

REVIEW ARTICLE

AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT AND AFRICAN STUDIES

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Towards a New Map of Africa, edited by Ben Wisner, Camilla Toulmin, and Rutendo Chitiga. London: Earthscan (also available in the USA), 2005. xxiii + 352 pp. £15.29/US\$35 (paperback). ISBN 1-84407-093-X.

Africa's Development in the Twenty-First Century: Pertinent socio-economic and development issues, edited by Kwadwo Konadu-Agyemang and Kwamina Panford. Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006. xvi + 409 pp. £65/US\$124.95 (hardback). ISBN 0-7546-4478-2.

Taking Sides: Clashing views on African issues, edited by William G. Moseley. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2007. xxv + 404 pp. £23.99 (paperback). ISBN 978-0-07-351507-8.

Much has been written on what African Studies is or should be about. We might question the need for such inward-looking dialogues, but debates about African Studies have a habit of becoming compelling. It is surely worthwhile, after all, to reflect on how knowledge about Africa is produced, by whom and to what ends it is put, and to relate such questions to Africa's position in global political and economic systems. If one viewed such systems as inequitable and unjust, contributing to continued poverty, illness, and marginalization across the continent, one would not want to be found complicit in their maintenance.

It is in part because of widespread concerns about the magnitude and posited intractability of problems facing African countries that development has become such a popular strand within African Studies. A sense of disappointment, within some academic circles and the popular press more widely, has arisen from the perceived lack of progress in the African context towards standard developmental goals such as longer life expectancy, greater

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opportunities for economic security and stability, or a more equitable distribution of profits made from the exploitation and sale of Africa's natural resources. That disappointment, the extent to which it is warranted, and the appropriate response to it weave the common thread running through all three of the books reviewed here.

Towards a New Map of Africa and *Africa's Development in the Twenty-First Century* both seek to document dilemmas, issues, and crises faced by Africans living south of the Sahara. They also proffer suggestions, in places, on what needs to be done in response and how to go about doing it. *Taking Sides* is an introductory university textbook which compiles (and compresses) twenty prominent debates within African Studies, with a view to easing students into the field. An inspection of the aims and content of all three titles affords the reader a feel for the current state of play in much thinking on African development. It also provides an entrée into debates about the nature of African Studies. Whilst only one of these books (*Taking Sides*) explicitly addresses these debates, all three embody them. This review article will therefore attempt to explore not just what these books have to say, but also what they have to say about African Studies. This is done through an inspection of their content, in conjunction with a consideration of who is writing them, where they are based, and how optimistic or pessimistic they are in their appraisals of the future of African development.

Towards a New Map of Africa (henceforth *New Map*) takes Lloyd Timberlake's *Africa in Crisis* as its frame of reference.¹ That text, lauded in *New Map*'s opening chapter as 'a fresh, powerful analysis of the droughts and famine then scourging much of the continent',² is judged nonetheless to stand in need of replacement. In part this recognizes the need to cover the significant changes that have occurred since the mid-1980s, both within and outside the African continent. Yet it is equally important to the book's editors that their text should serve as a corrective to the Afro-pessimism that, they argue, tends to characterize analysis – conducted 'mainly by outsiders'³ – of African countries. They aim, then, to take a long, unflinching look at a familiar litany of ills, tragedies, and injustices associated with Africa, and to formulate useful suggestions for the future direction of African development efforts in the twenty-first century.

The book is organised into two main parts, prefaced by a lengthy, wide-ranging introduction. Part I, 'Human Ecology', brings together five chapters which focus on livelihoods, HIV/AIDS and food security. Part II, 'Institutional Change', comprises the bulk of the collection, exploring various institutional dynamics. These include: Africa in the institutional framework of

1. L. Timberlake, *Africa in Crisis* (Earthscan, London, 1985).

2. B. Wisner and C. Toulmin, 'Introduction' in Wisner *et al.* (eds), *Towards a New Map of Africa* (Earthscan, London, 2005), p. 6.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

the global economy; customary and civil legal frameworks; the politics of decentralization; the case of Botswana as an instance of successful governance institutions; the link between identity and national governance; regional economic and political institutions; and institutions for conflict resolution and peacemaking. The concluding chapter attempts to sketch the broad outlines of the 'new map' of future directions for African development.

New Map's list of contributors reads in parts like a Who's Who of African Studies, with a line-up featuring Mahmood Mamdani, Thandika Mkandawire, William Moseley, Abdi Samatar and Alex de Waal. But there is more to the selection of contributors than star power: closer inspection reveals a mix of writers from within and outside academia who, crucially, hail variously from Africa, the US, and Europe. There has been much legitimate attention paid within African Studies to questions of *who* produces knowledge about Africa, *where* it is produced, and in consonance with *which* knowledge traditions. Scholars such as Paul Zeleza have long held grave concerns about how much knowledge about Africa is produced outside Africa, by people who are not from Africa.⁴ He raises the possibility that the ideas of such commentators are in some instances coloured, unconsciously or otherwise, by their upbringing within the social, economic, and political cultures of former colonial powers. Zeleza in particular has issued a clarion call for African scholars to bring about 'the "Africanization" of the existing disciplines and interdisciplines and any new knowledge formations that may emerge'.⁵

Zeleza's bent has itself provoked criticism, notably in the form of a terse exchange with another Africanist heavyweight, Achille Mbembe.⁶ Mbembe worries that worthwhile critiques of African Studies in the Occident can all too easily spill over into 'an extreme fetishizing of geographical identities'.⁷ He wants to avoid a situation which conflates black Africa with all of Africa, and which legitimizes or negates viewpoints on the basis of the (African) origin of those holding them.

Against this contentious background, *New Map's* spread of contributors across at least three continents acquires greater significance. A little under half of the authors (24 in total) are African in origin, whilst the others hail from the US or Europe (mainly Britain and France). In the midst of heated

4. See, for instance, P. T. Zeleza, *Manufacturing African Studies and Crises* (CODESRIA, Dakar, 1997), *Rethinking Africa's Globalisation. Volume 1: The Intellectual Challenges* (Africa World Press, Trenton, NJ and Asmara, 2003).

5. P. T. Zeleza, 'African Studies in the postcolony' (Keynote address, opening of the Centre for Africa Studies, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa), *The Zeleza Post*, <<http://www.zeleza.com/blogging/african-affairs/african-studies-postcolony>> (5 November 2007).

6. See A. Mbembe, 'Getting out of the ghetto. the challenge of internationalization', *CODESRIA Bulletin* 3-4 (1999), p. 3; and P. T. Zeleza, *Rethinking Africa's Globalisation*, especially Chapter 5 (pp. 229-93).

7. A. Mbembe, 'Getting out of the ghetto', p. 3.

debates about the contested legitimacy and authority of work written on Africa, it is both laudable and politically savvy to bring together people of such different geographical identities.

At the same time, it should also be noted that whilst *New Map* features more work from commentators at African institutions than either of the other books on review, the overwhelming majority of contributions were produced at US or European institutions. This tendency may not assuage the fears of Africanists who feel that African intellectual traditions are too dominated by the epistemic cultures of Europe and the US. But it would be unfair to write *New Map* off on the grounds that it is a manifestation of that dominance. Northern institutions *do* dominate the study of Africa; but it still seems preferable to foster collaboration and cooperation between scholars across these regions. There is a clear sense in which the book is a symbol of that goal.

The book also provides a showcase for rigorous and compelling African scholarship. Mahmood Mamdani's contribution (Chapter 10) explores the implications for African statehood of the contradictory, often violence-inducing relationship between basing rights and access to resources on criteria of indigeneity, on the one hand, and accommodating the economic dynamism associated with migration between and within states, on the other. He covers ground quickly and paints on a broad canvas, without seeming to overreach himself, and all within a meagre fourteen pages – albeit following a well-rehearsed script. Abdi Samatar's chapter on Botswana, though less succinct than Mamdani's, is also well worth exploring, not least because it charts a story of success and hope (Chapter 9). Others, whilst much bleaker – such as de Waal's chapter on the potentially terrifying impacts of HIV/AIDS upon Southern African demographics and economies – will help newcomers to the subject to understand why HIV/AIDS is such an urgent challenge in contemporary Southern Africa (Chapter 4).

In terms of its aims and the quality and breadth of the information presented in *New Map*, there is, then, clearly much to recommend it. There are also, of course, drawbacks. The title of the collection is potentially a concern. The metaphor of moving 'towards a new map of Africa', whilst chiming with the collection's overall objectives, seems a little inappropriate. Does Africa really need a new map? It is not wholly clear that it does, but this is the unquestioned assumption from the start. For a volume with a number of contributions clearly aware of the importance of setting African development in historical context, it is unfortunate that its title should leave it open to accusations of faddishness in its approach to African development. It is therefore a touch ironic that many of the suggestions for addressing issues and challenges faced by Africans and their leaders are not especially new. On the contrary, recommending greater regional integration, deeper participation of ordinary people in the policies that will affect them, or greater

advocacy for women and children's rights, is all par for the course. This lack of 'fresh thinking' is not necessarily a drawback, though, if these prove worthy recommendations capable of standing the test of time.

Moreover, whilst the book is quite assiduous in identifying different tasks for different actors in development processes, it has rather less to say about *how* to go about effecting change. Perhaps we cannot realistically expect this of a book which takes as broad an approach as this one. Indeed, the concluding chapter explicitly disavows any attempt to draw together into one handy tome (less than 400 pages) all the relevant knowledge with which to transform Africa into a global success story.⁸

Nor does *New Map* stick all that rigidly to its declared structure. The first and final chapters relate to each other, but less so to the bulk of the contributions within the book. The concluding chapter does identify a dozen 'difficult' challenges for the continent and another dozen 'durable' sets of resources on which Africans can draw. However, its recommendations for action do not draw on the messages and lessons discussed in the body of the book. To do so may have been a better way to 'chart the new map', and could have compensated for the lack of overarching goals for policy formulation in some of the chapters. But these are ultimately failings of a lesser order, eclipsed by the quality and diversity of the contributions of which *New Map* is comprised. To have secured such good contributors whilst maintaining a balance of scholars from African, US and European countries makes an important political statement about collaboration between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', 'Northerners' and 'Southerners' – one which has the pleasing effect of blurring the boundaries between these (sometimes unhelpful) dichotomies.

Africa's Development in the Twenty-First Century (henceforth *Africa's Development*) views most African development over the course of the twentieth century – and in particular since the waves of independence in the 1950s and 1960s – in terms of failure. Having judged Africa to have 'suffered from the most acute form of underdevelopment', its editors proceed to ask, 'What went wrong?'⁹ The central task of the collection is to ask whether the twenty-first century will follow suit and to identify the opportunities and constraints for African development in the years to come. The various contributions that comprise this volume are organized into four main parts, topped and tailed by an introductory and a concluding chapter.

Part I, 'Theoretical Discussions and Considerations', groups together an overview of crises and challenges within African development, an attempt to reconceptualize the state in sub-Saharan Africa, and an analysis

8. A. Samatar, B. Wisner, R. Chitiga, T. A. Smucker, E. Wangui, and C. Toulmin, 'Agenda for action' in *Towards a New Map of Africa*, p. 329.

9. K. Konadu-Agyemang and K. Panford, 'Introduction and overview' in *Africa's Development in the Twenty-First Century*, p. 1.

of globalization and Africa. Part II, 'Regional Groupings, Political and Economic Unions' comprises two chapters, one covering the transition from the Organization of African Unity to the African Union, the other examining the prospects for the Economic Community of West African States in the twenty-first century. The six chapters of Part III, 'Food, Land Matters, Natural Resources and Management', pick up a number of popular themes within African development studies: resource-fuelled conflict; food security; the politics of environmental crisis narratives; the link between structural adjustment programmes and environmental degradation; land reform; and local environmental knowledge. Part IV, 'Developmental Issues', mops up the rest of the contributions. These deal variously with: corruption and political economy; the difficulties of implementing a democratic constitution (South Africa's); gender and education; the politics of development intervention; urban development; and information and communication technologies in Africa. The concluding chapter attempts to draw lessons and set an agenda for twenty-first century development in the African context.

Africa's Development has been compiled with some discipline. Most of the contributions run to fewer than twenty-five pages, helping to ensure that their length does not persuade the reader to pass over them in search of something more quickly digestible. In comparison with the two other books reviewed, moreover, *Africa's Development* is replete with maps, diagrams, figures, and tables (though some of its authors are considerably more diligent in this regard than others). This is offset, however, by some poor editing. Typos abound throughout, being particularly notable in the introductory and concluding chapters, giving the impression that they were rather hurriedly pulled together.

As in *New Map*, the editors wish to evade the charge of Afro-pessimism, contending in the preface that it is not the book's purpose to dwell on a century of 'lost opportunities' for Africa (p. xv). Rather, they seek, in much the same vein as *New Map*, 'to explore ways of reinventing Africa for the 21st century'. For all that, the focus remains by and large on reasons for profound concern about Africa's future, not on reasons for optimism, provoking another parallel with *New Map*. Indeed, whilst *Africa's Development* does feature chapters which illustrate success stories or suggest reasons for cautious optimism, its editorial line devotes significantly less attention to the reasons for hope than does *New Map*. It could be argued, therefore, that the collection does little to widen a narrow, skewed view of Africa which portrays only past failures and future threats for the beleaguered inhabitants of a troubled continent.

Even a cursory glance at the contributors' list makes it clear that an important rationale for *Africa's Development* is to create space for African authorship. Significantly, this is not something to which the editors or

authors seek to bring our attention; rather, they seem to prefer to let the line-up speak for itself. This proves a neat way of providing a platform for African scholars and students, whilst circumventing the risk of claiming authenticity simply by dint of (African) origin. Against this, though, it should be noted that most of the contributors work for universities in the US, contrasting a little unfavourably in this regard with *New Map*. And yet this illustrates very well a point made by Henning Melber: any discussion of 'the danger of domination of African Studies by Western scholars requires [us] to begin with a strict definition of both'.¹⁰ This task becomes less easy in view of the extent to which African scholars are part and parcel of the Western academic landscape.

A certain bias towards work on Ghana has the unfortunate effect of undercutting the objective of leaving space for African voices. With a quarter of the case study chapters focusing on Ghana, the collection draws disproportionately upon one country to illustrate wider African phenomena. This gives rise to the slightly ugly suspicion that the volume is more about helping the authors to publish their work than it is about ensuring coverage of the vital development issues across a continent diverse beyond comprehension. This impression is not given by *New Map* (or by *Taking Sides*, for that matter). To be fair, however, it is not as if the imperatives of frequent publication are in no way in operation in these other two texts.

What lets this collection down is the quality of the contributions, which does not compare all that favourably with the other books reviewed. To be sure, there are a number of well-written, insightful and informative chapters on offer. One example is Joseph Mensah and Richard Aidoo's assessment (Chapter 6) of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).¹¹ It offers a handy overview of the course of ECOWAS since its inception, discusses the pan-African antecedents which brought it into existence, and puts the achievements and failings of this regional organization in comparative perspective. It makes a good many straightforward recommendations that will engage policy makers. Likewise, Kristin Henrard's work (Chapter 15) on constitutional transformation in South Africa and the challenges of implementation provides a comprehensive introduction to the processes through which the constitution was forged.¹²

Overall, though, the output is patchy, especially in comparison with *New Map*, a book with an almost identical objective. Chapter 1 of *New Map*,

10. H. Melber, 'The relevance of African Studies' (Lecture presented at the Nordic Africa Institute, 6 November 2006), p. 9.

11. J. Mensah and R. Aidoo, 'The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS): achievements, problems and prospects for Africa's development in the 21st century' in *Africa's Development in the Twenty-First Century*, pp. 89–108.

12. K. Henrard, 'South Africa's successful constitutional transformation meets the challenge of implementation: equality and the accommodation of population diversity' in *Africa's Development in the Twenty-First Century*, pp. 249–80.

surveying as it does an impressive range of topics across African development studies, has a bibliography stretching to ten pages, and is a commendable source of further reading for readers new to these fields. Its equivalent (Chapter 2) in *Africa's Development* has less than a page of references. Of course, the length of the bibliography is in itself an insufficient measure of the quality of a piece of work. And yet the comparative narrowness of the reading done in preparation is conspicuous when this chapter is compared with its counterpart in *New Map*. It deals with fewer issues and provides less evidence for the points that it makes, obliging the reader either to trust the authors or to beg questions of them. It does cover a lot of important points, but too often it illustrates them with Ghanaian examples. Ghana cannot unproblematically be taken to be emblematic of all West Africa, not to mention the rest of Africa; but all too frequently it is.

Other chapters bring to bear less than persuasive approaches to important and contentious themes. For instance, Kwame Ninsin's article on Africa and globalization decries the continent's marginal position within the global economy.¹³ Ninsin argues that it is prey to global capital, which seeks only to extract its natural resources and its qualified people. The state is held hostage by international financial institutions, especially the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization. Trade has declined (or had at the time of writing) and the African state is powerless to stop the intrusions of international capital. It is not that there is nothing to be said for any of these arguments, but they are stated almost as articles of faith, rather than propositions to be interrogated. His analysis casts African states and peoples in the role of powerless actors who never show the least bit of agency – unless they belong to his counter-elite, which is apparently free from the existing political-economic constraints that explain Africa's poor economic performance. It is striking that, at some points, Mkandawire's contribution in *New Map* makes some similar arguments, especially in terms of the extent to which the causes of much African economic malaise are external in origin.¹⁴ Whether one agrees with him or not, he is more rigorous in presenting evidence to support his case.

Taking Sides: Clashing Views on African Issues covers much of the same ground as the other two volumes. Yet it differs considerably from them in terms of format, intended audience and objectives. Whilst *New Map* and *Africa's Development* are written with a view to catching the attention of policy makers, *Taking Sides* is primarily for university students; and for

13. K. A. Ninsin, 'Left in the ditch: Africa and the dialectics of globalization' in *Africa's Development in the Twenty-First Century*, pp. 49–67.

14. T. Mkandawire, 'The global economic context' in *Towards a New Map of Africa*, pp. 155–82.

ones who know little or nothing about Africa at that. Whereas lecturers may seek to add any of these three books to their course reading lists, they could feasibly use *Taking Sides* as the basis of an entire course if they so desired.

The book concentrates on and covers twenty popular debates within African Studies on which differing – and sometimes diametrically opposed – viewpoints can be taken. *Taking Sides* is the best-structured of all the three books, with its various issues grouped into five parts: introduction and history; development; agriculture, food, and the environment; social issues; and, finally, politics, governance, and conflict resolution. Very helpfully, a list of the relevant resources available online is given at the beginning of each part. For each issue, a question is put – for example, ‘Is corruption the result of poor African leadership?’ – and two articles are selected, one arguing ‘yes’ and the other ‘no’. The articles are preceded by a short introduction and followed by a brief postscript, often featuring an overview of recent developments that may affect either point of view.

To the credit of the McGraw-Hill Contemporary Learning Series, of which *Taking Sides* is a well-established product, this format has a great deal to recommend it. It covers as many issues as *Africa’s Development*, but contains twice as many contributions (and over three times as many as *New Map*). The selection of contributions is also impressive. This is partly because it features a good many Africanist heavyweights and/or pieces that have fuelled notorious debates, such as those relating to the extent to which African societies and economies were transformed by the advent of the Atlantic slave trade (see Part I). But it is partly also because the majority of issues set against each other are articles or chapters which genuinely clash. They rarely seem to be forced into the format, but rather to complement it.

William Moseley, its editor, executes with aplomb the role of the helpful guide who introduces the protagonists in each controversy with respect and, by and large, with admirable impartiality. Having an editor who deliberately does not take sides nicely balances the yes/no structure, thereby also serving as a reminder to students (and academics) to understand opposing viewpoints before formulating their own opinions about them. Furthermore, his selection of readings has been done on the basis of those which best suit the book’s format, which has given him a much wider field of potential contributions upon which to draw than either *New Map* or *Africa’s Development*.

It is worth mentioning, in the light of this consideration, that only seven of the forty-eight contributors whose work features in *Taking Sides* are African in origin. Unlike *New Map* or *Africa’s Development*, the incorporation of a high proportion of African contributors does not therefore appear to have been an overriding feature of the selection criteria. Is this a flaw to be addressed in future editions? Adebayo Olukoshi has drawn

attention to asymmetrical power relations within African Studies that favour dominant, non-African scholars in the field.¹⁵ Some may choose to regard this book as simply another manifestation of such power relations. Others might prefer to defend the idea that readings be selected for a volume such as this on the basis of merit and suitability to the central objectives, regardless of who wrote them. They will, of course, come up against the questions of who makes the selection, how s/he defines merit, and on what basis. Either way, it would be hard to fault Moseley's passion for African Studies and African development. Admittedly, though, more could have been done to incorporate the work of African scholars without any sacrifice in quality. It will be interesting to see whether the balance between African, North American and European contributors changes in future editions.

Those who are less concerned with who authored the contributions will, then, find much to like and much that is useful in *Taking Sides*. There is another potential objection, though, that is worth considering. Inevitably, the format requires trade-offs that some may find unpalatable. Keeping the volume close to the 400-page mark has required some rather drastic editing. Many – though not all – of the contributions have been radically shortened. For instance, Roderick Neumann's article, 'Primitive ideas: protected area buffer zones and the politics of land in Africa',¹⁶ is reduced in *Taking Sides* to roughly a third of its original length. In a further effort to save space, the selections are stripped of their bibliographies, which hardly encourages keener students to learn the invaluable art of mining the bibliographies of established scholars.

Clearly, the editor and the team at McGraw Hill value the breadth of coverage that this strategy permits them above such concerns. But some may wonder whether too much subtlety or important contextual detail is sacrificed in the quest to make it sufficiently easy for students to turn up to class having actually read something. The question is hard to dispel: does *Taking Sides* set the bar too low? Anyone thinking about putting this book on their course list would be well-advised to attend to this consideration before doing so. It is worthwhile, too, pointing out that lecturers may be tempted to use *Taking Sides* as a source of material, then set those articles in their original form as course readings, as opposed to recommending the book as a core textbook that students should purchase. Were that in any way a general reaction, it might constitute an own goal for the publishers. Nonetheless, *Taking Sides* has so much in its favour that many may be prepared to put concerns about over-editing to one side.

15. A. Olukoshi, 'African scholars and African Studies' in H. Melber (ed.), *On Africa: Scholars and African Studies*, NAI Discussion Paper 35 (Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, 2007), p. 10.

16. R. P. Neumann, 'Primitive ideas: protected area buffer zones and the politics of land in Africa', *Development and Change* 28, 3 (July 1997), pp. 559–82.