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constructs of the powerful might not actually be the mirror of terrorism. Surely, if wars can be waged pre-emptively, reactions to occupation and invasion would seem to refer back to early questions of the role of sovereignty in war?

Douzinas' critical lens scrutinises the very bedrock of modern society and offer possibilities for re-interpreting the human condition. There is simply no way to do justice to this books' contribution to knowledge in such a brief review. Costas Douzinas' *Human Rights and Empire: The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism's* muscular social agenda and insightful contribution to the canon of human rights law and the study of cosmopolitanism make it one of the most important critical books of the last decade and perhaps the seminal study on human rights.

## Turning Away from Reality?

A Review of *Africa's Turn?* by Eduard Miguel (ed.). Boston: MIT Press, 2009, pp. 144, ISBN-13: 9780262012898, £9.95

By Tyce Shideler

In *Africa's Turn?*, Professor Edward Miguel paints an optimistic picture of Africa's last ten years of economic development. He suggests that minus the potentially disastrous consequences of unchecked climate change, or a reemergence of the extreme violence just 'below the surface of politics,' Africa can expect to experience continued economic growth and improved livelihoods in the future. Yet a critical part of *Africa's Turn?* consists of the edited responses to his thesis by nine other experts in the field (Olu Ajakaiye, Ken Banks, Robert Bates, Paul Collier, Rachel Glennerster, Rosamond Naylor, Smita Singh, David N. Weil, and Jeremy M. Weinstein). The critical consensus of these responses casts doubt on Miguel's upbeat assessment of Africa's prospects and suggests that his is a painfully selective look at developments on the continent. Nonetheless, many of the respondents also follow Miguel in failing to fully understand the significance of the newfound influence of China.

### **Miguel's thesis**

He begins his discussion in the small Kenyan town of Busia, near the Ugandan border, in the late 1990s. The perceived "African Renaissance" is evident from the increasingly omnipresent sight of ATMs, supermarkets, internet cafes, car rental businesses, cell phones and hotels, ostensibly denoting a new era in African economic and social

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development. For his acknowledgement of the role of poor economic policy and weak state institutions in the previous decades, characterized by economic stagnation and internecine conflict, Miguel's elucidation of contributing factors toward recent economic growth is helpful, but he offers only a partial account.

For instance, Miguel's most ardent conviction is that the widespread progress in democratisation on the continent has significantly contributed to economic growth. He proceeds to highlight the ubiquitous presence of opposition parties, independent media, and open debate on the African political scene, which only a decade or two ago would have been met with state sponsored repression and police brutality. Moreover, this is related to the experience of Africans who fought for political change in the early 90s, and the demise of the Soviet Union and apartheid South Africa. As opposed to providing the reader with substantial locally relevant evidence beyond the presence of multi-party elections, or improved Freedom House democracy scores, Miguel tangentially recounts the recent post-election violence in Kenya and documents how the existence of a strong civil society led to the eventual power-sharing agreement; purportedly with a sense of democracy restored ex-post.

The optimistic approach of the book is also furthered by placing African economies firmly within the emergent globalised political economy. The argument goes: with rising commodity prices largely due to increased East Asian demand, the African states endowed with highly coveted minerals, oil, and agricultural products can only stand to benefit. What is more, with massive increases of trade between Africa and Asia in the last ten years, the proliferation of Chinese firms – investing in everything from oil and mineral production, road and dam construction to telecom infrastructure, not to mention the extension of unconditional Chinese bi-lateral credit lines – Africa's opportunity to diversify economies, move up the supply-chain ladder, and finally break the shackles of dependence on the West's conditional aid industry has finally arrived. While acknowledging the criticism of the ubiquitous Chinese presence on the African civil society scene, Miguel gives little credence to the chorus of anti-Chinese discourses emerging from the traditional aid world.

For this emphasis on democratisation and Africa's integration into the globalised economy to hold, the book has to discredit the role of foreign aid on the continent. Miguel points out that during the sudden rise of aid in the early 1990s there was a "stable stagnation" of African economies. While the argument that a "lack of direct correspondence between aid and economic growth" is sound in its own right, it could be suggested that the raw data indicating the effects of aid should be analysed against various economic growth contributors. For instance, a major focus of Western aid is democracy promotion and the institutionalisation of liberalised free-market domestic economies open to foreign direct investment; all of which in Miguel's own words have contributed to the previously mentioned growth.

Despite the role of aid, Miguel's most poignant caveats surround the

consistent possibility for political violence and instability coupled with deeply entrenched poor governance, which could derail recent improvements. If, as history has repeatedly proven, civil violence is precipitated by economic downturn, Miguel argues, there is a need for 'rapid conflict prevention support' (RCPS) to cushion African societies against shocks in the global economy. Even if Miguel's suggestion is valid, we could argue that in calling on foreign aid to supply such a mechanism, Miguel seems to contradict himself on this key point.

The points brought up in Miguel's analysis are of critical importance. Fortunately, *Africa's Turn?* also offers a forum of astute experts who respond to Miguel's thesis and broaden the debate. I will discuss a number of these commentators' arguments.

### **The forum**

Firstly, Robert Bates, editor of *The Political Economy of Economic Growth in Africa 1960-2000* (2008), points to Miguel's optimistic naiveté, underscored by dubious indicators such as increased multi-party elections (apparently suggesting democratisation) or surging Chinese demand for crude bestowing upon African governments a better rate of return on unrefined commodities. Bates reminds us that with the fall of apartheid there has been a surge of private capital northwards from South Africa, a consistent and generous flow of remittances from Diaspora communities back to Africa, and a shift in the 'petroleum frontier' from the Middle East to West Africa opening up massive new markets for American and European investors.

While Bates concurs with Miguel on the increasingly vigorous Chinese interest in African resources he suggests the 'momentary' historical period of Western imperialism in Africa is but a blip on the timeline of Africa's tendency to look east when negotiating their economic and political futures. Although perhaps an accurate temporal observation, Bates' comment minimises the deep-rooted politico-cultural effects of colonialism on contemporary African governance and erroneously focuses our attention of African-Asian affairs to pre-Western colonial 'eons' of diplomatic and economic engagement toward the East. However brief an historical time period Western colonialism actually was in Africa, the lasting cultural and political effects cannot and must not be underestimated.

In a related manner, Ken Banks attempts to refocus the attention of Miguel's thesis from outside influences and interventions back to the role African agency has played in defining, shaping, and influencing the contemporary socio-economic space. Banks is accurate in stressing the potential of human agency to engage in what one could characterize as a dialectical performance or struggle against social structures and hegemonic ideological apparatuses. However, while agreeing with Banks that Africans have not merely been passive victims or beneficiaries of outside initiatives, it could be

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proposed to Banks that the recent surge in mobile phone sales, services, and the informal economic growth spurred by the influence of mobile technology has not and will not be the determining or elucidating factor in future African economic growth and therefore hardly merits mentioning on its own. While there is evidence to suggest that increased access to markets for agricultural goods and improved coordination with regards to vital supply chain networks with improved communication stimulates trade, and thereby economic growth, the genuine focus should be on the wider improvements in the technological and physical infrastructural context being promoted by China (within which mobile technology is only a small element). Recent Chinese advances in Angola are illustrative of this point. For instance, in recent years the *Chinese Road and Bridge Corporation* has invested US\$ 212 million to reconstruct roads and bridges damaged in the civil war, the *China International Fund* is reconstructing Angola's destroyed rail network, the *China National Electronics Import and Export Corporation* won the tender for the renovation of the water distribution network in Bengo Province, and the *China Jiangsu International* has been contracted to finish construction on the Palace of Justice building and other provincial government buildings around Luanda (Guererro & Manjii, 2008, p. 167).

Olu Ajakaiye, research director at the African Economic Research Consortium, concurs with Miguel on the "recent gains in political freedom" contributing to nascent economic success in Africa. However, Ajakaiye seems to much more accurately elucidate the raw economic indicators. However insufficient the focus, Ajakaiye does suggest that China's increased involvement on the African continent has had significant impact and that increased reliance on Chinese demand for raw unfinished commodities is not a sustainable economic model to follow. More importantly, Ajakaiye reminds us of the economic factors Miguel ignores in his analysis. For instance, without a more comprehensive economic reform package in the US and EU to reduce trade barriers and liberalise markets to allow African goods to reach their shores, African productive capacity will be inherently limited. I would further Ajakaiye's remarks and focus attention on the AGOA legislation, or African Growth and Opportunities Act, passed in the US congress in May of 2000, intended to provide trade preferences for quota and duty-free entry into the US for certain goods originating in Africa. While this legislation has been successful for countries such as Nigeria and Angola, only South Africa has substantially benefited across a variety of economic sectors excluding energy exports. As Ajakaiye rightly points out, until Africa develops the manufacturing capacity to move up the production supply-chain, the risk of unsustainable commodity dependent economies will persist. Furthermore, while refocusing our attention on foreign aid, Ajakaiye only goes one step further than Miguel in pointing out that concentration should not only be on the ineptitude of African governments to handle or properly utilize aid, but on the often misguided, short-sighted, and self-interested social agendas at work within NGO's and multi and

bi-lateral aid agencies themselves.

Rasamond Naylor echoes the importance of a return to agriculture in domestic and international aid agendas on the continent. Naylor succinctly reminds the reader that the gap in GDP per capita between the richest and poorest deciles of sub-Saharan African countries almost doubled from a factor of ten to eighteen between 1975 and 2005. As Naylor writes, the level of neglect toward rural agricultural productivity is deplorable, and it has permeated aid agencies and governments in Africa in the last few decades. To counter Miguel's aforementioned skepticism on the effectiveness of international aid, it is essential to underscore various features of the agricultural sector Naylor reminds us of, which international development agencies could play an important and strategic role. For instance, Naylor directs our attention to the importance of promoting strategies for crop breeding programs, small-scale irrigation, and risk management schemes for rural farmers. Naylor stresses the whole gamut of rural agricultural issues which need to be addressed, however we could further the focus on the role major international aid agencies can play in promoting a 'green revolution' in Africa. By providing high-yielding crop varieties which are affordable, funding the development of 'Ag Universities' with sustainable funding in rural areas to pass on knowledge of the latest and most effective agricultural techniques and technologies, abolishing policies of Western donor agencies related to domestically grown food which is shipped thousands of miles to be distributed as food aid, and providing the means, networks, and infrastructure for increased inter-African agricultural trade, aid agencies could promote the sustainable programs Naylor speaks of.

As a long-established shrewd Africanist, Professor Paul Collier concurs with the critique of Miguel's focus on democratisation as a prime determinant of African economic growth. Collier trumps the much played Kenya card when referencing recent evidence of the shallow nature of African democracy, and astutely reminds us of how Robert Mugabe has transformed Zimbabwean democracy into a farce, essentially devastating the local economy. Collier proposes the notion that perhaps recent economic success in Africa is largely due to the fact that since the 1970's African societies have gained a lot of experience in how *not* to run the economy. In relation to this point, Collier's remarks might be best placed within the context of the more holistic account of the various socio-historical forces at play indicated by Miguel. For instance, although 'just below the surface of politics', many of the conflicts which plagued Africa in the 1990s have since either been resolved or dissipated. Perhaps the economic lessons Collier makes clear to us have blossomed as a result of increased regional stability, acknowledging the role of peacekeepers and multi and bilateral peace-building initiatives. Furthermore, although Miguel reminds us that the evidence of aid effectiveness is inconclusive, we could further Collier's point to include the increasingly prudent and ethical manner in which foreign aid to Africa has been

handled by African elites. In the aftermath of the Cold War power politics and proxy propaganda battles, aid spending has become increasingly scrutinised by donors, and therefore the lessons regarding responsible aid procurement and management learned by African politicians over the last two decades must be included in Collier's 'learning from mistakes' economic model.

### **In sum**

*Africa's Turn?* offers a thumbnail critique from a variety of researchers of the contemporary discourse on Africa's social and economic future. In order to facilitate continued growth, the hope Edward Miguel places in "the resourcefulness and creativity of the African people", must be continued to be analyzed through this kind of broad, multi-layered commentary. Both the academic world and the aid world should welcome the type of discourse conducted in *Africa's Turn?*, even if this review has highlighted many of the limitations of Miguel's thesis.

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