

**Ian Taylor and Paul Williams (eds.) *Africa in International Politics: External Involvement on the Continent*. (London: Routledge, 2004).**

*Reviewed by George Jeriko\**

The place of Africa in international relations has raised more questions than answers. Academics, practitioners, and activists especially from the global South have increasingly asked whether Africa is a real actor in international relations or not. They note that Africa is marginalized and its role to influence and shape international policies is meagre. Some observers have gone so far to suggest that the engagement and involvement of big, powerful, developed states in Africa is a neo-colonial project. Subsequently, a number of approaches to redress the situation have been suggested. One of the dominant stands is to reform and overhaul the United Nations system so as to grant African states with membership in the Security Council and other important institutions. Yet, others view such involvement to have both good and bad impact.

*Africa in International Politics: External Involvement on the Continent* is an attempt to study the impact of the involvement and engagement of major external actors on the continent. Specifically, the book examines whether the operations and engagement of big powers and financial institutions in Africa promote peace, prosperity and development or they simply cause and foster war, poverty and underdevelopment (p. 18). The authors have done a great job as they examine the involvement of both state and non-state actors on the continent. This gives readers much wider lenses than when the work concentrates on states alone. Under the current era of globalization which fosters the emergence of multiple actors in the international system, any work which does not address the impact of such entities like Multinational Corporations and Transnational Corporations fails to capture important

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dynamics in international relations. On this stance, this book has, though not completely, managed to address this concern. Much could have been done to examine how other actors especially those not having closer relations with states have and continue to engage with African countries. These might include but not limited to global civil society, private businesses, and charity organizations.

*The Africa in International Politics* is an invaluable resource as it attempts to convey a deeper understanding of Africa's involvement in international politics. It highlights important landmarks that have prevailed over time as Africa engages with external actors. I think that the authors make a convincing argument that Africa has been an integral part in international relations in the sense that it has and continues to be shaped by international politics while at the same time, it shapes what happens at the international arena. However, while arguing along this line sounds and indeed is plausible, I am concerned that the authors' work does not distance itself from what others have presented (p. 1-4). To be sure, this book while discussing how various external actors engage with the continent at different times, there is no even a single chapter devoted towards examining how Africa has shaped its policies in the course of relating with such external actors. In a way, arguments framed in this order suggest that only external actors have been shaping what actually happens on African soil. Or stated differently, it appears as if only external actors have well stipulated policies towards Africa and that African states do not have foreign policies.

The book has ten chapters that are subdivided into three major sections. Whereas chapters 1-5 look and examine the policies of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council towards Africa, chapters 6-7 focus on the Japanese and Canadian policies on Africa partly because these two states are members of the group of world's richest countries, G-7 and the fact that over time, Canada and Japan have been important actors in the continent. The last part of the book, that is, chapters 8-10 provides an analysis of how the biggest and major international organizations like the UN, European Union, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have engaged on the continent in the pursuit of democracy, peace and development.

Having rigorously read the book and noted its basic arguments, I think that the authors have successfully managed to communicate the aim of their

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work. The involvement of key actors such as the United States of America, Great Britain, France, Russia, Canada, China and Japan has been discussed at greater lengths. Besides, the book has explored the role of major International Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and other regional bodies particularly the European Union. While this provides a thorough account of the major actors on the basis that they are the ones that command greater influence in the world economy and other aspects, I recommend that attempts should be made to research and document whether other emerging powers in the world economy have interests in Africa and explain why or why not. Of special interest to study here might include Brazil whose rate of economic growth in recent years has overtaken that of big powers like Britain. Equally, it is high time that more research is directed towards an examination of how different states of Africa interact with the external world in order to answer questions like: Are there precise African policies that guide international relations? What dynamics have particularly been dominant in informing Africa's choices of strategies and policies in relation to the external world? I think that this account is a prerequisite if the narrative presented in this book is to produce a balanced story. This will also be important to uncover much information about Africa which at present is indeed not much known, especially to constituencies outside the continent. I think that it will be fair in case a new version is to be produced to include specific chapters devoted to address how Africa has been shaping its foreign policies over time.

Similarly, it is problematic to generalize any phenomenon being studied in Africa. Africa is so diverse. Though some commonalities might be deduced among different states, there is diversity in the manner in which each state conducts its relations with external actors. Therefore, an examination of specific cases, say how South Africa relates with China, Tanzania's relations with Russia or any other choices might be useful to unveil African relations with the external world. In this volume, Africa is presented as a single unit of analysis. While this approach might appear plausible and in a way serves to explain the aspects being studied, one should be careful and recognize the approach as both limited and risking to ignore a range of issues that prevail in specific countries of Africa.

Furthermore, although the authors raise a very important point that issues on Africa have been given little attention or consideration in the world, in a sense that not all that happens get enough coverage and that what has been so famous about this part of the world is its portrayal as a 'dark continent' (p.

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1), no attempt is made by the authors to establish why this has been the case. To clarify this, I wish to advance a premise that every kind of knowledge has a purpose. There is certainly a clear reason as to why very little is popularized and hence known about Africa. In part, this is a continuation of the domination project and an attempt by the West to keep Africa's knowledge and all its aspects subordinated to theirs. This goal is pursued by the Westerners in collaboration with some Africans. Whether consciously or unconsciously, some African brothers and sisters have been part of the system that works to undermine their own knowledge by not fitting everything that is researched, documented and known in the African context. At some point, this has come from blindly copy-pasting research methodologies, approaches and different styles used in the pursuit of knowledge in the metropolis. This has contributed to the colonization of African knowledge. To get rid of this, there is a strong need to engage in the decolonization of knowledge. Tuhiwai Smith, in his work *Decolonizing Methodologies 1999* discusses extensively how knowledge is colonized. He subsequently reveals strategies to be used in the decolonization of knowledge.

Evaluating the findings with reference to the aim of the book, the authors conclude that the results are mixed (p. 18). This means that, while the involvement of external actors on the continent has fostered development, prosperity and peace in some parts of the continent, it has been a source of war, poverty and underdevelopment in other countries. I partly agree with the conclusion on the repercussion of the activities of external actors in the continent. The involvement of various actors on African soil has caused and continues to exert damaging impact that far outweigh what might be labelled as positive result and hence this stand point of 'mixed' results is highly doubtful. Viewed from all angles, foreign aid, trade relations and economic partnerships, just to mention a few, have enormously deprived and disadvantaged Africa.

Related to the above, I stand strongly opposed to authors' argument that "there is little credible evidence of an international conspiracy to keep Africa down" (p .18). It is evident that a handful of policies and engagements of developed countries on Africa since early contacts, mercantile period, industrial capitalism, monopoly capitalism and colonialism as well as in the contemporary times is indeed exploitative and deliberately tailored with a goal of constraining Africa's development path. One cannot comprehend

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Africa's situation today without understanding its historical past. Similarly, anyone attempting to analyze contemporary patterns of relations between Africa and the external world has to start from the premise that there is a considerable continuity from the colonial past and a meagre 'new' degree of patterns. A working evidence is the examination of how the majority of 'the common man', that is, people at the grassroots of the society in different countries of Africa still experience difficult life-conditions and suffer from policies whose architects are the rich developed countries.

If the suffering of the mass of Africans resulting from the policies of the developed countries does not count as evidence of deliberate attempt by the powerful nations to undermine Africa and what matters are documented evidences, still, a lot of credible evidence is available. The fact that foreign aid only serves rich countries' strategic interest has been reiterated in many volumes including Dambisa Moyo's *Dead Aid: Why Aid Makes Things Worse and How there is Another Way for Africa 2009*. Additionally, the reality that the neo-liberal agenda in Africa, particularly in the sub-Saharan Africa as vindicated by the repercussions of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) has been and continues to be disastrous. This is also well documented. It is arguably reasonable and correct to assert that the economic and political liberalization policies have great bearing in limiting Africa's prosperity. Moreover, the political economy of peace and conflict explanation to many African cases of instabilities and violent conflicts point to the involvement of external actors on the continent. Conflicts in different parts of Africa like those in Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia and Sierra Leone are attributed to the role of external actors in various ways.

Despite the weaknesses I have advanced, this is a well written, informative and educative work. I strongly recommend this book to students wishing to understand African international relations and Foreign Policy, academics, practitioners and whoever is involved in the pursuit of knowledge on international relations. Not only does this book offer relations between Africa and powerful states in the international system as well as International Financial Institutions (IFIs) in a very systematic manner but also it provides a strong historical perspective on the subject matter being discussed. It is therefore a must-read text for analysts of foreign policies.

The qualifications and reputations of the editors and contributors also provide another convincing reason as to why people should be interested in reading this publication. Paul Williams is no doubt among the well-known

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authors of international affairs specifically on Peacekeeping and Peace Operations. I personally benefited a great deal by reading his two publications entitled: *Understanding Peacekeeping* and *Peace Operations and Global Order*. These two books substantially contributed to my understanding of peace operations and peacekeeping during my studies at the United Nations Mandated University for Peace. On the other hand, Ian Taylor and other contributors are greatly knowledgeable (p. x-xi) on the subject matter presented throughout the book and it is recommended that to benefit from their insights and skills the *African in International Politics* should be read to its fullest.