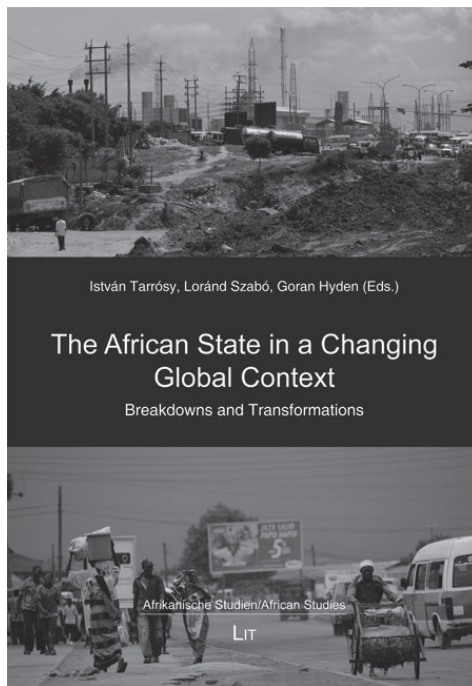


THE AFRICAN STATE IN A CHANGING GLOBAL CONTEXT.

BREAKDOWNS AND TRANSFORMATIONS.

EDITED BY ISTVÁN TARRÓSY, LORÁND SZABÓ AND GORAN HYDEN.

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REVIEW BY: GÁBOR BÚR

HABILITATED PROFESSOR, AFRICA EXPERT

EÖTVÖS LORÁND UNIVERSITY FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

BURGABOR@GMAIL.COM

Habent sua fata libelli – books have their destiny. Some are senescent at the time of their publication, others are like newspapers, carrying information valid for one day and we all know that there is nothing older than a newspaper from yesterday. And some books are like wines, time will not pass on them. Ten years ago a young and dedicated team of the newly established Africa Research Centre of the Department of Political Science and International Studies at the University of Pécs dared to dream big and invited a number of already great names and an even larger number of great hopes in the field of African Studies to contribute to a book with an eloquent title: “The African State in a Changing Global Context. Breakdowns and Transformations”, bringing Africanist research in Central Europe to a wider audience. In an era of accelerating change and global transformations more attention is paid to the changes in Africa and in the light of current processes, it is worth re-reading and re-evaluating previously published studies as well.

With today’s eyes reading the book, we can make the diagnose, it is more relevant than ever. This opinion is valid despite the fact that the introductory lines (Introduction: The African State in a Changing Global Context) tell us otherwise. Goran Hyden, a former president of the African Studies Association (ASA) and emeritus professor in political science at the University of Florida paints a rather pink picture of the African states in their first 25 years after independence: “[...] the African state was largely driven from within by the ambition to establish political order in a world where national sovereignty over issues of development was not in question. National development plans provided a sense of economic and political direction. Government control of development was taken for granted.” (p. 7.) If that would not be enough from the near idyllic presentation, the following sentence will convince everybody: “The two super powers – USSR and USA – got involved but – again – in response to initiatives or demands by African leaders.” (p. 7.) But because of that we should not put down the book, this idealized image may just want to counterpoint the much gloomier reality of the next quarter century which was producing “an increased number of states that have broken down in the process of interacting with the new global forces.” (p. 9.) We can argue about what was before, but we have to agree with the world-renowned author that the African state is no longer insulated from external influences.

Three sections of the book are investigating the nature of those external influences, to be specific: “The New Forces at Play”, “Breakdowns and Transitions” and “New Trends within Africa”. The first two chapters deal with the growing interaction with other countries in the South and the third with the exposure to new information and communication technology. The purpose of the whole book is to trace some of the more important features of the role of the state

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in Africa since independence with a view to highlighting the difference between the past and the present and drawing conclusions with reference to what might be expected in the future.

The first and most comprehensive chapter is written by one of the editors, István Tarrósy: “New South–South Dynamics and the Effects on Africa”. He provides an overview of the relations with countries of the Global South outside of Africa. This relation has become even more significant for African development in the years since the publication of the book. Brazil, China and India are the focus of the study, indicating how each of them approaches Africa differently with its own national interest in mind. Tarrósy clearly demonstrates that although the South-South interactions have intensified since the turn of the century they build on a long tradition going back to the Bandung Conference of 1955 and the Non-Aligned Movement. But in “our deeply interconnected and -dependent world” it is not enough to speak the language of the Bandung conference. “The case of Tanzania is an appropriate illustration of how many factors enter into China’s relations with African countries,” writes Tarrósy. (p. 21.) He also turns our attention to the understanding of the new dynamism centred around the leading actors of the newly industrialized countries in the African continent and to the growing importance of the triangular co-operation model, which includes some Northern partners, like Japan. (p. 20.) Most importantly and still fully validly the author underlines: “the new dynamics created by the new emerging actors will be promoting real change only if the development they launch or strengthen reach out to the local levels of societies at large across the African continent.” (p. 27.)

Almost all the contributors to this book emphasize the significance of the good governance agenda which is more valid today than ever. Also, the integration of the African economies into the global economy received a lot of attention. Our present knowledge only confirms the opinion expressed in the book that in this process Africa is exposed to new constraints but also to new opportunities. More and more countries are also realizing the value of trade and greater interaction among themselves.

The book discusses the challenges to Africa that follow from a closer cooperation with new actors that are in search of their rich mineral and natural resources and those which follow from the rapid rise and growth of digital communications in recent years. The section dealing with breakdowns and transitions focuses on the problems of sustaining regimes or trying to build new ones as old ones collapse. The chapters offer analyses over the situation in Somalia, in Southern Sudan and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Further, such questions as the past, the present and future of national states, nation building, federalism, the restoration of traditional authorities as part of local governance, refugee crises, and methods to gather knowledge about Africa form the core investigations of the rest of the book. If you read all the chapters you will have a better understanding of contemporary Africa from mutations of developmental state, violent conflicts through internal battles to gain control of an existing state to the strengthening of the international positions of the continent. ☀