

Africa's Challenge to International Relations Theory. Kevin C. Dunn & Timothy M. Shaw (eds). New York: Palgrave Publishers Ltd, 2001, 242 pp.

Editors Kevin C. Dunn and Timothy M. Shaw boldly step forward to challenge established international relations theories and the ways in which IR theories are formulated. After reviewing the fundamental elements of core IR models, including neorealism, neoliberalism, and structuralism, Dunn reminds readers that Africa has conventionally remained absent from traditional theory-making. In other words, in terms of political analysis, Africa has become marginalized. Dunn then insists that to the contrary, African(ist) issues are central to understanding today's international relations, although not necessarily along the parameters of "old-school" Western IR theory.

Africa's Challenge to International Relations Theory focuses on the concepts of security, power, states, nations, and sovereignty to underline the holes in current methods of analysis. The articles included within this compilation are organized into three parts: Part I begins by dismantling traditional IR theory; Part II emphasizes the absence of African(ist) content in leading IR analyses; Part III outlines policy implications based on the preceding material.

For readers relatively unfamiliar with the conventions of international relations theory, Dunn and Shaw include writings that provide historical background to the Westphalian System, and on the beginnings of IR as a political science. For readers who are well-versed in IR theory, this book offers a fascinatingly unconventional examination of Africa as a unique region characterized by a similarly unique role in IR studies. The articles in this volume combine overviews of colonial and post-colonial dynamics in Africa with strongly supported suggestions for a revised IR theory that takes these dynamics into due consideration. The contents of each individual article seem united by a theme that highlights the distinctiveness of African institutions. The articles identify as an important concept the idea that Africa cannot, and must not, be held to a universal standard of moral authority. Although sovereignty encompasses many diverse forms, a Western interpretation of sovereignty and statehood has come to dominate others interpretations. Not only do several articles bring to question the [Western] perception of African states, but they also question the basic importance of the state (or lack thereof) as an African institution. After overturning several well-established theories on issues of sovereignty and statehood, a number of the authors present possible alternatives to IR theorizing, such as a broadening of social knowledge, or a reevaluation of the very concept of statehood.

This book does not merely dare to suspect the gospel of IR traditionalists, but it goes further to question popularly studied trends, such as liberalism and globalism. Without discounting these trends entirely, the authors find, and try to fill, the loopholes within such approaches to IR analysis. The authors point out areas in which others may have failed to acknowledge Africa as an essential diversifying contributor to major IR questions. Rather than seeking to make room for African(ist) analysis in existing theories, Dunn and Shaw emphasize the need to revise theories altogether. Africa, being a singular representative of myriad non-Western conventions, brings to light the gaping holes in IR studies to date.

Far from being an empty treatise on the flaws on IR theory, *Africa's Challenge to International Relations Theory* suggests policy implications built on a strong foundation of evidence and analysis. James Jude Hentz proposes regionalism as a revised approach to foreign relations toward Africa. Timothy M. Shaw provides a checklist for policy makers, including the expansion and diversification of peace building efforts.

This book is ideal for those seeking an explanation for Africa's unique position in the world, and for IR theorists wishing to find an enlightened reconsideration of the conventions in their field. The authors/editors invoke frustration with regards to the marginalization of Africa, while simultaneously generating urgency for the need to tackle the flaws of IR theory and to create an appreciation for Africa there within. In their commentary, the editors brush the line of didacticism, but do not cross it. The articles in this volume communicate a general tone of regret and exigency, but in the process do not completely attack the validity of the theories they criticize. Dunn and Shaw clearly acknowledge the need to offer varied perspectives from a wide source of authors, and to include historical, theoretical, and political views. The occasional inclusion of primary sources facilitates balance between an objective presentation of facts and events, and a potentially subjective author/editor interpretation of the issues.

Africa's Challenge to International Relations Theory achieves its goal of problematizing conventions. However, it also goes beyond, venturing into possible solutions for theory revision. In stressing future implications, this book demands the attentive consideration of Africanists; as source of historical example, as a model for regional and global trends, and as a superlatively influential factor in IR studies. This text ought to be revisited, so as to gauge the progress of policies and attitudes toward Africa in the future.

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