

# BOOK REVIEW

**Dawn Nagar and Charles Mutasa, eds. *Africa and the World: Bilateral and Multilateral International Diplomacy*.** Chaim, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. xxxv + 520 pp. List of Abbreviations. List of Tables. Notes. \$129.00. Cloth. ISBN: 978-3-319-62589-8.

Africa's external relations have in general received inadequate scholarly attention. Dawn Nagar and Charles Mutasa seek to address this shortfall through their volume, *Africa and the World: Bilateral and Multilateral International Diplomacy*, an edited compilation of thoughts and perspectives on Africa's multifaceted interactions with the rest of the world. Together with other contributors, Nagar and Mutasa contextualize the diverse patterns of Africa's external relations during and after the Cold War through case studies of core bilateral and multilateral issues to empirically underpin their central thesis: Africa's relations with key external state actors and multilateral institutions have historically been nebulous and insecure. The case studies are diverse and comprehensive, one example being the military cooperation which identified Angola, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mozambique, and Somalia as main beneficiaries of Washington's military supports for the continent and, conversely, Nigeria, Zimbabwe under Mugabe, Sudan, and the Central Africa Republic as hesitant regarding their military relationships with the United States. They also examine, among other topics, economic relations, focusing particularly on China's non-interference trade deals with Africa as alternative to Western conditionalities and political interferences, and African migration to Europe, with Libya as a notable Mediterranean outward-bound, constituting first thematic priority in Italy's engagement with Africa.

Unfortunately, the same central argument could not be reinforced with sufficient theoretical foundations, save for mere mentioning and scanty exposition of the underlying principles of realism, neoliberalism, Marxism, and the Westphalian model as applicable theoretical paradigms. Besides, the contributors to the book relied merely on a qualitative case studies approach, which is not adequate for this study. By raising specific concerns about Africa's dynamic and complex composition of 55 (rather than 54) formally sovereign states with divergent and, perhaps, largely irreconcilable engagements outside its continental confines, Nagar and Mutasa suggestively drag the book into the borderline politics around the statehood of Western Sahara and Somaliland (Bereketeab, ed., *Self-Determination and*

*Secession in Africa: The post-colonial state* [Routledge, 2015]; Solomon, “The Legality of Secession: the Legitimacy of Separatist Movements in Western Sahara, Somaliland and South Sudan” [*Xavier Journal of Politics* 3(1), 2012]).

The book’s pocket approach by which Africa is treated as a single country or, at best, a collection of few purposely selected states is not only restrictive, but also not an accurate reflection of the continent’s external relations. By this, the intention is not to underestimate the daunting task of a continent-wide treatment for Africa’s external engagements which are as diverse, if not more, as its numeric state characters. Aside from the fact that the book also contains no serious discourse on the subtle roles of state-owned multinational corporations and private investors as another vital element of Africa’s external relations, its credibility is further weakened by some unsubstantiated statements. A few examples include: “Norway received, proportionally to its size, a relatively large number of asylum seekers: a record of 30,000 new applications in 2015” (301); “In relation to the global youth unemployment total of 71,000,000 in 2017,... this population growth is by far the fastest in the world” (322); “For many African countries the remittances from migrants abroad constitute a larger amount of money more than official development aid” (328).

Furthermore, the book establishes no significant link with the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) as another phase in the industrial world that attributes automated revolutionary changes to virtually everything (Armando et al., *Industrial Cyberphysical Systems: A Backbone of the Fourth Industrial Revolution* [IEEE IEM, 11(1), 2017]. The 4IR drew its first significant global attention during the annual Davos meeting of World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2016 (Prisecaru, *Challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution* [Knowledge Horizons - Economics, 8(1), 2016]). It would have offered a unique opportunity for Nagar and Mutasa to bring into context the need to radicalize the current approach to Africa’s external roles in terms of bilateral and multilateral dealings, bearing in mind the dynamics of the 4IR.

But for the identified scholarly oversights and, particularly, the complexity of a complete narrative which was pretentiously assumed, *Africa and the World: Bilateral and Multilateral International Diplomacy* offers credible insights into Africa’s external engagements in a unique and novel way.

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### For additional reading on this subject, the ASR recommends:

Burgess, Stephen F. 1998. “African Security in the Twenty-First Century: The Challenges of Indigenization and Multilateralism.” *African Studies Review* 41 (2): 37–62. doi:10.2307/524826.

Shaw, Timothy M. 1975. “The Political Economy of African International Relations.” *Issue* 5 (4): 29–38. doi:10.1017/S1548450500000482.