

Sanya Osha (ed.) (2014), *The Social Contract in Africa*, Pretoria: Africa Institute for South Africa, ISBN 978-0-7983-0444-3, 200 pp.

This volume seeks to deconstruct the relationship between the rulers and the ruled in Africa. Its point of departure being the so-called “Arab Spring”, it examines the possibilities of such revolt in parts of sub-Saharan Africa where the rulers have not fulfilled the wishes and aspirations of the ruled, as evidenced by the fall of the former leader of the Central African Republic, François Bozizé, following years of brutal dictatorship in which his government plundered resources and impoverished the people. The book also takes a broad view of the historical legacies of Africa’s interaction with the West, including slavery, colonialism and globalization, and the West’s contribution to the African present. Each chapter is well researched and well written, as the volume attempts to understand, decode and unravel how the past shapes and influences the present.

Toyin Falola’s chapter, “Transnationalisation, denationalism and deterritorialism: Contemporary cultures in the context of globalization”, maintains that in the age of globalization, very strong elements are re-framing, redefining and reshaping identities within and between regions, countries and continents and, in the process, are precipitating conditions that denationalize and deterritorialize. Thus, a growing number of people are acquiring a global view of issues and perspectives, seeking to remodel and reconstruct national or local identities or cultures within a global framework. In essence, Falola’s contribution interrogates the dynamics of African culture in the age of globalization: “Many African countries are aggregations of former precolonial nations, with their own established cultural practices. The modern states, created by European conquest and violence, have been struggling to create development and stability. Elements of the practices of the past cannot be discarded, and they do have implications for how contemporary societies are managed” (15). The essence of his argument is that African traditional cultures should be resurrected and that some aspects of those cultures could be useful in helping to solve the current crisis of poor governance on the continent. Falola believes that a careful consideration and re-evaluation of the positive aspects of African culture is important, as Western epistemologies and knowledge have not solved the continent’s problems.

Seth Asumah argues that one of the problems confronting Africa is its wholesale copying of the European/American style of procedural democracy while neglecting the peculiar socio-cultural realities existing in the multilingual, multicultural and multi-ethnic nature of most countries.

Relational democracy transcends the levels of the procedural democracy, which places emphasis on process. In his view, relational democracy refers to the idea that all humans have the same worth and deserve equality in terms of opportunities, respect and participation in their own lives and the direction of their societies. Asumah believes that this concept of relational democracy represents a genuine and authentic method of representing the diversities, institutions and cultures that characterize most African countries. This chapter represents a timely intervention, as it searches for solutions to the myriad of problems confronting many states on the continent in which the relationship between the ruler and the ruled equals that of citizens and subjects as was common during colonialism. In other words, the ruler (the European) is akin to citizen while the subject is akin to ruled (African). The crux of Asumah's chapter is that African democracy has not reached the stage where Western forms of democracy and methods of carrying it out can be deeply embedded in the body politic, and as such it would be better if the continent formulated a different democratic paradigm with due consideration of its multiplicity of cultures, languages, ethnicities, religions and so on. He believes that the solution to the African condition lies in the re-evaluation of African indigenous political institutions and practices. During this process, the continent should also attempt to gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of the appropriate aspects of a European model and merge those with African political institutions to achieve a more nuanced relational democracy. He proposes integrating African cultures and political systems into the inherited European colonial model of democracy, the latter of which has not solved the continent's developmental objectives almost half a century after political independence was granted to most African countries.

Steve McGiffen's chapter claims that behind the European Union's lip service to democracy promotion during the Arab Spring uprisings lies the desire to make the countries more suitable for capital accumulation and exploitation. McGiffen argues that the real intention of the European Union in promoting democracy in North Africa was to dilute the revolutionary zeal and vigour of the revolutionaries and co-opt the elite of the new political establishments to create a conducive environment for free-market policies where European markets, capital and multinational corporations would have free reign to amass profits. When Europe sermonizes about democracy implied is the expectation of a democratic outcome that favours unbridled capitalism, providing access to a market in North Africa where big European multinational companies will have the advantage. EU's concept of democratic governance includes

securing the basis for a well-functioning market economy. McGiffen claims that the real intention or thought hidden in the inner recesses of the European idea of democracy in North Africa is the colonial assumption of an ideal type of relationship between the former and the latter, which should logically be one of teacher and student. According to him, this relationship also mirrors the colonial assumptions and foundations whereby Europe is believed to possess a superior knowledge and that Africans have an inferior knowledge and less understanding of how to operate and organize their economies and governments.

Nigel Gibson uses the thesis of Frantz Fanon as a canvas upon which to illustrate the deplorable state of political affairs and the economy in postcolonial states in Africa. He argues that it is the fault of Africa's national bourgeoisie and its political leadership. Using Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* as a template, Gibson explains that the national politicians did not dismantle the economic and political apparatuses of the European colonial governments in Africa because those structures served their interests, though it led to the impoverishment of the people. Gibson shows that part of the failure of development can be blamed on the preponderance of what Fanon called the "pseudo-bourgeoisie". It is a class that simply consumes, not generating investment, jobs, economic growth or development.

Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni demonstrates in his chapter that the present world order is a product of what he calls "global imperial designs" that came into existence through events and exercises such as Christianization, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid and globalization, among others. According to him, modernity is dominated and influenced by the global North, which is unable to predict and solve the recent global financial crisis. This shows Africa that it is time to re-evaluate the paradigms, concepts and knowledge it has taken from the North and, in the process, to make good use of African traditional knowledge and cultures in trying to find solutions to poverty and underdevelopment.

By examining how generations of writers in Nigeria, for decades, have used literature to criticize the hegemony of military rule and despotism, Sule Egya explains how literature can be a tool for political critique. The chapter includes analyses of poems, articles and books that were used to draw the attention of the Nigerian population to the impact of the mismanagement and maladministration that characterized governance in the country under military rule.

Uyilawa Usuanlele and Victor Osaro Edo use the example of the Jesse-Urhobo–Benin-Edo land conflicts of 1998 to show the pitfalls in the legacy of the British colonial policy of "indirect rule" as theorized by

Mahmood Mamdani. Mamdani argues in his critically acclaimed work *Citizen and Subject* (1996) that administration rested with the chief, the land, the native court and the tribe and that they were vested with powers by the British colonial authorities. In this chapter, Usuanlele and Edo demonstrate that Mamdani's theory neglected some critical aspects of life in colonial Africa, and they refer to the conflicts over the Jesse-Urhobo–Benin-Edo land to suggest that Mamdani overlooked certain historical situations where the chief's political precedence, authority and power did not coincide with the “tribe” or people. The theory also did not take into consideration issues of multi-ethnicity, which may be occasioned by migration. As a result, a disconnection between the chief and the tribe was a major headache in many areas during colonial rule.

In the final chapter, Sanya Osha uses Hannah Arendt's concept of totalitarianism to explain the way unbounded global power is wreaking havoc, mayhem, chaos and disorder in the Niger Delta of Nigeria in the country's quest for profits from oil exploration. Osha shows that the genocidal element theorized in the work of Arendt can be captured and understood by the way multinational companies and Nigerian agencies are deploying terror and violence, thereby also inflicting ecological damage. Osha also uses Mamdani's account of the Rwandan genocide to show another model of political terror in this age of modernity. She concludes, “Since we live in a global village, the Arendtian conception of terror transcends all cultures, political zones and indeed all kinds of territoriality” (177).

This volume offers insights for anyone seeking a better understanding of Africa's current situation, as its contributions work to unmask and unravel the reasons for the African condition.

- Damian Chukwudi Ukwandu