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African Miracle or African Marvel?

Mammo Muchie, Sanya Osha, and Matlotleng P. Matlou have edited this useful 2012 book, The Africana World: From Fragmentation to Unity and Renaissance. In it, readers – who include scholars and students – are expected to read about how the economic underdevelopment and continual challenge to democracy in Africa springs from cultural conundrum, a culture (or cultures) waiting for Renaissance that admires personalities more than institutions. Who is ruling, rather than what is the rule, in a given country is a question curiously posed by, for example, Somali communities in the Diaspora and back home. This could probably be due to the long historical process of rule by traditional clan/tribal chiefs, in contrast to European medieval city-states, which laid the basis for strong democratic institutions for contemporary through Renaissance.

Indeed, personalisation of institutions is a dilemma for state development and economic growth in Africa. In Somalia and South Sudan, for example, they are considered as archetypal failed nations, and that the case is more nascent than any other part of the second largest continent. Part of the reason in Somalia and South Sudan or anywhere else in Africa is many, but the most pressing lies in the clan-inspired (un)‘civil’ wars and authoritarian regime’s authorities, who rebuffed to make the military apolitical and professional. One vivid example is the uneasy truce between civil-military relations.

Consisting of five parts, this collection by writers, with Pan-Africanist orientation, offers a cure-all answers for African unity from an international context. Promptly, the introduction sets out the framework of African unity, obliquely inquiring ‘if not now, when?’ The editors, in their introduction, point out that “building a shared understanding, values, purpose, policy and strategy with a decolonised imagination, knowledge, intelligence, innovation, competence, learning and identity is critical to creating a free and non-humiliating African future’, (p. 5). After 50 years of independence, African countries are still unable to surmount what critics see as the colonial albatross round their necks. Indeed, colonialism served a scapegoat for many Africans distressed by perpetual poverty and underdevelopment in many fronts. Yet, Haiti is a slap in the face of African apologists and anxious authors. It became the first black independent State in 1791 and, after two centuries of independence, it remains
one of the ten poorest countries in the world. This fact evinces that political independence does not necessarily usher in a human development.

Thematically, part I of *The Africana World: From Fragmentation to Unity and Renaissance* traces the post-colonial nation-building processes. Part II deals with African governance, democracy and development. Alive with a new form of Afro-centrism, it is claimed in those chapters that African corruption is the same as the American, European and Chinese counterparts. Part III subsequently examines the new phenomenon that came to be called ‘the ‘new scramble for Africa’. It specifically concerns with Brazil, Russia, India and China. Here, where some contributors are favourable to China, others are to India. China and India are at loggerheads with each other. Where China is concerned with the public sector, India pursued on obtaining economic opportunities from the private sector. The contributors to this part are divided on these issues. India has a strong economic base in the Indian Ocean States; they have even presence on the Somali coast. In fact, Somalia and other East African communities such as Zanzibar had asymmetrical trade relationship with India more than eight centuries or probably more. When Ibn Batutta visited Maldives, on his way to India from Somalia, he saw commodities exported from Mogadishu. However, to what extent does India compete with China?

One learns that China is the most exemplary case in point, and the reflections of one Chinese scholar is apt here that “studying China in Africa is much like pursuing a dragon in the bush. The dragon is imposing but the bush is dense,” (p. 207). If Europe conquered Africa through brute military might, China is using through unrestricted, exploitative trade with cheap commodities. China’s interest in Africa is viewed by many people as mercantilist mission mimicking a new face of economic colonialism. Its foreign policy seeks to forge closer relationship with the rulers than the ruled, who are those directly affected by any deal signed by the State authorities on behalf of the society. As such, China concentrated for its relations on personalities and parties, rather than societies and States, though some African States, such as Lesotho, have had relations with China since colonial period. There is an influx of Chinese expatriates into Lesotho, leading one analysts to envisage that the next government in Maseru might include some Chinese who had acquired Lesotho citizenship.

It is further demonstrated that there are no political conditions on Chinese aid to Africa, yet it is here that the Chinese seem dreadful for democracy, especially promoting human rights, but not for social development. Its strong engagement of Africa’s politics is hindered by the internal problem, one example being Taiwan. However, apart from trade, there is no investment for sharing knowledge and skills between the Africans and the Chinese. It is unlikely for