

Globalization and Politics in the Economic Community of West African States

A book review by Shola Omotola

Eric M. Edi, *Globalization and Politics in the Economic Community of West African States*. Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 2007, xii+209pp, ISBN 13: 978-1-59460-283-2.

The series in which this important book appears –*Carolina Academic Press Studies on Globalization and Society*- seeks to publish provocative books that not only address controversial issues, but also offer innovative methodologies and normative analysis, presented in accessible and engaging manner. Eric M. Edi's book is an excellent contribution to the understanding of the dynamics of globalization in West Africa, which largely satisfies these conditions.

Organized into eight chapters, the first three chapters basically provide background issues to the analytical fulcrum of the book. The first situates the problem within methodological and theoretical perspectives, integrating what he called Africa-centered perspective, autocentricity and political interaction framework into a multi-paradigmatic approach. The second traces the history of ECOWAS, underscoring its evolutionary processes, the role of core actors in the process most notably Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Eyadema of Togo and Gowon of Nigeria, among others, and its accomplishments in both political and economic terms. Chapter three explores the concept of globalization, reflecting on contending perspectives, the same way it tries to domesticate it to local realities.

From chapter four, the book began to interrogate the impact of globalization on politics in west Africa, underscoring the impact of domestic and external pressures for democratization, both of which compelled constitutional changes across most West African States, either by drafting new constitutions as in Benin, Ghana or revising/amending existing constitutions as in Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal. There were also notable changes in terms of political party and party system, elections and electoral system, and the reconfiguration of the media and civil society landscape. Edi did well analyzing the ups and downs of these changes, including the institutional environment within which they had to operate and how these impact the search for democratic consolidation. Chapter five furthers these discussions by interrogating the question of democracy in West Africa, rooting its arguments in comparative literature on democratization.

Edi then makes a powerful case for adapting democracy to local realities. He suggests six propositions –the autochthony of democracy in Africa, alteration of the western heritage, de-centering African politics by re-centering the people, moving the trend up, a diversity of routes and the demystification of the ballot box- that should mix to form the bedrock of an African-centered theory of democracy (pp.89-90).

Proceeding from this premises, Edi attempts a behavioral analysis of democracy in Chapter six, using the lenses of gender, religion, ethnicity, the military and security forces, political representation, government, rule of law and the mass media. He demonstrates sufficient comparative insights on these issues vis-à-vis democracy in West Africa, as much as he gave penetrating analysis about the travails of these important democratic variables. Edi then proceeds to chart his own ideal “roadmaps for the consolidation of democracy” (pp.141-158). For him, consolidating democracy in West Africa requires revisiting African socialism and communalism, most especially given its autochthony to Africa, the decentralization of power to allow popular participation in governance, mainstreaming gender issues into governance through women empowerment, civic/political education and the strengthening of political parties. In the final chapter, Edi discusses the idea of Pan-West Africanism, with illustrations from the ECOMOG experiment, together with persuasive arguments for multi-polarity, where “the big four: Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal and Core d’Ivoire” (p.164) will call the shot.

Despite its contributions to our understanding of the dynamics of globalization in West Africa, the book is not entirely flawless. Its limitations include its limited reflection on the “how” of its suggestions; its exclusive political focus at the expense of the economic dimensions, which tends to create the impression, wrongly though, that politics and economy are mutually exclusive. An inclusion of the citizenship question, which represents a critically troubling and vexed issue in the democratization process in most West African states could have served to strengthen the analysis of the behavioral components of democracy. Also, a curious reader may want to query: who is Eric M Edi? The book keeps readers in total darkness in this regard. A short note about the author, as is conventionally the case, rather than the exception, would have settled that.

Nevertheless, these shortcomings are too marginal to rob the book of its exceptional quality. For sure, Edi’s *Globalization and Politics in the Economic Community of West African States*, is an excellent and elegant piece, which critically scrutinizes the changing form and character of political globalization in West Africa. Its outstanding qualities include its extensive research base, comparative insights, conceptual and theoretical innovations and analytical simplicity. Its alternative prescriptions are also worth careful considerations. Without any doubt, Edi’s book has enriched our understanding of the dynamics of political globalization from a pan-African point of view. The book will certainly find useful expression in scholarly, research and decision making circles with interest in comparative West African political globalization, both at home and in the Diaspora.