively empirical ground and provides a wide spectrum of theoretical insights. The synthesis of quantitative data from more than five different data programs gives the book an impressive empirical grounding. A rigorous examination of five different possible explanations yields a more refined focus on what has been the nerve centre for wars and conflicts on the continent. That said, the keen reader will take issue with Williams on several fronts. I will highlight only a few here.

First, the book makes no mention of the typologies of warfare on the continent, something ably undertaken by William Reno (2011). The fact that Africa’s wars have been decidedly different at different historical times means their motivations were also different and the causes distinct. This also means that some of the wars analysed by Williams were not just inevitable but in fact necessary. Taking into consideration this important empirical reality has implications for understanding both the intensity and extent of conflict in Africa.

The second problem lies in what is in fact the book’s strength: understanding conflict as the function of complexes operating at different ontological levels. For causally oriented scholars, the question that naturally arises is how to carefully isolate the causal chains and causal mechanisms at play in understanding conflict as it happens on the different levels of analysis. This is of key concern for those who believe that the ultimate value of social research is providing precise causal arguments.

The third issue that one may take with Williams’ work is the heavy bias towards instrumental explanations. It appears that everything comes down to the instrumental and manipulative ways of political elites and specialists in violence. This is all fine except that the agency of the subalterns, of the man and woman at the bottom of the puzzle, easily gets set aside rather easily and un-critically. The limits of instrumentalism are something that Williams seems not particularly conscious of, at least in the understanding of this reviewer.

**References**


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**Shopping for Ideas to Unlock Africa’s Economic Potential**

Asnake Kefale

*Africa’s Third Liberation: The New Search for Prosperity and Jobs* by Greg Mills and Jeffrey Herbst


The development experiences of five Central American, four Asian, and two Middle Eastern countries with the aim of bringing lessons to Africa. The authors, by covering a large number of countries (23 to be precise), have shown their preference to breadth rather than depth. The sheer size of the countries covered in this volume also raises an important question – which country’s experience is more relevant to Africa?

The volume comprises five chapters (excluding the introduction and the conclusion). The first chapter provides an overview of growth and liberalisation at the continental level. Before identifying some of the key features of the recent growth in Africa using statistical data, the chapter draws attention to the long-standing impacts of the two lost decades of African development – the 1980s and 1990s. Since the mid-1990s, there has been positive continental per capita growth. This sustained growth brought some crucial changes. One of these changes, according to this volume, is the widening of the ‘gap between high and low performing African countries’
The second chapter assesses the economic performance of 12 African countries (namely, Angola, Burundi, Cote d’Ivoire, DRC, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe) with an expressed intention to identify the substantial policy bottlenecks that created obstacles for growth and job creation. The third, fourth and fifth chapters examine lessons that Africa could draw from the development experiences of selected Central American, Asian and Middle Eastern countries, respectively.

### Explaining the Ailments of African Economies

Chapter two of this volume discusses the major factors that could help explain the ailments of sub-Saharan African economies by looking at the experiences of the 12 African countries cited above. The countries included in this broad survey come from different geographic regions of the continent and vary widely in terms of economic development and political history. The treatment of each country also varies in terms of length and depth of analysis. There is no good explanation why these particular countries were chosen. One does not see how all of them, however, the difficulty that the countries are facing in reforming their economies. The analysis of Africa’s economic woes could be seen from four interrelated angles.

Firstly, Mills and Herbst persuasively explain how economic development in the continent was hampered by misguided redistribution policies. They draw on the experiences of countries like South Africa, Malawi and Zimbabwe to prove their point. In South Africa, the massively expanded public service and the welfare system put a heavy burden on the economy, particularly on the mining sector. Indeed, the sector has been declining due to tax burden (p. 62). The other countries show the adverse effects of redistributive policies that was the Malaysian fertilizer distribution programme. This scheme provides to poor farmers heavily subsidized fertilizers with other farm inputs, estimated to be 1.6 million in 2011 (p. 68). The scheme created dependency among farmers and was susceptible to corruption (p. 68). In Zimbabwe, redistributive policies ranging from gratuity payments and pensions to war veterans to redistribution of farmlands formerly owned by white farmers led to the decline of production and skyrocketing inflation (p. 117).

### Mills and Herbst's Analysis

Mills and Herbst undoubtedly made a good argument about the adverse impacts of redistributive policies on economic growth. They, however, failed to examine the political and economic ramifications of these policies. In countries like South Africa, where horizontal inequality is large and the divide takes racial lines, redistribution policies are important not only to redress economic injustice but also to ensure political stability. Indeed, as discussed in the same volume, Malaysia, which was utilizing its high spatial economic inequality, used a policy of economic redistribution, popularly known as Bumiputra, to successfully reduce the income gap between the indigenous ethnic Malays and the economically dominant Chinese minority (p. 178).

Secondly, the volume discusses how low productivity hampers economic growth. Mills and Herbst convincingly argue that the need to enhance the skill and productivity of the African worker if Africa is going to attract investment. They give a specific example of the problem of productivity by looking at the case of South Africa, arguably the most advanced economy in sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, ‘between 1990 and 2009, multi-factor productivity increased by 1.6 per cent per year while unit labour costs rose 5.7 per cent’ (p. 59). Because of this, Mills and Herbst contend, South African companies have been investing in capital-intensive technologies and outsourcing jobs.

Thirdly, Mill and Herbst showed how ‘vested political-economic interests’ continue to hamper job creation and growth in Africa. Angola, which has indeed emerged as a ‘land of ironies’ (p. 97), is also a good example to show how vested political interests frustrate inclusive development and bring massive inequality. The figures about Angola are indeed daunting. In a country where ‘average per capita income is nearly US$9,000, more than two-thirds of the 8 million Angolans live under the US$2 per-day poverty line’ (p. 97). It is a matter of no surprise then that people hold the view that the ruling party, the People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), remains a hegemonic distributor of wealth, which creates millionaires (p. 98). As clearly narrated in the volume, similar patterns of cronynism and patronage are seen in countries like DRC, Zimbabwe and Kenya.

Fourthly, the volume discusses how the crowding out of the private sector and government control regimes undermine growth and the creation of jobs. Mills and Herbst show that the authors said about Mozambique, where the private sector is not only over-regulated but also crowded out by state-linked actors, reflects the situation in many other African countries (p. 103). In Ethiopia, for instance, as a foreign economist whom the authors interviewed in Addis Ababa said, ‘every law is extremely complicated. They [the government] would like to follow China, and micro-manage the economy, but they do not have the quality of the administration’ (p. 115). Mills and Herbst also showed how Ethiopia’s unfriendly visa regime undermines the development of tourism sector in the country despite serious official commitment to expand the industry (p. 113).

The main conclusions that emerge out of the second chapter are the need for Africa to move away from distributive policies and statist control regimes and provide more space to the private sector (p. 124). In other words, the authors recommend the reintroduction of policies of economic liberalization and free market to reinvigorate growth and job creation in the continent. However, before arriving at such a conclusion, Mills and Herbst should have made two things clear. First, what makes their recommendation different from the policies of economic liberalization that were promoted by donors and international financial institutions under the rubric of structural adjustment programmes (SAP) during the 1980s and 1990s? Second, in the face of the failure of earlier efforts to liberalize African economies, how can one be sure that government interventionism for a period of liberalization would be successful?

### Lessons for Africa

After a thorough examination in the second chapter of the ailments of African economies and the deadlock that the reform movement faced, in chapter three, four and five of the volume, Mill and Herbst broadly explore the lessons that the countries of the region could learn from the experiences of Central America, Asia and Middle East. They, however, contend that as sub-Saharan Africa countries, namely, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. The survey of the five countries provided the first hand experience of the difficulties and successes recorded regarding growth and jobs in Central America. The authors were not oblivious to the differences that exist between Africa and Central America. They, however, contend that as sub-Saharan Africa and Central America share profound similarities, there are lessons that the former could learn from the latter.

The records of the five Central American countries covered in this volume are very mixed. The key drivers of growth in the region are agriculture, maquilas (duty-free export processing zones, which are also known as free zones/industrial parks) and tourism. The trailblazer in the region is Costa Rica, a country of 4 million people who mastered this unique in the region in many ways. As indicated in the volume, its ‘exports rose from US$870 million in the early 1980s to US$9.3 billion in 2010’ (p. 165). The country not only managed to expand its economy but also to successfully diversify its exports. According, Costa Rica exports thousands of high tech industries goods as well as previously dominant agricultural products like banana and coffee. The reasons for the success of Costa Rica, according to Mills and Herbst, are the opening up of the economy, higher investment on education and training and allowing political leaders to get the country out of patronage politics (p. 168). While Costa Rica was successful in diversifying its economy away from the maquila sector, the other four countries continue to rely on the same factor for the creation of new jobs (p. 136).

The maquila sector, which plays a central role in the provision of jobs in Central America, faces a major challenge in the shape of rising production costs and minimum wages (p. 142). Hence, the countries of the region compete in order to attract foreign investment by reducing minimum wages and production cost. Honduras went further than the others and slashed from law to lower their wages in providing incentives to international companies. Accordingly, ‘the maquilas have been completely exempt from all taxes, with no restriction on capital repatriation or, unusually, on local sales taxes’ (p. 145). Since then, they fixed the minimum wage under US$200 and allowed the employment of 40 per cent of the workforce on ‘part-time’ basis without benefits (p. 156). In its bid to win more investment, the Honduran government started a law that allows foreign companies to win more investment, the Honduran government made the “…legal and tax environment in Honduras – or parts of it – akin to Singapore or Hong Kong…” (p. 157). For this purpose, the constitution was amended in August 2011. Following the introduction of the maquilas in 1990, there were positive changes in the export performance of the country. Accordingly, ‘exports have grown from US$113 million in 1990 to more than US$3.6 billion in 2008. By mid 2011, there were 253 companies producing goods and services within these free zones “parks”’ (p. 157).

The fourth chapter examines what Africa could learn from the Asian experience. The chapter starts by making a comparison of the economies of Nigeria and Ghana with Indonesia and South Korea, respectively. The comparison gives a good glimpse of the economic decline that had taken place in Africa. Both Nigeria and Ghana had higher per capita income than the two Asian countries during the 1950s and 1960s. Much of Southeast Asia, according to the authors, follows a similar pattern of growth: ‘agricultural revolution based on land reform segues into progressive industrial development through garment, light manufacturing and electronics, and then into services’ (pp. 173-174). The volume also shows that the success of the region has been the attention given to ‘girls’ and boys’ education and diversifying economies – from agriculture, to light industry, and to service and knowledge based industries (p. 175). Having presented this general trend, the authors discuss the experiences of...
four Asian countries, namely, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Bangla
desh. Malaysia followed a development trajectory like the other Southeast
Asian countries. Immediately after independence, Malaysia revolutionized its agriculture and then ventured into manufacturing industry (p. 178). First, it developed import substitution industries; then it proceeded to heavy industries (p. 179). With the advent of the information age, Malaysia began to invest heavily in information technology (IT) industries (p. 182). Using a series of five-year development plans, Malaysia was able to transform its economy. Policies of economic redistribution and government support to selected industries, which were identified by Mills, and Herbst as counter-productive to African growth, were effectively used by Malaysia to bring about economic transformation and reduce inequality. The relatively successful use of redistribution policy and support to selected industries by Ma
laysia shows the difficulty of dismissing such policies outright in Africa.

In comparison to the other countries of the region, the economic performance of the Philippines has been low. This is despite its huge potential in terms of edu
cated human resource and also minerals. Due to its weak economic performance, the country earned the unenviable name of the ‘sick man of Asia’ (p. 187). But in recent years, the country has emerged as a “service leader” using free zones (p. 186). While free zones of Central America specialize in the production of coffee, next to Brazil (p. 199). The country has also registered positive results in the industrial sector, including in the manufacturing of appar
el, footwear and consumer electronics.

Bangladesh, which is one of the densely populated countries of the world, has been one of the countries that has managed to turn around its economy through policies of economic liberalization. The government uses tax incentives, low minimum wages and export processing zones (EPZ) to encourage investment, particularly in the apparel and textile industry. In 2011, the industry employed about five million people and generated, more than 80 per cent of annual export earnings. In 2009, it was estimated at about US$18 billion (p. 203).

Chapter five examines lessons that Af
cia could learn from two Middle Eastern
countries, Dubai and Israel. Actually, the authors themselves admit that what Af
cia could learn from the experiences of Dubai and the other oil rich countries of the Gulf is limited (p. 221). But the effort of Dubai and the other Gulf countries in diversifying their economies, which are heavily reliant on oil and gas, is instructive to those African countries whose economies are dependent on mineral resources (pp. 213-214).

The discussion on Israel brings good insights in several respects. The main lessons for Africa include the Israeli experience in creating closer collaboration among the government, research institu
tions and business and its heavy invest
ment on human resource development. As explained in the volume, the secret behind Israel’s massively successful horticulture industry is the use of innova
tive farming methods developed by its agricultural research organizations (p. 232). Israel has also a good experience regarding innovation. The government provides seed money for start up projects on a competitive basis. The seed money will be repaid if the projects become suc
cessful and make it to the market. This collaboration was one of the key reasons for the success of Israeli high tech and IT industries (pp. 228-9).

Instruments for Africa’s Third Liberation

The exploration of the experiences of the eleven countries covered in this volume undoubtedly gives ample les
sions for Africa. The chief message that Mills and Herbst want to send to African policymakers is the need to adopt what they call ‘conventional model of development’, which encourages private enterprise and opens markets (p. 240). As noted above, however, it is not clear how this key recommendation is dif
ferent from the policies of economic liberalization that were forced upon African states in the name of structural adjustment programmes.

One of the most important policy instruments that were used to spur growth and create jobs both in Central America and Asia, as discussed in this volume, has been the development of free zones. In recent years, countries like Ethiopia have shown strong interest in the development of free zones/industrial parks to create employment and raise much-needed foreign exchange. This limitation of this policy option are not adequately discussed in the volume. The most important challenge regarding free zones is the incessant desire of multinational corporations (MNCs) to reduce cost. As a result, MNCs relocate their operations where the cost of produc
tion is lower and incentives are the greatest. This puts developing countries at a disadvantage; they compete to attract foreign investment by lowering wages and reducing production cost. Moreover, free zones do not have a particularly stel
lar record in creating decent jobs and in respecting workers’ rights.

The main shortcomings of this volume is, however, the lack of a discussion on the ‘ideology of development’. This is in spite of the authors’ claim that the lack of ‘ideology of growth’ is one of the key reasons that explains the diff
iculty in sustaining economic reforms in Africa (p. 3). One important missing point in this regard is a discussion of the ideology of the developmental state. In recent years, the developmental state, which emphasizes the strategic role that the state plays in economic transforma

tion, has become influential in African development discourse. In light of this, it would have been helpful to examine how this ideology worked in Asia and what Africa could learn from the Asian experience.

The volume also overlooks the issue of how intra-African economic cooperation could contribute to Africa’s economic transformation. Nor are the challenges and opportunities that the rise of China and India in Africa provides to Africa’s Third Liberation discussed.

In spite of such limitations, Africa’s Third Liberation is an important con
tribution to the issue of African devel
opment. Its chief strength lies in the provision of first hand experiences of several countries from which African leaders can draw lessons to reinvigo
 rate the continent’s hopes for economic transformation and the creation of jobs.

Notes
1. Doug Lorimer, 2002, Imperial

Dani Nabudere’s Afrikology
A Quest for African Holism

By

Sanya Osha

ISBN: 978-2-86978-753-7

164 pages

Dani Wadada Nabudere, the illustrious Ugandan scholar, produced a diverse body of work on various aspects of African culture, politics and philosophy. Toward the end of his life, he formulated a theoretical construct that he termed “Afrikology.” Unlike most other Afrocentrists, who have stopped with the task of proving the primacy of the Egyptian past and its numerous cultural and scientific achievements, Nabudere strenuously attempts to connect that illustrious heritage with that of African present. This, remarkably, is what makes his project worthy of careful attention. His corpus is multidisciplinary, although a major preoccupation with Africa is discernible in virtually all his works. His writings deal with critiques of imperialism, African political systems, processes of globalization and Africa’s location within them, and finally the ideological and existential imperatives of Afrocentric discourse.

Sanya Osha has written a deeply profound study of one of Africa’s most brilliant thinkers. Osha is a towering figure among leading social scientists and intellectuals of this generation. I am truly excited about this book and believe that it will further clarify Nabudere’s outstanding contribution and remarkable achievement.

Molefi Kete Asante
When Theory Misses History
Yonas Ashine
State and Economic Development in Africa: The Case of Ethiopia
by Aaron Tesfaye
ISBN: 978-3-319-57825-5 HC

The introductory chapter presents the historical, theoretical and conceptual context of the politics of development in East Asia, Latin America and Africa. The chapter is divided into two broad sections. In the first section, the author argues that the history of the current Ethiopian developmental state. The author argues that in the Ethiopian developmental state, the incumbent party, the EPRDF (Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front) was inspired by the ‘East Asian Miracle’. The two party system was given to the Ethiopian federal state under the new constitution. The second section of the first chapter presents the theoretical framework of the work; it is anchored on the comparative analysis of the state and the politics of development in the global south. The author presents an extensive theoretical and conceptual discussion on the historical role of the state in transforming society and achieving development through the launching of a successful policy and strategy of industrialization. Without considering the experience of the Western states, the author presents the comprehensive study of the global south, showing the exceptional success stories of East Asian ‘tigers’ as a model to be emulated. He argues that in spite of the misrepresentations of the global south in the development literature, ‘the East Asians have clearly demonstrated in their march from the periphery that development is possible, albeit, with authoritative allocation’ (p. 7). The choice of the subject matter and the historical case studies are thus a political decision.

One of the positive aspects of the theoretical chapter is that the author analyzes the debate on developmental trajectories by considering the historical differences of Asian, Latin America and African states. According to the author, the presence of Japan as a model to be set out to develop Ethiopia was a modernizing force that animated the exceptional trajectory of the East Asian states. However, Aaron did not give any explanation as to how the Japan developmental track is different from the Western model apart from describing it as a late developmental economy located in Asia. Similarly, in addition to the role of the political elites, Aaron considers the role of foreign colonial powers and cold war intervention as contributing factors. In the South Korean case, for example, in addition to the Japanese colonial intervention, the US also played a key role in its economic transformation. It was with this structural legacy that the Korean leadership managed to play its role in launching the developmental state. In other words, the developmental state should be viewed as a Hobbesian state. In other words, the developmental state was created through an elite pact committed to national development. In other words, development should be the ruling hegemonic ideology. Such theorization and conceptualization have nevertheless two critical problems. First, the above elements are external to the developmental state are only internal elements of the state; they are insulter from historical, structural and contingent factors, mainly in the global capitalist world. In other words, while the author handpicked and appropriated features of the developmental state mainly from the East Asian experience to develop a theory, he eschews structural and historical factors. For example, the role of the colonial and post-colonial war intervention, which conditioned the East Asian historical experience, are absent from the theoretical construct. What is the value of discussing history if it is not used in constructing theory? The state theorizing on the universal value of the developmental state through partial selection of historical factors is done while citing the work of, among others, Claude Ake, who argued that the developmental trajectory of a nation is particular and contingent on the historical socio-political and geopolitical factors of each state. Instead of theorizing from the considered historical experience of the three continents, East Asia is presented as the theoretical basis for analysing African and Latin America history. Like many studies of the developmental state, the theorization and conceptualization of the developmental state is framed as an imported model from the successful East Asian countries. This representation and articulation, therefore, presupposes the repetition of the history of Asian Tigers’ miracle and ‘the awakening of Asia’ in the mirage of African lions and giants. In the historiography of developmental states, scholars often try to construct a ‘modular’ development trajectory focusing on one or few features of these states, such as the development agency in Japan, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), governing the market in South Korea, the late industrialization of Taiwan, embedded autonomy and developmental ideology nexus, not to mention those who explained the success of industrialization through the cultural thesis and the free market variable. Aaron’s work is not free from such trend of abstracting a theory from one historical instance to impose on another region as a measure of historical progress.

Indeed, Aaron’s work falls short of studying the developmental state in Latin America or Africa on its own terms and within its own historicity. For example, instead of developing an alternative theory of a developmental state grounded on the historical experience of Latin American states such as that of Brazil, the author regards the Koreas as a model in the early capitalist experience. A possible theorization of the developmental state was made except for the projection of South Korean history onto the African and Latin American continents to appraise the performance of states. It is in the second chapter that the author discusses the state and development in Ethiopia. In discussing the history of the Ethiopian state, the author underlines its exceptional trajectory compared to other African states as an indigenous state and one that was never colonized. Historically, according to the author, the indigenous Ethiopian state was feudal, with a ‘rigid class’ comparable to a ‘caste system’ (p. 40). It was a predator state that used forced labor to acquire wealth or in pious religious activity (p. 1). If war were for the accumulation of wealth, as the author argues, would this particular war not be an economic war? What is development, if not accumulation of wealth in a capitalist sense? Without offering an in-depth historical study, the author makes bold generalizations about the pre-modern Ethiopian state as a warrior state; even though it was a strong state, it lacked the will and the ideology of development. It is only with ‘the insertion of Ethiopia into world capitalist economy’ that Ethiopian political elites became a ‘modernizing’ force committed to bureaucratization, centralization and consolidation of the power of the state, abandoning the age-old mission of making war for wealth and religion (p. 1). Despite the emergence of modernizing monarchs in the nineteenth century, the true development agent for Aaron is the incumbent party, the EPRDF. Development, which is also defined as a technical process, is conceived as a survival issue for Ethiopia because Ethiopia is surrounded by ‘failed and failing states’ (p. 7). The author thus defines the African past as devoid of developmental imagination before the incorporation into capitalist world. He also relies on the categories, assumptions and pesssimist representations of African states as collapsing states to justify the exceptional mission of the contemporary Ethiopian state. In so doing, he slides into the core weakness of the Afro-pessimism that the author had set out to debunk.

The second section of the first chapter presents the theoretical framework of the work; it is anchored on the comparative analysis of the state and the politics of development in the global south. The author presents an extensive theoretical and conceptual discussion on the historical role of the state in transforming society and achieving development through the launching of a successful policy and strategy of industrialization. Without considering the experience of the Western states, the author has isolated the study in the global south taking the exceptional success stories of East Asian ‘tigers’ as a model to be emulated. He argues that in spite of the misrepresentations of the global south in the development literature, ‘the East Asians have clearly demonstrated in their march from the periphery that development is possible, albeit, with authoritative allocation’ (p. 7). The choice of the subject matter and the historical case studies are thus a political decision.
condition, instability and dysfunctional features made production non-existent and economic development impossible. Even Emperor Menelik II, who is considered by the author as ‘the architect of the centralized Ethiopian state’ (p. 43), is at the same time criticized for not emulating the Japanese model. The author traces the imagination of development as an ideology to the early twentieth century intellectuals known in Ethiopian historiography as the ‘Pioneers’ and the ‘Japanese’. He characterizes them as the only ‘true ideologues of modernization and economic development’ (p. 59). Through most of these intellectuals emerged in the post-Menelik period, the author anachronistically questions why the idea of development did not take root in that period. Further, the author did not adequately trace the influence of the intellectuals, both the pioneers and the second-generation intellectuals, on state ideology and policy.

Emperor Haile Selassie I, who patronized these intellectuals, is described as a ‘cautious modernizer, not a visionary leader’ (p. 46). Such a bold assertion would have been enriched if the monarch’s relation with the intellectuals concerning Ethiopia’s development was placed in the larger context of the time. What was the difference, at least at the ideological level, between the modernizing emperors and the ‘Japanese’? How did this ideology of leaders and intellectuals contribute historically to the emergence of modern Ethiopia? How was modernization or development negotiated with the old ideology of religion and religiosity in Ethiopia? While tracing the history of the ‘indigenous’ state, it would have been illuminating if the author explored the dynamics and evolution of state ideology, mainly with the emergence of modernizing emperors. How does a predatory state committed to war and religious persecution become a modernizing state in the nineteenth century?

Despite the emergence of the modernizing emperors, the state has to wait until the late twentieth century to find a new ‘consensual parameter’ to ‘cage conflict’ and produce a new set of policies into the re-building of political institutions and new social action (p. 40). For the author, such an opportunity was lost in 1974 when the military regime took over. This regime neither caged conflict nor achieved national development. The Ethiopian federal structure which emerged after 1991 is considered by the author as the only successful ‘consensual parameter’ opening the structure for new social action, to ‘cage conflict’ and to achieve development. This new consensus is the decentralization of the state structure combined with re-centralizing using the EPRDF’s party structure, and the practice of democratic centralism and federalism. This complex state re-structuring that facilitates the emergence of the Ethiopian developmental state, measured both in terms of ideology and state structure. The author argues that, unlike its predecessors, the post-1991 regime was characterized by a leadership pact based on a national developmental ideology. Structurally, the EPRDF regime is not only autocratic but also able to attract and mobilize society towards political and economic development; the author seems oblivious to the post-2005 trend towards the de-mobilization of civil society and the narrowing of political space. Moreover, because of an agricultural-led industrial development publicly articulated before 2001 either as party ideology or state policy, the author traces the Ethiopian development state and its ideology to the beginning of the federal structure and revolutionary development (ARDL) (p. 199). This is an interesting case worth wondering about the intellectual contribution of this chapter given that the author chooses to merely describe the economic policy and the headline story of ‘impressive’ growth record. The author presents economic policymaking and implementation as apolitical processes, ignoring the theoretical and historical discussion of policy implementation in the history of different developmental states. In the author’s framework, the author demonstrates how the politics of development and centralization can critically engage the performance of the economy, particularly in addressing structural poverty, which is manifested among others through the human development index, according to a World Bank index. Ethiopia holds the bottom position in comparison to other sub-Saharan states. Without interrogating the GDP growth record, the author chooses to reproduce the discourse of the impressive growth record as a manifestation of the success of the policy and its implementation.

Development policy in Ethiopia and Globalization” is the problematic of the fifth chapter in which the author shows how the industrial policy of Ethiopia, instead of import substitution and protection of infant local manufacturing, deliberately aimed at exposing the manufacturing industry to global competition to realize an export-oriented manufacturing sector. As far as the author is concerned, private capital is considered as the center of industrial policy of achieving industrial transformation through making agriculture an engine of economic development. In other words, the agrarian sector is considered as the source of capital for investment in industries. However, Ethiopia’s manufacturing industry, as in many late developing countries, is primarily light industry, i.e. producing food, beverages and textiles. These enterprises are owned by micro and small holders while state, political parties and foreign investors play an active role by owning a considerable chunk of medium scale and emerging large scale manufacturing industries. The author anchors his analysis on the performance of the leather industry. In so doing, he documents how the state promoted the industry through legal and institutional mechanisms, such as the establishment of a special agency and developing it. Such institutional intervention is considered as an example of Ethiopia’s successful emulation of the East Asian model of the developmental state.

The author describes the ruling party’s ownership of manufacturing industries and the process of endorsement. However, the author refrains from discussing the implication of the ruling party’s involvement in business for the economy and political dynamics of the country. Different investors have been identified as the party’s businesses as a factor in analyzing the Ethiopian developmental state. Some have dubbed the Ethiopian case as development neo-patrimonialism, by re-conceptualizing the concept of neo-patrimonialism as the party’s control over a social asset that can be used to meet a developmental end. The endowment factor is seen as one strategy through which rent is successfully managed for the long-term national objective. However, the author refrains from discussing the similarities between EFFORT, a TPLF-owned business conglomerate, and the South Korean company Chaebols. Aaron remains silent. What is the place of an ethnic-based party and business on the Ethiopian federal development state? How can one discuss the autonomy of the state while political parties own large businesses in the country? Do parties, like the state, play a role in breaking free from sectoral division and contract? Are political parties supra-social entities?

In the last chapter, which is the conclusion, the author summarizes each chapter in detail and devotes only a paragraph to conclude the study. Aaron appreciates the twenty-year performance of the Ethiopian federal state, given the fact that Ethiopia is located in a volatile region with internal politics of nationalism and sectarian contestations. However, the author excludes the recent political crises and unrest in Ethiopia, the author argues, is due to poor governance, corruption, clientelistic relationship and lack of voice of the civil society and opposition parties in general, and the absence of inclusive politics. Yet all these political problems lie at the heart of the federal structure and party system in Ethiopia. They did not just pop up in 2015 and 2016 to ignite the unprecedented political crisis in the country. How does the author draw conclusions about the economic impact of the political system in Ethiopia? Can Ethiopia’s politics and policies be seen as ethno-political or national identity? The author refrains from discussing the political crisis. The fundamental issue is: how is it that Ethiopia, with an ‘impressive growth record’, a celebrated institutional capacity to formulate and implement policy, faces such a serious political crisis? How did the new ‘consensual parameter’, which the author argues managed to ‘cage conflict’ in Ethiopia, fail to regulate conflict and ensure peace and stability? The author has documented how democracy was absent in the take-off stage in both the Western and East Asian historical experience. Both regions evolved in different temporal and spatial contexts, which makes the comparison of the modern African states appear less plausible. Bringing back the political and the democracy factor, or as the author prescribe the politics of inclusion, into historical analysis might help explain the political crisis in Ethiopia better. Unfortunately, this book says little about the emerging political crisis in the country.
Africa Review of Books / Revue africaine des Livres

To conclude, the book raises timely and relevant questions concerning the politics of development and the role of the state in the global south in general and in Ethiopia in particular. The author must be commended for this scholarly contribution to the study of the developmental state presented from an optimistic perspective. It is a recommended book for readers, students and scholars alike interested in the political economy of Ethiopia and the continent at large.

Notes


In May 2016, global attention was gripped by the sight of hundreds of corpses washed ashore on the northern coast of the Mediterranean. About 450 of these bodies belonged to Eritreans who had undertaken the perilous journey across the Mediterranean from the Libyan coast. They had trusted their fate to boats that were hardly seaworthy in the hope of reaching Europe and finding asylum. This was not the first of such incidents; nor was it to be the last. Few people could fathom the reason why the victims would resort to such desperate measures, courting almost certain death, rather than remain in their own country.

The book under review provides the answer in eloquent fashion. At the root of this exodus of Eritrean youth is the most heinous form of ‘national service’ that the world has ever seen. Initiated to inculcate the values of the liberation struggle to the Eritrean youth, the institution has degenerated into a regime of servitude costing each Eritrean two decades of his/her life.

It is to escape this bondage that so many Eritreans have ‘voted with their feet’, as it were. The world witnessed only the terminal stage of their tragic odyssey. Little noticed and recorded is the no less perilous journey to Libya. To conclude, the book raises timely and relevant questions concerning the politics of development and the role of the state in the global south in general and in Ethiopia in particular. The author must be commended for this scholarly contribution to the study of the developmental state presented from an optimistic perspective. It is a recommended book for readers, students and scholars alike interested in the political economy of Ethiopia and the continent at large.
the country’s independence had been formalized by the 1993 referendum. But the 1991 proclamation, designed to indoctrinate national unity and address the problem of youth unemployment, did not become operational until after formal independence. The principal legislations for the ENS was Proclamation No. 82/1995. The proclamation introduced an 18-month military service whereby conscripts were paid a paltry sum after the first six months. It also did away with the exemptions that the first proclamation had provided for, only veterans of the independence struggle being eligible for exemptions. But the legal basis for an institution that has assumed the form of permanent servitude was laid in May 2002 with the introduction of what was rather innocuously dubbed the Warsai-Yikealo Development Campaign (WYDC). The ostensible rationale for the proclamation was the inculcation of the spartan values and the spirit of self-sacrifice of the liberation struggle by the yikealo, veterans, literally ‘those who are capable of achieving anything’ towards the warsai (the heirs).

In reality, however, the yikealo were scarcely in a position to transmit the values of the liberation struggle. ‘The former paragons of virtue have become corrupt and self-interested’ (p. 73). They were busy accumulating money ‘by any means to make up for lost time’ (p. 182). Corruption was rife throughout the country and the torrid training camp at Sawa, on the Sudanese border, was no exception. Those in charge of the camp were highly susceptible to corruption. Conscripts with the means could influence their place of assignment (the capital, Asmara, being the most popular for obvious reasons) or secure or renew the all-important travel permit (menqa-sexes) to visit their families. They could even buy their way out of the camp by bribing high-ranking military officers, who could go to the extent of providing military vehicles to transport them to the border. The less endowed would have to endure a regime of penal servitude that has no precedents or parallels in modern history. They have to undergo rigorous training in one of the most inhospitable places in the country. Non-compliance could result in detention and corporal punishment and conscripts were paid meagre wages. But the contrary scenario was the running of the regional servants of the commanders, running their small shops, clearing agricultural land and building irrigation canals, being hired out to commercial farmers (with the commanders pocketing their wages), building houses and even serving as domestic servants to their wives. Female conscripts became victims of sexual harassment and violence, with girls opting for unwanted pregnancy or even committing suicide to avoid the sexual advances of the commanders. What made their condition even bleaker was that there was no end in sight, as the initial 18-month limit has been extended indefinitely.

In an understandable effort at objectivity, the author asks his respondents if there were any redeeming features of the odious system. A high proportion of respondents are said to have appreciated the contribution of ENS to bring about national unity and cohesion coming together of youths from differing ethnic and religious backgrounds. They also point out the inculcation of work discipline that they were able to acquire in the course of the training. But the lingering question remains: at what price? Couldn’t one have achieved these positive outcomes through other, less costly, means?

The damage inflicted by ENS went beyond the conscripts. It had a deleterious effect on the country’s social fabric. The country paid a high price for the perennial mobilisation and excessive militarization. The economy, particularly agricultural production, suffered because of the diversion of skilled manpower as well as resources. The scarcity of labour, which was highly expensive even on a global scale, made firms and enterprises capital-intensive, thereby undermining their competitiveness. Following the strong challenge from Asmara University Students in 1999-2001, the university was shut down. In its place, the government opened a string of colleges that were run like barracks. Thus, education, like the rest of society, was also militarised.

Perhaps the most disastrous outcome of ENS was the destruction of the family. Both conscription and the attendant migration were a drain on agricultural labour. Urban livelihood too was a delicate affair requiring the contributions of all members of the family. The author describes this situation in one of the most poignant chapters of the book (Chapter 9), drawing on the experiences of two families, one urban the other rural. The first was the case of Abdu’s family in Asmara, which had led a reasonably comfortable life through the income generated by the different members of the large family. Until, that is, six members of them were called up for military service and then recalled for indefinite servitude on the outbreak of the border war with Ethiopia. The mother died heartbroken at the uncertainty of the fate of her enlisted sons, as the government was not particularly keen to release the names of those killed in combat. Three of them decided to flee. Two of them made it to the Sudan; the third was captured, tortured and detained in a container for a long time. Of the two who had made it across the border, one fell into the hands of traffickers who demanded a hefty ransom to release him.

The second case was that of Tekle’s family, whose members (including six siblings) contributed their share to achieve a fairly comfortable livelihood. This delicate balance collapsed when five of its young members were called up for military service. Here again, it was the recall for the border war and the subsequent indefinite detention, more than the initial call up, that led to the disintegration of the family. Tekle was forced to flee the country, eventually making it to England, via Italy and Calais in France. He then started sending money to his other brothers so that they could follow suit. He describes in graphic detail the anguish that he felt when one of them drowned in the Mediterranean Sea as he tried to cross to Italy and the deep sense of ambivalence he felt about sending money to his second brother so that he could also try his luck.

The breakup of families and the erosion of values have other dimensions as well. The youth haemorrhage through involuntary detention in military camps and migration meant that the burden of caring for children fell on the elderly. In a manner that is reminiscent of the AIDS epidemic, grandparents had to take care of grandchildren rather than being cared for. Conscripts could not even get leave to attend funerals of parents and siblings, thereby being denied the most basic expression of family loyalty.

The only salutary aspect of this calamitous situation was the remittances that successful migrants were able to send back to their families. Remittances from the Diaspora constituted the backbone of the Eritrean economy. Although it is difficult to disaggregate the contribution of those who had fled from the ENS, such remittances were estimated at a total of over $400 million per annum. But no amount of money can compensate for the traumas and tribulations that the conscripts went through and the destruction of families that ensued.

In sum, an institution that could have had some redeeming value had it been confined to a limited period has assumed the character of an onerous burden on the youth and society at large by virtue of its open-ended character. The contrast with the period of liberation struggle, when so many gave up their professions and businesses to join it, could hardly be any starker. Even in the initial phase of the ENS, it was not uncommon to see under-age youth faking their ages to enlist. The work under review proves conclusively that the ENS has been an unmitigated disaster on many counts. The only beneficiaries have been the smugglers and traffickers who extort enormous sums of enemy from the desperate refugees and the corrupt officers and commanders in the training camps who have used the institution to enrich themselves. Above all, it has helped to consolidate even further the autocratic power of the architect of the entire system, President Isaias Afwerki. The future of any country hangs on its youth. With its youth forced to flee their country in massive numbers, the future of Eritrea can only be surmised to be bleak.
Pour ce qui est de la Grande Bretagne, gouvernements ou des corporations » et le dogme, pour être quelqu'un qui moqueur dont la position est de soulever en dépit de leurs origines culturelles, généralogique

e génération, à l’époque, les intellectuels les plus « intellectuels » sont situés pour la plupart entre deux paradigmes antagogiques : celui de continuité voire de mimétisme, souvent des élites intellectuelles européennes, et celui de rupture voire d’émancipation. Y-a-t-il alors des particularismes qui se sont développés au niveau local ? Peut-on bien décrire une cartographie des idiosynkrasies de ces intellectuels africains ?


L’ouvrage édité par Idrissa K. se subdivise en trois ensembles assez inégaux, intitulés : ‘histoires de vie’ (pp. 17-154), les ‘intellectuels dans l’espace public’ (pp. 155-262) et les ‘intellectuels et les savoirs’ (pp. 263-337). Cependant, la présentation aurait pu être inversée en partant de ce qui est générique : les intellectuels dans l’espace public, puis leurs rapports aux savoirs pour finir par les spécificités de leurs trajectoires personnelles dans l’‘arène publique’ (Idrissa K. 7). Tout lecteur non initié a besoin d’une telle approche pour mieux contextualiser les engagements, les responsabilités, les compromissions, les réussites ou les échecs. Néanmoins, une vérité est établie : l’intellectuel nigérien n’est pas une création de la domination coloniale. Les ‘petites histoires’ individuelles inverment ainsi la Grande Histoire d’un pays qui a aussi subi l’influence d’intellectuels arabo-musulmans bien avant la colonisation française, et dont le background culturel est ancestral.

Le point de départ des différentes contributions n’est pas seulement le récit sur les réponses apportées par les intellectuels nigériens aux problèmes de leur temps, mais aussi celui de la confrontation, la leur ou celle de figures de proue dans l’histoire du pays, contre des forces politiques et/ou intellectuelles opposées sur des questions aussi problématiques que l’économie en déclin, la lutte pour le pouvoir, le combat contre le néocolonialisme dans des contextes sociopolitiques et/ou religieux divers à travers l’histoire nationale pré ou postcoloniale. Ces contributions montrent un intellectuel explorateur et organique (cf. Mahaman, pp. 19-33) ou engagé (cf. Maidoka), un militant (cf. Daouda, Mallam, et Adjii), un syndicaliste (cf. Bakary et Abdoulaye), parfois un médiateur (cf. Mahaman) ou un savant (cf. Idrissa K.) qui se battent mais ne réussissent pas toujours à éviter l’allégeance (cf. Adjii) ou la compromission (cf. Mahaman) et sont souvent exclus des débats nationaux (cf. Moumou, pp. 265-279), ou qui subissent les préjugés sociaux (l’intellectuelle-femme chez Mounkaila). Cet échange sur l’univers intellectuel en Afrique de l’Ouest, qui ne parle pas d’adopter des attitudes antinomiques, entre conformisme et contestation. En outre, rien dans cette typologie ne montre de différence marquée par rapport à d’autres espaces politiques au-delà de l’Afrique de l’Ouest, si ce n’est la rare volonté collective pour constituer un esprit de corps, à l’instar d’autres mouvements intellectuels de par le monde : le mouvement Dada,...
le Black Consciousness, les Gender Studies, l’Existentialisme, le jadidisme, les Cultural Studies ou la New Cultural History; Conomi dans tous les autres livres vifs sur l’image de la pyramide (Grsameci à la tête de laquelle se trouve le penseur principal alors que les intellectuels ‘de base’ sont occupés par les termes tâches managériales et/ou administratives. Avant de faire une curiosité des récits analytiques sur des mouvements d’intellectuels depuis la période précoloniale (Mahamman : guerre sainte de 1804, Idriessa A : XVIIIe siècle, Moumouni : récits analytiques sur des mouvements en soi empêtrées dans la quotidienneté à cause durable. Ces intellectuels étaient/sont la vie politique et/ou culturelle de façon les arts, l’université, la politique ou parti Bakary et Abdoullaye Mamani, ou le ou collectives d’intellectuels (Djibo dan Fodio, Alfa Mahaman Diobo, Bou- toires d’abord personnelles (Abdoullahi que l’histoire des idées à travers le temps Asie). La constitution de soi dans son d’intellectuels dans d’autres aires cultu- sants fidèle de démarches l’allégeance, les préjugés, l’éveil des de vie: l’engagement, la responsabilité, la condition humaine dans toute sa com- d’intellectuels dans d’autres aires cultu- sants fidèle de démarches l’allégeance, les préjugés, l’éveil des de vie: l’engagement, la responsabilité, la condition humaine dans toute sa com-
La construction technopolitique d’un marché de l’uranium

L’uranium a été depuis longtemps l’objet de convoitises mondiales, tantôt considéré comme un minerai rare qui servait à fabriquer des armes à la puissance nucléaire exceptionnelle, surtout dans un contexte de guerre froide, tantôt considéré comme une marchandise banale au même titre que n’importe quelle autre ressource minière. Ainsi pour faire émerger l’uranium dans un système de marchandisation, il était nécessaire de mettre en place une structure pour réguler le commerce de l’uranium, ce fut le cas de la création de l’Agence Internationale de l’Energie Atomique (AIEA) en 1957. Des dispositifs marchands ont été constitués pour gérer l’offre et la demande. Des normes ont été établies pour maîtriser et contrôler toutes formes apparentées à l’uranium : minerais, yellowcake, tétrafluorure, hexafluorure, uranium enrichi. A cela s’ajoute une série d’instruments et de pratiques qui incluent des estimations des réserves mondiales, les prévisions et les prix à fixer. Ces différents dispositifs tifs furent à chaque fois retravaillés et mutualisés par des compagnies privées, des géopolitiques, des organisations internationales et des agences nationales. Des sociétés de courtage et des cartels ont également contribué à la création d’un marché dont l’objectif est d’animer le marché de l’uranium et de stabiliser le marché. Or l’uranium n’est pas une marchandise comme les autres, les théories et les mécanismes classiques de l’économie de marché pouvaient donc difficilement rendre compte du fonctionnement spécifique du marché de l’uranium.

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Urâmion afrikân, une histoere globle

par Gabrielle Hecht

Éditions du Seuil, Paris (France), avril 2016, 416 pages, 23.00 €

ISBN : 9782070390072, pour la traduction française,

Collection « l’univers historique »

Tirte originale : Being Nuclear. Africans and the Global Uranium Trade,
The MIT Press, 2012, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

La nucléarité de l'Afrique : une histoire d'invisibilité

Lamy Teneci

Uranium African, a Histoire globale

par Gabrielle Hecht
Pourtant les dangers de la radioactivité étaient connus depuis les années 1920 et 1930, à la fois par Marie Curie et de plusieurs femmes du New Jersey employées à peindre du radium sur les cadres de montres (p. 167). Le statut nucléaire des mines d’uranium en Afrique n’était pas établi clairement puisque il était associé à n’importe quel autre tra- vail minier. C’est précisément autour de cette banalité des mines africaines que l’irrationalité des cancers et des maladies professionnelles des milliers de mineurs a pu devenir méconnues et impercepti- bles, en partie du reste du monde. Dans la deuxième partie de l’ouvrage intitulée le travail nucléaire, Gabrielle Hecht soutient l’idée que le fait de consi- dérer les mines en France comme des lieux nucléaires n’a pas suffi à rendre compte de la nucléarité des minerais en Afrique. Pour que des mines d’uranium soient désignées comme nucléaires, un ensemble de données devraient être ras- semblées, à savoir des instruments, des laboratoires, des archives, des pratiques médicales, des réglementations et un réseau d’experts faisant suivre les connaissances nouvellement acquises, etc. L’absence de tous ces éléments et leur inégalité « distribution géographique, politique et technologique » a rendu certains corps contaminés visibles et d’autres invisibles (p. 166).

Il est incontestable de constater qu’à au- cun moment, la production mondiale des connaissances scientifiques n’a pas pris en compte l’exposition aux radiations des travailleurs africains.

Pour toutes ces raisons, Gabri- elle Hecht s’intéresse à l’histoire de l’uranium en pénétrant au plus près les mines de Madagascar, du Gabon, de l’Afrique du Sud et du Niger. Elle veut comprendre les mécanismes complexes qui ont permis de maintenir le secret sur l’invisibilité de l’exposition des mineurs aux radiations. Pour ce faire, elle défend l’idée que les contingences historiques et géographiques ont souvent été en partie le mode de vie qui a permis de faire l’histoire. Elle a donc structuré le livre autour de deux sous-thèmes, l’un concernant le rôle de façonner le « nucléaire » et l’autre concernant les contingences historiques qui ont permis de maintenir le silence sur le sujet.

Le croisement simultané des archives et des conférences ou de rencontres internationales et en dépit des connaissances qu’ils disposaient sur les dangers des radiations même si des divergences demeuraient entre systèmes français et américain - les expositions des mineurs africains ont été exclues des différentes enquêtes scienti- fiques menées par les experts. L’absence de données concernant l’exposition des mineurs africains a rendu les informations sur les conditions de travail des mineurs en Afrique difficile à obtenir.

L’histoire de l’uranium et de la radiativité est complexe et souvent négligée, car elle a été souvent occultée ou déniée. Cependant, les mineurs d’uranium ont souffert d’expositions radioactives qui ont eu des conséquences graves sur leur santé. Il est important de souligner l’intérêt du travail de terrain qui a permis de recueillir des informations précieuses sur les conditions de travail des mineurs et les risques qu’ils ont encourus.

Exposition radio active et mortalité : genèse d’une controverse. De là, la controverse entourant la santé des mineurs d’uranium en Afrique. Il est incontestable de constater que les mineurs d’uranium américains ont été soumis à des expositions radioactives qui ont été négligées ou minimisées. Cependant, les mineurs d’uranium africains ont également été exposés à des risques radioactifs, mais leur santé a été méconnue ou négligée.

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Les médias privés et la lutte pour la démocratie au Sénégal
Ousmane Oumar Kane

L’Étranger parmi les siens : Compilation, confrontation civilisationnelle, soucis d’une communauté, trajectoire par Sidi Lamine Niasse
Edition L’Harmattan, Dakar (Sénégal), septembre 2016, 284 pages, 29.00 €
ISBN : 978-2-343-09887-6

Les médias privés et le Sénégal : une lutte cruciale. Le parcours de Sidi Lamine, tel qu’il est décrit dans ce livre, est un regard unique sur les nombreux défis de la démocratie continue. Le travail de Sidi Lamine, tel que le montre ce livre, doit être lu par tous ceux qui veulent comprendre l’évolution politique, sociale et les questions religieuses du Sénégal.

Sidi Lamine Niasse est issu d’une famille de lettrés musulmans de grande renommée. Son grand père Abdoulaye Niasse (m. 1922) et son père Mouhamed Niasse (m. 1957) comptent parmi les plus grands érudits de l’histoire du Sénégal. Sidi Lamine commence ses études en langue arabe et études islamiques au Sénégal, exerce le métier d’enseignant arabe en 1971 et 1975 et poursuit ensuite ses études supérieures à la prestigieuse université d’El Izhaz au Caire. Au cours des trente dernières années, il a fait partie des intellectuels qui ont marqué de leur empreinte la vie publique sénégalaise. Dans les livres qu’il a écrits dont L’étranger parmi les siens, est le dernier, et non le moindre, et dans ses émissions à la radio et à la télévision, il est prononcé sur toutes les questions politiques, sociales, religieuses et culturelles importantes au Sénégal. L’une des émissions le plus remarquable qu’il a créées est Dine ak Jamano (religion et questions d’actualité). Présentée en Wolof, cette émission accueille de nombreuses personnalités politiques, économiques, culturelles et artistiques pour débattre des questions d’actualité. Depuis 1994, l’émission a abordé la plus des thèmes d’importance nationale ou internationale, y compris et surtout l’éthique de bonne gouvernance. A titre de conclusion, l’émission a beaucoup contribué à éveiller les populations, surtout non francophones, et à les sensibiliser sur les questions d’actualité.

L’ouvrage est une contribution décisive à la consolidation de la démocratie au Sénégal.

Gestion et Fundamentalismes

Edited by Fatou Sow
ISBN: 978-2-86978-754-4

When, why and how can religion and culture be both sources and places of expression for fundamentalisms especially when they are connected to politics? Those are central questions raised throughout this book. What is at stake here is religion and culture as sources of persistent concern in social debates, in feminist and women’s political organizations as well as in academia and politics. The manipulations of cultures and religions is progressively political and consequently cause social discriminations, or even physical, moral and symbolic violence undoubtly unsustainable.

Les médias privés et la lutte pour la démocratie au Sénégal
Ousmane Oumar Kane

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Le paradoxe africain
Manous Kodidir

Africques entre puissance et vulnérabilité par Philippe Hugon

Armand Colin, Paris (France), 2016, 272 pages,


Le livre « Afriques entre puissance et vulnérabilité », objet de la présente recension, comprend cinq chapitres qui se sont déroulant dans les années 1990 et 2000, y compris l’année de son premier recueil, avant de paraître. Philippe Hugon mérite d’être lu, il convient de se débarrasser des stéréotypes qui lui sont attribués au milieu de la recherche scientifique.

À première vue, la richesse de l’ouvrage est indéniable. Sa force tient plus à un recensement des problèmes de l’Afrique qu’à une analyse de sa vulnérabilité. En abordant les différents obstacles qui entravent la marche de l’Afrique vers le progrès, Philippe Hugon situe les causes du sous-développement d’une manière décontextualisée et sans référence aux conditions historiques et géographiques, ainsi que l’Afrique est restée en marge des grands bouleversements qui ont été à l’origine de l’expansion du capital mondial. Dans sa démarche, on est amené à comprendre la vulnérabilité de l’Afrique comme déterminée par des facteurs autres que ceux liés au colonialisme et à la domination.

À la fin de cette partie, l’auteur réserve son analyse aux conflictualités et à la montée du terrorisme. Contextualisant les guerres internes et régionales, le conflit est étudié comme résultant d’une sismicité structurale qui caractérise la réalité africaine traversée par des logiques historiques, culturelles, éducatives et d’un manque de légitimité. Le terrorisme avec ses mutations actuelles semble être le fléau plus dévastateur. Concernant la dernière partie, Philippe Hugon cerne le devenir de l’Afrique entre croissance, crise et conflits. Il commence par analyser l’économie africaine. À considérer l’hypothèse du développement économique sur la base d’une terre riche et d’un sous-sol regorgeant d’hydrocarbures et d’or. Les pays africains auraient dû, depuis longtemps, rattraper leur retard économique par rapport à l’Europe. Mais tel n’est pas le cas. Qu’ils aient emprunté la voie libérale en laissant les compagnies internationales exploiter leur ressource ou la voie socialiste pour promouvoir leur développement en captant les revenus provenant de ressources minières et agricoles, la plupart des pays africains sont tombés dans le piège de la rente. À cela, il convient d’ajouter la répartition inégale de la rente aggravant par conséquent l’appauvrissement de larges couches de la société. Cette situation ne va pas cependant sans générer des efforts dévastateurs à l’intérieur de ces pays.


En conclusion, bien que le livre de Philippe Hugon mérite d’être lu, il convient de contrôler son approche de plusieurs façons. De plus, son ouvrage est préparé pour un public autre que ceux qui sont familiers avec les problèmes de l’Afrique. Ce qui nous émène à soutenir que la problématique africaine doit être résolue, à partir d’une démarche d’ensemble.
La CFAO et le commerce en Afrique : de la ‘trocque-sous-voile’ à l’ère de la modernité
Tayeb Rehail

Raymond Lehideux-Vernimmen
Ed. L’Harmattan, Paris (France), 2016, 321 pages, 29 €
ISBN : 978-2-343-08860-0

It is a two-fold affair (in Europe, and in Africa, affrare ses navires à l’aller comme au retour, vend deux fois (en France, puis en Europe) et marge donc sur le titre (p. 4).

Pour stocker produits et marchandises, il construit comptoirs et factoreries et organise des expéditions à objectifs commerciaux et géographiques (il organise des voyages aux sources afin de faire des rencontres de liens pour les diverses entrepôts et faciliter les transactions avec les autochtones).

Il se rend compte que pour réussir à vendre beaucoup de marchandises aux indigènes de la côte d’Afrique, il faut leur permettre d’avoir suffisamment de pouvoir d’achat. La raison, dans ce cadre, est de faire passer l’indigène du statut de paysan fournisseur à celui de client-acheteur. Ce passage du système de troc à l’économie monétaire réussit à se réaliser vers 1887.

Les ruptures de l’histoire qui donnent naissance à certaines innovations au courant du XIXe siècle, participent eux aussi à leur manière au développement de l’activité des groupes de distribution, comme par exemple les accélérations technologiques, le raccourcissement des temps de transport, la métamorphose des télécommunications et la mondialisation du commerce.

La communication « mors » qui relie les continents dès l’aube du XXe siècle permet par exemple de faire des commandes en temps réel. Cette technique de télécommunication est remplacée à partir de 1920 par la télégraphie sans fil (TSF).

Dès 1913, la CFAO signe un contrat pour distribuer des voitures sur la côte d’Afrique. Juste après, la mobilisation générale pour la Première Guerre mondiale de 1914 ampute les effectifs de la CFAO. Pour parer à cela, cette dernière recrute des employés suisses.

Après l’amnistie en 1918, le moteur du développement de la compagnie est la vente d’automobiles (et de camions). La CFAO participe même à l’expédition “promotion” de Citroën, voiture française qui parcourt en 1924 26 000 km en neuf mois du nord au sud d’un continent vierge de toute trace de pneu.

Après deux décennies, la compagnie est de nouveau touchée par les effets néfastes d’une Seconde Guerre mondiale. L’ouvrage nous relate les péripéties du retour de certains employés vers leurs postes de travail après la fin de la guerre.

Cet épisode, permet de mettre en scène le développement des moyens de transport sur le continent noir.

Ensuite, après des récits tirés de carnets de bord de certains acteurs de l’époque, l’auteur nous renseigne sur la « reconstruction » de la compagnie après la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Mais à partir de 1945, deux superpuissances dominent la planète : les USA et l’URSS, qui se livrent désormais une guerre idéologique.

L’ouvrage contient également une présentation de quelquesPatché et la CFAO, seule survivante du continent africain à franchir le cap de la modernité comme au retour, vend deux fois (en France, puis en Europe) et marge donc sur le titre (p. 4).