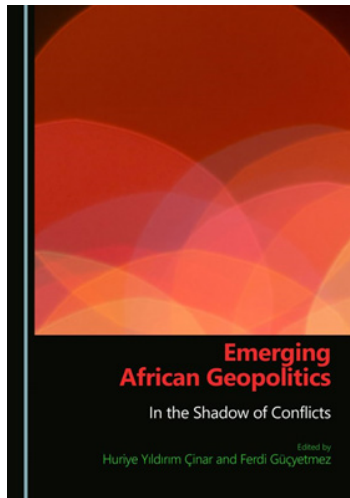


## BOOK REVIEW: EMERGING AFRICAN GEOPOLITICS: IN THE SHADOW OF CONFLICTS

EDITED BY HURIYE YILDRIM CINAR & FERDI GÜÇYETMEZ

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*Emerging African Geopolitics: In the Shadow of Conflicts*, edited by Huriye Yildirim Cinar & Ferdi Güçyetmez (2025), conducts a multidimensional analysis of Africa's geopolitical position in this changing global order. The volume bravely sketches how Africa's internal realities, intertwined with external pressures, can determine the continent's geopolitical relevance. In this era of multipolar competition, this volume is not only timely but also a comprehensive resource to explore Africa's strategic significance in the international geopolitical game. It is recommended for those interested in studying African geopolitics and international relations.

The volume is originally organized across nineteen chapters. However, for the sake of this review, it can be dissected into two major dimensions: internal (themes explaining Africa's domestic and continental realities) and external (themes explaining external powers' rivalry). While the internal dimension of the volume discusses geography, internal politics, security, and Africa's self-definition, the external dimension examines how other powers are defining Africa. In between, however, there are internal bridging concepts that link internal African realities with external geopolitical rivalries, such as energy security, maritime power, security and terrorism, regional integration, neo-colonialism, and multi-polarity concepts.

As the volume's main argument is that the interaction between Africa's internal realities and external rivalries shapes the continent's geopolitical future, the review heavily applied the internal bridging concepts to analyze the internal and external geopolitical linkage of the volume. Thus, the energy security, particularly in Algeria and Egypt (pp. 36-52), enabled the EU to consider North Africa as part of its post-Ukraine war energy diversification strategy (p. 47). This demonstrates how Africa's resources bridge local capability with external necessity, positioning the continent as an indispensable energy collider. Maritime power is the other bridging concept between the two dimensions of the volume. The idea of Africa's closure to the seas and Oceans brought both great benefits and serious threats (pp. 56-65), connected to the second dimension of anti-piracy campaigns, which has created a good opportunity for major global powers to regularize their naval force presence in the region. Security and terrorism are the other bridging concepts in which the existence of border instability and terrorist groups like ISIS and Al-Shabaab on the continent (pp.67-76) helped superpowers to justify their military clustering in Africa, notably in Djibouti (pp.59-60). This link of the dimensions clearly shows how Africa's internal fragility creates an opportunity for external powers to intervene on the continent.

The regional integration concept, which describes intra-African economic cooperation and Afro-Asian solidarity and development paths (pp. 22-33), is linked to the realization of Afro-Asian cooperation through BRICs (pp. 178-181). Neo-colonialism is another key concept, explaining the new scramble for Africa, resource extraction, and dependency (pp. 5-16), as well as Africa's debt trap and aid dependency (pp. 80-82). This is directly connected to France's continuation of colonial structures via economic and military control (pp. 235-238) and China's debt-trap diplomacy and neo-imperial infrastructure influence (pp. 267-272), both of which demonstrate how

economic dependency and weak governance in Africa allow neo-colonial leverage by former colonial and emerging powers.

Multi-polarity is a key concept that helps explain the internal fragmentation of Africa's regional organizations after the Cold War, as well as the continent's energy dependency, which makes it vulnerable to external influence. To navigate this multipolar world (pp. 11-13), Africa must focus on maintaining internal unity and strategic autonomy. This need for unity is linked to Africa's engagement with BRIC nations (pp. 178-181) as a platform to challenge Western dominance. The volume treats BRICs as the external response to Africa's internal call to escape its traditional Western dominance. However, Africa becomes the epicenter of multipolar competition between the traditional Western powers and emerging powers, all competing for strategic assets, resources, political alliances, and market infrastructure.

Theoretically, the editors' courageous attempt to integrate the historical geography with contemporary global power theories is amazing. While the internal dimension uses the historical geographic framework to demonstrate how Africa's geographic environment and historical colonial legacies continue to shape its geopolitical relevance, the external dimension uses contemporary theories of realism to explain how major powers are pursuing their strategic interests in Africa through security, infrastructure, and shifting alliance strategies. From this, one may argue that the analysis favors external power logics over internal epistemologies, positioning Africa as reactive rather than as a producer of geopolitical meaning. The analysis of a "New Scramble for Africa" (p. 12), which examines middle-power rivalries such as India, Brazil, Iran, Japan, and Turkey for influence in Africa, clearly shows that Africa remains an object of competition rather than a geopolitical agent. Furthermore, the application of Wallerstein's World System Theory (p. 7) and power transition theory (p. 10) is used effectively, but insufficiently critiqued, for they weaken the decolonial potential of Eurocentric epistemology, which explains Africa's geopolitical progression through Western epistemic categories rather than allowing Africa to articulate its own geopolitical formula. Although the volume sought to promote the perspectives of Afro-Asia and the global South in its second chapter (pp. 22-25), the foundation laid in the first chapter, with Eurocentric hierarchical power theories, undermines that effort. To a certain extent, the theories may provide a derivative African agency, emerging from competition among external powers (China, India, and the U.S.), rather than an original African agency that enables Africa to develop its own strategic agenda. It would have been beneficial for the volume to incorporate Afrocentric and Southern perspectives, such as Ali Mazrui's (1986) concept of "Global Africa," which suggests that African cultures and ideas shape global politics. Additionally, including Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) idea of "epistemic freedom," Aníbal Quijano's (2000) theory on the "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," and Walter Dignolo's (2011) exploration of "the Dark Side of Western Modernity" could enhance Africa's geopolitical position. This would encourage a deeper appreciation of endogenous African thought.

The volume explains global powers' interventions in Africa by analyzing the engagement of the United States, including AFRICOM and Prosper Africa diplomacy (pp. 123-128), Russia's Wagner-style resource securitization (p. 137), and China's infrastructure statecraft (pp. 262-272). This analysis is dominated by realism, reinforcing a materialist perspective of competition rather than acknowledging Africa's geopolitical agency. Furthermore, the volume's comparative discussions on foreign

power interventions in Africa, such as India (pp. 98-115), Israel (pp.184-197), Iran (pp. 198-209), and the South-South cooperation manifested by BRICs (pp.170-183), demonstrate the de-Westernization of Africa's geopolitics, yet it confuses multipolarity with true emancipation of Africa's geopolitical agency. For instance, if we look at the volume's analysis of how BRICs, as a South-South cooperation, provide an opportunity (pp. 178-180) for diversifying partners, this may not automatically provide true African agency; instead, it may reproduce new dependencies. As such, it would have been better if the volume had shown how African states can strategically navigate power asymmetries and maintain agency in this multipolar global order.

In sum, connecting classical geopolitical theory with contemporary African realities, the volume portrays the continent not as a passive periphery but as a central arena of global multipolar competition. While the interdisciplinary richness and empirical depth of the volume are impressive, its analytical center remains constrained by a realist orthodoxy that maps how others perceive Africa, rather than how Africa perceives the world. Africa's geopolitical significance is indeed increasing amid various conflicts. However, it is important to ask: from whose perspective is this importance rising, and for whom? The next volume, edited by the authors, should aim to develop genuine African geopolitical agency rooted in African epistemology, and I hope this will be achieved.

As a strength, the volume is a very timely and ambitious contribution to redefining Africa's geopolitical position. Integrating diverse perspectives and regions is its greatest achievement. The inclusion of Algeria's Pipelines, Egypt's EastMed Project, and the geopolitical cluster of foreign bases in Djibouti, and China's BRI across Africa in the discussion makes the volume empirically strong. The inclusion of Western, Eastern, and Middle Eastern engagements that demonstrate how Africa serves as a pivotal nexus of global competition makes the comparative scope of the volume equally impressive. The introduction of fresh analytical frameworks, such as eco-geopolitics, global South-South financial autonomy, and Afro-Asian solidarity, into the discussion makes the volume conceptually innovative and equally important for challenging Eurocentric narratives of geopolitical power.

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However, the volume does not escape some limitations. The significant limitation comes from its actor-centric analytical approach, which frames Africa's role through the strategies of external powers that undermine the continent's indigenous geopolitical voice. There is a large dominance of external perspectives. For instance, if we look at the third chapter on North Africa's energy collider, it heavily relies on the Euro-Mediterranean and Eurasian security frameworks, less emphasizing the African-led perspectives on energy transition. The same is true for the fourth chapter, which discusses African Maritime geopolitics and is the victim of external perspectives that focus on interpreting African maritime importance through the Indo-Pacific and foreign strategic lenses rather than the AU maritime policy discourse. The other limitation of the volume stems from a lack of empirical data, which limits its originality and fresh analysis. For example, the fifth chapter makes an informative presentation on terrorism and border issues, yet it relies on historical and secondary data rather than field data.

Despite these limitations, the volume makes a pioneering contribution and provides a foundational framework for redefining Africa's position in the context of multipolarity. As such, the volume can serve as a critical reference for scholars and policymakers seeking to examine Africa's evolving geopolitical role. Finally, the review would like to suggest that future African scholarship must move from a mere descriptive analysis of the geopolitical relevance to developing an African-centered geopolitical theory that can transform the continent from a site of external rivalry into a producer of global geopolitical thought. As Africa's geopolitical relevance and Africa's geopolitical agency are two different things, future African scholars should focus on the latter. For this, the *"Emerging African Geopolitics: In the Shadow of Conflicts"* lays the groundwork, inviting deeper reflection on how Africa can redefine its place in the global geopolitics through conceptual autonomy and strategic self-definition.

## Notes

- Mazrui, A. A. (1986). *The Africans: A triple heritage*. BBC Publications.
- Mignolo, W.D. (2011). Coloniality: The darker side of Western modernity. In *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global futures decolonial options* (pp. 1-26). Duke University Press.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J. (2018). *Epistemic freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and decolonization*. Routledge.
- Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of power and Eurocentrism in Latin America. *International sociology*, 15(2), 215-232.