

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

Christopher Rowan. *The Politics of Water in Africa: The European Union's Role in Development Aid Partnership.* London and New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2009. International Library of African Studies, no. 24. xiii + 203 pp. Glossary. Abbreviations. Notes. Tables. Photographs. Appendixes. Bibliography. Index. \$85.00. Cloth.

Its title notwithstanding, this eccentric little study is most definitely not about water. Neither is it about the politics of water nor about the politics of water in Africa. And despite its subtitle, this book is also not about “the European Union’s role in development and partnership.” Rather, this study sets for itself the more limited task of discerning whether published claims of EU “partnership”—read “equal and respectful relations”—with ACP countries match on-the-ground realities. An underarticulated comparative case study from Lesotho and Mozambique serves as “evidence.” Not surprisingly, the answer is no: the rhetoric does not match the reality.

To arrive at this rather obvious conclusion, the author takes the reader on a meander through varied terrain: chapter 1, on the “human right to water,” which is in no way integrated with the rest of the book; a long second chapter entitled “Friends or Foes” that presents fairly standard descriptions of a myriad of developmental actors and mixes them in with equally standard synopses of the philosophies of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and African thinking about *ubuntu*; a third chapter on “development or dictatorship” in which the author seems to be talking about motives for development aid; a results-style chapter 4 in which the author walks us through each of his fieldwork interviews, many with “Lesothans” [*sic*]; three chapters that purport to reinforce the “proof” that the EU–ACP relationship is unequal; and a final chapter stating that “In conclusion, it is possible to suggest that the concept of aid between equal partners is impossible” (144).

Accompanying the text are four photos that add little to the argument, endnotes and a bibliography (which are similarly limited), two appendixes, and an unhelpful two-page index.

All in all, I found this to be a very weak academic study whose methodology demonstrates all of the pitfalls that Western scholars of Africa—especially those purporting to investigate the life experiences of Africans—should be careful to avoid: an inadequate amount of time spent on the continent (ten days in this case); a narrowly selected group of interviewees and informants (in this case, fifteen or so “elite” spokespersons, though why these individuals should be accepted as an adequate basis upon which to make a truth claim is never established), complemented by some opinions from “the man in the street”; then a few more interviews in Brussels. The results from this “extensive fieldwork” (111) are then placed in the context of an assorted mix of possibly noncomplementary theories—discourse, postmodernity, classical political philosophy, and so on. Even with all of

these weaknesses, the misleading title is perhaps the most egregious problem of all: it does a complete disservice to the many serious scholars and policymakers around the world working on the politics of water in Africa, who have long accepted the contradictions between rhetoric and reality in EU–Africa relations, but who strive to find ways forward in the search for “some water, for all, forever, together” (the slogan of the South African Ministry of Water Affairs).

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