

LANG FAFA DAMPHA, *The United Nations, the Bretton Woods Institutions and African Reconstruction*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2014, 165 pp., ISBN: 978-2-343-04585-6.

Studies on institutional development on the African continent after World War II are in a phase of relative growth. The contributions of the institutionalism school in this field currently led by Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson (AJR) have generated a stream of interesting researches on issues of economic development in the long run. This work of Dampha is oriented towards the institutional approach, but from an internationalist perspective where multiple political and economic actors that interfere with the social, political and economic life of the nations involved. In this sense, Dampha away from the institutional perspective of "national" scope that defines the theoretical bases of the AJR, shows a review of the impact on Africa of the great political and economic institutions created after World War II. The thesis defended so clear throughout the book focuses on the African continent abandonment of the great guidelines that laid the foundations for European recovery after the conflict, considering the limited role played by African countries and development configuration of these institutions with global reach. The marginalization of the African continent in these institutions would reflect long-lasting economic extraction path for centuries, following Marxist theory advocated by Walter Rodney in the 1970s.

This book is divided into two main chapters. The first makes a survey of the concept of underdevelopment and its application to Africa, culminated by an analysis of the functioning of the main institutions of the United Nations, especially the Security Council. The second chapter provides an overview of the Bretton Woods Institutions, offering a direct connection to structural adjustment policies applied in Africa and its impact on social and economic welfare in the long term.

On a more concrete level, Dampha marks the transformation of the African socio-economic structure caused by the colonial occupation. The author highlights the existence of relatively traditional representative institutions (in assemblies) that united society (p.19), as has also exposed Adama Diouf (2012) with respect to the community *leboue* on the peninsula of Cape Verde. Dampha highlights the key role played by colonial institutions and the weight of slavery in developing economies dependent and extroverted (p.25), following in this respect the guidelines set by Rodney and Samir Amin. The consequences of the slave trade, colonization and post-colonial relationships are designated as an element that has marked economic and social future of the continent, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, the author repeatedly insists on the need to rethink and design a model of democratic and representative international institutions, taking into account the needs and specificities of African countries and regions. As an example of the inability of these institutions, he points out the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, where over 800,000 people were killed in a month. In this regard, the role of the Security Council as a supposed guarantor of international stability is exposed. A stability that is not representative in its permanent members who enjoy veto

privilege in the agreed resolutions. The African continent is not represented in this institution, which suffers from over-representation of Western countries, grouped also in other institutions of great international importance such as the G8 or G21, formed outside the democratic principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Faced with this accumulation of power by the “Western” countries, the Organization for African Unity (OAU) filed a resolution in Harare in 1997 where it called for the reconfiguration of the Security Council, two permanent members with veto power: the resolution was rejected. This first chapter closes with an analysis of the signed trade agreements since the 1990s, and especially those achieved in the Uruguay Round (1994), focused on agricultural issues and the structure of agricultural subsidies in industrialized countries. According to the author, this institutional structure built from large Western financial centers favors the continued emergence of food crises in the southern countries, grounded in unequal trading formulas promoted by the World Trade Organization (WTO) (pp. 88-91). Similarly, international agreements on the market of medical patents (TRIPS) are a hindrance to the development of national health systems in countries under economic troubles. These agreements benefit only large pharmaceutical corporations at the expense of the weaker population which cannot access medical treatment. The last major health crisis in Africa with Ebola epidemic (2013-2014) has revealed the inadequacy of resources available on the ground and the slow response of the international institutions to provide a coordinated and effective response.

The second part of the book focuses on the role played by the Bretton Woods institutions on the African continent. A performance, that according to the author, reproduced extractive models developed during the colonial occupation. He gives an exact definition of the functioning of the colonial extractive economy and how this model persisted:

“African countries during colonization specialized almost essentially in growing one or two types of crops, rarely three, such as groundnut in Senegal and Gambia. The growth of the economies of these countries was thus determined by the fluctuations in the prices of their commodities on the world market, which was the inevitable consequence of monoculture. During colonization the majority of the population of Africa were farmers; their prosperity or poverty, after independence, therefore depended directly on the prices of their products (...) Diversification by introducing cash crops for exports is good for the economy, but the colonial policy which almost coerced Africans to abandon the production of food crops necessary for the survival of the population to exclusively focus on the production of raw materials and other cash crops for export to the metropolis is done out of the context of constructive diversification, thereby causing a long-lasting negative impact on African economies whose legacy is still present” (p.98).

The payment of external debt worsened the dependent financial structures of the Independent African countries. In addition, the indebtedness of African nations and the structural adjustment programs promoted by the IMF and World Bank in the 1980s and 1990s have been a serious challenge to economic

development in Africa. Thus, the modernization of the African economy after the colonial occupation was based on external financing and increased specialization in the production of commodities, whose value relative has experienced a sharp drop between 1977 and 2001. The issue has also been highlighted by the specialists in maritime transport history, Ekberg, Lange and Merok (2012: 88-105) who have highlighted this fall in global commodity freights. In dependent economies, the external trade balance is based on the price of these commodities: a fall in value represents the technical bankruptcy and failure to pay the debt with creditors. Furthermore, it must be added the upward movements in interest rates of external debt to be paid by the African states which moved from 3-4% above the 18% between 1970s and 1980s. Dampha explores the impact of these financial decisions on regional economies and how these effects have prevented sustained economic development. Moreover, the author points out the existence of other institutions such as the International Development Association, created in 1960 and linked to the World Bank, aimed at boosting economic development in the countries that had just achieved political independence. In this section, the author shows the limited impact of these progressive policies against structural adjustment plans. It is about the role of the IMF where he takes a more critical perspective at different levels. On the one hand, it calls into question the interest in the economic development of nations after the application of structural adjustment plans under neoliberal criteria. The author cites the case of Gambia, and how policies designed under the "Washington consensus" has been a failure in most of African countries, especially from the point of view of human development indicators (p.110). The neoliberal "recipe" imposed on these plans often neglected the local-regional factors (*embeddedness*) and the historical trajectories that define the socioeconomic structure. The share of the lion of the negative consequences of these plans often falls on the working classes, which are not able to access to essential public services such as healthcare. The budgetary adjustment, liberalization of sectors and the privatization of public companies is part of the neoliberal strategy imposed from large circles of economic power, whose effects have been very negative on the African continent in the long term. Following this argument, Dampha analyzes the percentage distribution of power by states in the IMF, noting that the US (main contributor) has between 17 and 20 percent of the vote in the decision-making. The first African country representation is the South African Union, with 0.9% share of participation (p.122). With these proportions, the author claims a sparsely imbalance of powers that benefited the large contributors: United States, Japan, EU, Australia, Canada, etc. (p.125). Therefore, these institutions do not seem to guarantee an economic model of balanced development on a global scale, according to the statutory principles agreed at Bretton Woods. These agreements that should be mentioned not enjoy the support of African states, still sunk under the domination of colonial nations. By contrast, economic disparities and inequality have grown significantly and globally since 1960, increasing the gap between the North and the South, and especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

As alternatives, Dampha proposes a new, more plural and democratic international order based on cooperation policies between countries: a multilateral

representative system that ensures a balanced distribution of wealth and incomes worldwide. To do this, the proposes an economic recovery programs on the African continent; a kind of Marshall Plan for the XXI century in Africa to repair the economic consequences of the slave trade, colonial occupation and development of structural adjustment policies since 1980. An idealist approach by the author, but it reflects the crisis current global economic system. Finally, it should be noted that the bibliography and documentation used are not well identified throughout the text, despite being organized at the end of the manuscript. This aspect makes reading difficult and impairs the overall look of the book. However, that does not overshadow the content and the quality of the arguments exposed by the author.

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**ELISABETH VALLET (ed.), *Borders, Fences and Walls. State of Insecurity?*, Ashgate, Farnham, Surrey, 2014, 298 pp., ISBN: 978-1-4724-2966-7.**

**CHIARA BRAMBILLA, GIANLUCA BOCCI, JUSSI LAINE y JAMES W. SCOTT (eds.), *Borderscaping: Imaginations and Practices of Border Making*, Ed. Ashgate, 2015, 278 pp., ISBN: 978-1-4724-5146-0.**

Cuando pensamos en qué consiste una frontera nos viene enseguida a la mente la idea de una raya discontinua dibujada sobre un mapa de cartón que separa territorios diferenciándolos a uno y otro lado. La frontera es, en efecto, un espacio físico concreto dotado de personalidad propia que trasciende en el imaginario colectivo hasta configurar un símbolo iconográfico de seguridad nacional y de protección frente a potenciales enemigos externos. Nos referimos evidentemente al espacio fronterizo que puede adquirir la dimensión de una región situada en la periferia de las naciones y que es objeto de una gestión específica por parte de los Estados como límite cerrado de su territorio (REITEL y ZANDER, 2014). Estos límites políticos son comúnmente aceptados y reconocidos internacionalmente, llegan a convertirse en auténticos guardianes de la soberanía y están señalados por hitos y símbolos específicos del poder, del control, de la defensa y de la seguridad (LÓPEZ TRIGAL, 2015: 259-260).<sup>1</sup>

La frontera, como barrera trazada arbitrariamente en los confines de un país que lo separa de sus vecinos, no sólo delimita el territorio sobre el que un Estado ejerce su soberanía, sino que demarca y configura también las identidades que se pretenden salvaguardar, los procesos culturales, las dinámicas políticas, económicas y hasta la propia rutina cotidiana. Una frontera constituye una realidad humana, una construcción social y un ente territorial, que va más allá

<sup>1</sup> LÓPEZ TRIGAL, L. (dir.): *Diccionario de Geografía aplicada y profesional. Terminología de análisis, planificación y gestión del territorio*, Universidad de León, León 2015.