

REVIEWS

Bach, Daniel C. 2016. *Regionalism in Africa – Genealogies, Institutions and Trans-state Networks*. London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 197 pages.

The book under review is the freshest ever publication of its kind to have recently appeared in bookshops. It is authored by Daniel Bach, a scholar in the field of African Studies, who has devoted a significant part of his life to conduct decades of research on the subject of regionalism in Africa. In this book, the author boldly presents the inception of regionalism, its present form and probable future in connection with Africa. He brings together the various dimensions of regionalism starting from the colonial period up to independence and the present time. Unlike a number of previous publications on the subject of African Studies, whose major objective was solely to entertain European readers at African expense, the present publication makes an effort to analyse facts and make them palatable to both European and African readers, including other world regions that have an interest in comparative studies of regionalism and regionalisation.

At first glance, the book may seem yet another publication to enhance Western knowledge production on Africa that merely glorifies and serves the interests of the developed world, so to say the interests of the decision-making elites and academia contributing to the marginalisation of the African continent while stimulating the revival of old Eurocentric images and racial stereotypes. But, this is not what the publication under review is about. Further reading and a thorough assessment of the publication ascertains the shift in perception across the Transatlantic and other regions around the globe concerning the growing new status of the African region within the bounds of contemporary international relations.

Daniel Bach is one of the few scholars who has observed this development and provided plausible explanations. He is at his strongest when arguing against an old-fashioned Victorian style of thinking that converged with neo-Hegelian representations of Africa, while degrading its status to a “continent of barbarians, devoid of any

history and culture,” a notion that is being reiterated even today by the policy makers of the West. The author has developed this point in his seventh and last chapter.

He effectively framed his efforts to make a complex subject understandable to all kinds of readers in a book of only 197 pages, including seven chapters and a long bibliography. In Chapter 1, the author sets a platform for further discussion by introducing the upsurge of regionalism across the world during the 1980s. Providing examples that illustrate various types of regionalisms, however, he puts special emphasis on Africa under the subtitle “The African maze.” Chapter 2 demonstrates how colonial policies and politics in Africa played the role in shaping the landscapes, topographies and mental maps associated with region building, as they did in Latin America. When this type of inter-territorial arrangement dissolved in Africa during independence, inter-governmental organisations took over; nevertheless, most of them rapidly lost relevance due to differences in politics and national orientations. In Chapter 3 the author examines the politics of economic cooperation, including the linkages with regime consolidation, club diplomacy and patronage. As the author carefully elaborates, around the end of the Cold War period and right in its aftermath, there was no veritable sub-regional integration process underway, because at that time none of the groups in Africa was able to make their impact felt, in a positive sense. Chapter 4 documents cross-border interactions in Africa, as much as goes on in other regions of the world, with intricate, multidimensional and multidirectional dimensions not captured by the discipline of International Relations, because of its difficult nature. As the author argues, in this kind of situation policies pursued under the garb of trade liberalisation serve as a free ticket to plunder a weaker neighbour within the context of the broader scope of trans-border and cross-border practices. In Chapter 5 the author argues that the renaissance of Pan-Africanism during the 1990s has powerfully contributed to the endorsement of the European Union as the best suitable model to fulfil the ambition of establishing an African Economic Community. The European Union remains the model of reference for the founding treaties and programmes of six of the eight regional economic communities in Africa. Moreover, as the author describes, the European Union is believed to have been the provider of the framework and criteria against which the Pan-African institutions monitoring regional integration in Africa seek

to assess their progress without falling into the trap of incantations and rhetorica. Chapter 6 presents how in Africa, as in other world regions, the establishment of regional trade agreements function to cause deeper regional integration that could occur in the process of defragmentation and connectivity.

In the last Chapter, as indicated above, the author presents the new status of Africa in international relations quite successfully. Here, he argues that the new and ascending status of the African continent in contemporary international relations intertwines with the concept and metaphor of frontier. He emphasises that present-day references to the continent may be understood as a new frontier and a global interface, underpinned by the continent's combination of large resources with a strong market potential due to a young population.

Also the engagement of China, and in general the BRICS actions, especially by the mid-2000s, when the economy faced serious difficulties in the United States and the Eurozone, has been a significant addition to the process of deepening and broadening Africa's integration in the global economy. The more Africa's potential domestic market was rediscovered by private investors from across the world, the more upgraded the new status of the continent has become.

The dynamism of African "frontier," which the book highlights in its various parts and particularly in the last chapter, is thus about foreign engagement that has enhanced connectivity and markets defragmentation. All these factors have led towards challenging conventional wisdoms and images of Africa, including the simmering intention for a new scramble, in which Africans will have no voice in the international arena. As the author has thoroughly elaborated, although China is predominantly driven by demands for energy and raw materials, the Chinese massive engagement in Africa has contributed to avert the tendency of diminishing Africa's role in global politics, while making a vivid contribution to sustaining favourable terms of trades between manufacturers and raw materials; it has utterly helped to transform Africa into an arena or a frontier, in which new strategies and paradigms are being tested to an extent thus far unseen in history.

In this very well narrated presentation, the author analysis the indicators for the claims made above, encompassing the ascending role of the new global actors as well as the declining tendency of the major traditional actors and the impact this would have on the economy and politics of the continent, which is actually a major field of on-going debates. Above all, he addresses Africa's new status, the indicators of which include such events as the increase in official visits by non-western actors, the expansion of diplomatic representation across the continent, and the multiplicity of high level public diplomatic initiatives, which were helpful in reconfiguring the global claim of the continent's new status. On top of this, as the author confirms, series of summit meetings that have been conducted in various parts of the South, mainly the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation, held every other year since 2006, is seen as having a major impact on setting the tone in the global environment.

The analysis casts a critical light on major Western actors by emphasising how this ongoing stream of initiatives contrast with the mood in the transatlantic West and East, whose foreign ministers laboured to reduce their diplomatic presence on the continent for most of the 2000s, since in the United States as in most European capitals, Africa was merely seen through the lens of securing the frontiers of the West devising a policy of the global war on terrorism. The author seems to have been concerned with the ineptness of the policies of the West regarding Africa, during bygone times, which may now need serious adjustment. Concerning this point, his observation indicates that it was only in 2014, during the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit in Washington, that the Obama administration appeared to wake up to the untapped potential and business opportunities of the African continent.

Daniel Bach is concerned about the relations between development and politics in the African region as well as its uneasy relations with the West. In this process of investigation he provides a more tranquil, less publicised evaluation of the process of transformation and its outcomes thus far, suitable to our current era. This should be used to pose some fundamental questions such as: Did the last two decades or so represent a reform or revolution? Was the whole process in general a success story or, as some may say, a catastrophe? In addition, why do countries in the post-Cold War era differ so considerably in their

political, economic, legal perception, and social achievement? Why do some countries descend into open civil and military conflict while others avoid major turmoil? What led to revive the metaphor of the new “scramble” for Africa? Why is Africa poor, marginalised, and portrayed by mainstream media as a region unable to meaningfully interact with the rest of the world? The publication under review offers a sophisticated explanation that reflects on all of the issues indicated above.

This publication is a significant contribution to the literature about African studies. Its content represents a heightened interest to students and scholars of African studies in the fields of economics, politics and history as well as to policy makers and researchers of international relations, including inter-regional studies of various scopes. Its attraction and strength emanates from plausible research and reasoning that vigorously challenge a bankrupted vision of purporting prejudice that tries to depict Africa as a “continent with no history and culture,” a “distant abroad,” a “significant other,” and the like, which culminated during the 1990s with the notion that treated Africa’s status in international relations as an irrelevant area of study, a pervasive idea declaring that Africa’s existence depends on the extent of foreign control imposed upon it. Nevertheless, as the author has insightfully challenged this notion, Africa has since become a more recognised subject of the international system. As the author highlights, Africa has become a source of theoretical and conceptual innovation for the contemporary discipline of international relations.

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Bischoff, Paul-Henri, Aning, Kwesi and Acharya, Amitav (eds.). 2016. *Africa in Global International Relations: Emerging Approaches to Theory and Practice*. London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 180 pages.

The publication under review has been authored by a crew of eleven contributors, namely: Paul-Henri Bischoff, Kwesi Aning, Amitav Acharya, Nancy Annan, Lesely Blaauw, Heldi Hudson, Candice Moore, Tim Murithi, Ahmed Ali Salem, Gerrie Swart and Jo-Ansie van Wyk, of whom the first three are its editors. Needless to say, each of the authors