

Book Review

Fernando Arenas, ***“Lusophone Africa: Beyond Independence”***, Minneapolis MN and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011, Price - pb £14, Pages – 368, ISBN – 978-0-81666-984-4

Chetan Tokas

Assistant Professor, Dept of Political Science,
Motilal Nehru College, University of Delhi, New Delhi.

The book is a significant contribution in conceptualizing Lusophone Africa while drawing experiences from globalization and post-colonial perspectives. The countries being referred to as in the book have been categorized with their distinct historical experiences but it appears different while discussing their structural differences which denies comprehensive coherent dimension in order to analyse these different perspectives. Geographical dimensions of these countries differentiate them on the basis of their natural resources in the first place. Sao Tome Principe and Angola are dominated by oil resources while Mozambique is dominated by variety of natural resources clubbed with the size of the country and its demography. Cape Verde is primarily categorized as a dry archipelago associated with an industrious population. Cape Verde has benefitted and has made best use of their remittances with the help of migrants and tourist industry. Guinea Bissau is a relatively smaller economy while comparing with other Lusophone African countries.

Fernando Arena's book has been conceptualized in background of realizing differences of post-colonial political system which have emerged and thus realizing differences of various political cultures. Diverse forms of post independence political developments do not suggest a common account for all these countries which was otherwise envisaged in a common colonial past. The reader hence has to develop a perspective while considering the case studies of various Lusophone countries not as entirely coherent political systems but considering them as different exclusive political systems developed after their respective struggles of independence.

The author draws episodes from three exclusive case studies of the musical tradition of Cape Verdean social fabric. The author then begins to discuss diverse facets of Lusophone African cinema before going on to showcase the Angolan literature and its characteristic features. In this section of the discussion, the author conceptualizes a 'Lusophone transatlantic matrix' which combines the characteristic features of Portugal culture, African countries and experiences from Brazil. The reader finds it comfortable while analyzing experiences of this matrix from a global perspective. The book conveys examples of uniqueness of these experiences. Excerpts of vibrant musical traditions, cultural based media, diverse literature and various discourses of cinema present the diversity constituted in African tradition. The author also tries to correct the phenomenal neglect discussed while studying Lusophone African countries as it gathers less attention than other Anglophone and Francophone countries.

Author's idea of a 'Lusophone transatlantic matrix' is based on an intellectual discourse which interprets the historical commitment of these countries while drawing experiences from shared destiny. The author recognizes role of African countries and their experiences in establishing ideas and gathering attention of an academic discourse while recognizing intellectual terms of the matrix under Brazilian and Portuguese influences. Under such influences, the author argues a condition wherein whatever intellectual matrix is contributed by Lusophone African countries has already been determined by other significant Lusophone countries.

The Lusophone transatlantic matrix is evaluated from two broad perspectives by the author. He analyses post-colonial and globalization perspectives in order to deal with global community which is otherwise loosely defined. The author recognizes global forces based on expansion of capital, its reproduction, security dimensions, regulation regimes and order maintained in the society.

In subsequent sections, the author suggests analysing the nature and processes constituted in ideological and structural conditions of the newly independent countries while formation of their respective independent nationalistic political systems. Post-colonial critical engagements clubbed with historical imaginaries of nation building have been evaluated by the author under critical trajectories of crisis management of most of African countries struggling to deal with their civil wars, natural disasters, and corruption of political elites. Indifference of African political elites towards suffering of people is suggested under the post-colonial critical perspective which justifies the failure of African economies. This justification of the failure of African economies in integrating with economies of the rest of the world also reflects the results of failure of rights of freedom and prosperity.

Discourses of this argument in the book are appealing to the reader as it coincides with African terms and African experiences. The author however, recognizes the fact that this appeal could be based on various post-colonial and global definitions. As the author discusses these two perspectives in detail in other sections of the book, it seems an unobjectionable fact that the author has tried to build an argument which is revolving on the dimensions of nation building from historical perspectives of post-colonial experiences and contemporary debates of global economy and capital exchange.

The debate on post-colonial perspective defines temporal dimensions based on local observations but fails to define the structures established by engaging post-colonial critiques. The extent of engaging post-colonial critiques has made it possible for such societies to inherit the structures. Local dialect, culture, tradition and debates are characteristic features of the post-colonial perspective defined by regional African observations. The global perspective however tries to draw attention and analyse the interconnectedness without emphasizing on particular structures of colonial rule.

This perspective denies any attention to the capitalism and characteristic features determined by local responses. Readers at certain sections might not be able to establish the definitive roles of the global and post-colonial perspectives as it poses a question of the relativity of both these discourses. It remains as critical narrative about the necessity of analyzing these discourses for historical, academic and experimental purposes. Answer to all such academic observations in this work could relate to interesting discussions which might be suitable for further research methodologies. The Lusophone transatlantic matrix argument provides a comprehensive foundation to further research based methodologies related to area studies and other case study methodologies.