

Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo (ed.). *Liberal Democracy and its Critics in Africa: Political Dysfunction and the Struggle for Social Progress*. London: Zed Books. 2005. Distributed by UNISA Press (South Africa) and CODESRIA Books. xviii + 213 pp. Index. Paper. **NO PRICE GIVEN.**

Editor Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo provides readers with a disappointing collection of descriptive articles on liberal democracy and the emergence of democratic institutional processes in select African countries. *Liberal Democracy and its Critics in Africa* is a confusing read that does not live up to its stated aims. The book contains several engrossing chapters of some importance to Africanist scholars while others are less reader-friendly, with priority given to esoteric jargon and abstract reasoning.

Lumumba-Kasongo sets the tone of difficult prose in both the Preface and his introductory Chapter One. The two contributions openly contradict one another, with the Preface providing some evidence of a common theoretical and methodological thread to the book, and a series of ‘critical’ questions that the book aims to address. A critical analysis of the Western principles of liberal democracy, articulated by “...African scholars who want to see social progress happen on the continent” (p. x) is the stated goal. That the book will offer new insight into the consolidation of liberal democracy on the continent seems assured by the end of Preface. Chapter One, in contrast, reads like a cut-and-paste job of Lumumba-Kasongo’s previous writing on the subject, with no clear argument emerging on which the individual contributions to the book can hang their collective hat. Common themes, or points of interest, are not revealed. Instead, readers are asked to struggle with viscous prose that ultimately befuddles more than it illuminates. Also clear are the Marxist leanings of the editor, and an overall lack of commitment to liberal democracy despite earlier arguments that liberal democracy can and will make a significant difference in the lives of ordinary Africans as they “struggle for economic, social and cultural progress” (p. 16). Lumumba-Kasongo’s Conclusion does little to clear up the confusion; he even introduces unexamined themes!

Despite the lack of guiding light, there are some gems to be found in the book, particularly for English-speaking readers. Essays from French-speaking scholars are reproduced in English (chapters 2, 3, 5 and 8). Of interest are Tlemçani's article on the police state in Africa, and Onsarigo's contribution on the participation of women in Kenyan democratization processes. The book attempts to provide a theoretical and methodological contribution to the literature, but fails to provide new insight. It does nothing to voice the 'ordinary' Africans on whose behalf the book has been published, and indeed, so dedicated. Africa is presented unproblematically, as a monolithic continent; not one of great diversity and differing forms of liberal democracy from, for example, democratic Botswana to collapsing Zimbabwe, and the variety of countries between those two poles.

Instead, we are blindly-led through the procedures and processes of electoral democracy in a handful of African countries, rather than critical analyses of the global, national and local actors that are promoting liberal democracy across Africa, and why. The stated promise of the book to provide valuable insights on the functioning of liberal democracy from the perspective of Africa scholars living in the communities on which they are writing falls far short. *Liberal Democracy and its Critics in Africa* may appeal to a select group of senior scholars, but is of limited use for students, policy-makers or practitioners.

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