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Book review:

Tella, O., & Motala, S. (Eds.). (2020). From Ivory Towers to Ebony Towers: Transforming Humanities Curricula in South Africa, Africa, and African American Studies. South Africa: Jacana Media, 563 p.

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Рецензия на книгу:

From Ivory Towers to Ebony Towers: Transforming Humanities Curricula in South Africa, Africa, and African American Studies / ed. by O. Tella, S. Motala. South Africa: Jacana Media, 2020. 563 p.

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The reviewed book is devoted to one of the key elements of the soft power — education and more precisely to the curriculum transformation in humanities in Africa, with special focus on the concepts of Africanisation, indigenization, and decolonization, while debunking the hold of Eurocentric epistemologies and paradigms on Africa's educational sector¹. The narrative of the book looks quite dynamic, presenting the current position of South African higher education, which continues to epitomize the European educational model. However, the book is not limited to this,

offering constructive strategies for curriculum transformation in South Africa. The precious contribution is the set of persistent efforts from within the continental of Africa and diaspora such as African-American studies in the United States, aimed at counting the misrepresentation of African methodology, epistemology, and history as primitive. The book's fundamental methodology is derived from a variety of African history, theories, and traditions.

The book's chronological standpoint is between 1950 and 1960, which marked one of the

¹ Studies on African IR as a social science were previously reviewed at Vestnik RUDN. International Relations [Amuhaya 2019]. (*Editor's note*).

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most crucial eras in the rise of Africa. On the one hand, it signalled the end to colonization, while, on the other, gave birth to the mainstream schools of decolonization, aiming to challenge the misrepresentation of African history. Especially such institutional centres as the *Ibadan School of History*, the *School of Political Economy in Dar es Salaam*, and the *School of Culture in Dakar* worth highlighting, as in their research they were committed to the nationalist historiography and special oral sources to challenge Eurocentric epistemology, counter the notions of white supremacy, question racist ideas and traditional approaches and structures in international relations.

Section I *Introduction* provides a background on the dilemma of South African universities especially in the sphere of humanities while adopting European models, post-colonial apartheid paradigm, and archetype just to maintain international rankings, paying little or even no attention to the curriculum content and its final effects on the socio-economic and political realities of the country. South Africa's attempts of the curriculum reform in 1995 by the National Commission on Higher Education and the 2000 National Student Financial Aid Scheme were the government post-apartheid policies, regardless the country continues facing challenges in its quest to delink humanities curriculum and free higher education from the grasp of eurocentrism. In this prospect the authors recommend drawing ideas and new approaches from other African counties [Tella, Motala 2020: 2—30].

Section II *The Challenges of Transforming South Africa's Higher Education Sector* mostly engages with a philosophical significance in South Africa's higher education. The existing challenges led to the student's protests that took place from 2015 to 2017 and were caused by deep and ambiguous epistemological and ontological issues. The author asserts that epistemology is well-delivered in South Africa, nevertheless its content remains Eurocentric, contradicting the idea of curriculum reform, while the ontology has largely been neglected despite identifying institutional racism as a psychological effect in South Africa [Tella, Motala 2020: 33—47].

In chapter four, while using the *University of Natal* as a case, the author explained the South Africa's higher education reliance on European epistemology by a set of reasons [Tella, Motala 2020: 48—65]. To fully understand this rationale, the need to investigate the conditions that birth the emergence of South African universities must be explored and understood.

Section III covers the most difficult issue — *Lessons from South Africa's Student Movement*. Chapter seven narrates the lessons drawn from the protests at the *University of Witwatersrand* in 2015—2016, summarizing main problems that caused the protests — the call for decolonization of higher education curriculum, reforms, and transformation of the curriculum, including the university management. Chapter eight elaborates on the causes of the protests at the *Rhodes University*. Here they were provoked by the lack of structural policies and methods of implementation. There was a lack or little attention to the teaching process, teachers' welfare, working staff, and living space. It is obvious that eroding all these factors will continue to lure neoliberal ideology, thus delineating educational transformation. Chapter nine concludes the section with the perspective of the student protests at the *University of Cape Town*, pinning the causes of the protests to racism, marginalization, and violent experience on black students. The author continues by outlining the demands of the protests, notably the removal of Cecil Rhode statute and decolonized curriculum [Tella, Motala 2020: 136—155].

Section IV deepens the issue of *Transforming South Africa's Humanities Curriculum*. Considering the circumstances that led to the decolonization of the educational sector in South Africa, decolonization of curriculum and reforms can be relevant if it embodies the struggle of a decolonized society, drawing attention to policymakers taking cognizance of the South African society. Consequently, the book describes the African context of sociology, being closely implanted with Eurocentric theories and paradigms, which do not fully apply to African society. Chapter twelve in concluding the whole section paints a unique narrative, as the author

argues for the revival of indigenous African epistemology as a blueprint for the discipline of philosophy while taking cognizance of South Africa's socio-economic reality [Tella, Motala 2020: 192—210]. Contrary to other scholars, he advocated for a synthesized epistemology of both African and Western knowledge [Tella, Motala 2020: 192—210].

Section V presents the specificity of *African Schools of Thought*. The *Ibadan School of History* maintained an intellectual skirmish against the Eurocentric view of African history by deploying nationalist historiography and oral sources as a research method to negate the primitive portrayal of the African continent and history². Whereas the *Dar es Salaam School* mainly focused on African economic determinism. The author [Tella, Motala 2020: 228] submits that internal contradictions of the capitalist system and various international events led to declining of the school. The upsurge of the *Dakar School of Culture* is notably linked to Cheikh Anta Diop, through his scholarship program and the use of Afrikology to transform the humanities curriculum, research methods, and social sciences³.

Section VI is all about *African Transformation Initiatives*. The Heinemann African Writers Series influence the monopoly of publication of African literature, notably around the 1960s — 1990s. The author affirms that lessons can be drawn from Heinemann, for example publication accessibility, cheap publication cost, and republication of classic African literature [Tella, Motala 2020: 269—282]. In chapter seven he agitates for a strong nexus between higher education and society, as knowledge produced across African universities should be catered towards solving societal

challenges [Tella, Motala 2020: 283—300]. Ugandan transformation efforts can be traced to the process of Africanisation at the *Makerere University*. The author opines that the process of educational transformation regarding Africanisation must reflect on both academic and administrative staff [Tella, Motala 2020: 314—327].

Section VII *Lessons from African American Studies* focuses on African history, in an effort, to confront racism in the United States. The study of African history introduced African American studies as a discipline, thus spreading intellectualism and social practices. Subsequently, this witnessed the confrontation of western epistemology through rigorous research about Africans and Africans in the diaspora. One of the early African American universities was the *Atlanta School of Sociology*, which prides itself in disproving African inferiority, African activism, and promoting African liberation movements [Asante 1991: 175—177]. Due to the widespread racism and segregation in the United States in 1930, Allen, Jones and Regassa opine that the need for curriculum transformation in universities is paramount [Tella, Motala 2020: 329—389], as universities such as *Howard and Fisk* were sparked with racism and oppression of Africans in the United States, thus creating institutional racism.

Section VIII provides the final *Conclusion* with all major findings. It summarises the following issues: curriculum decolonization, transformation, agency development for African literature, easy accessibility to objective African knowledge and content and finally enacting change in African American studies [Tella, Motala 2020: 399]. The book successfully mapped out the existence of institutionalized racism around humanities, alluding to the fact that education taught alienates Africans from their traditions and culture. African curriculum transformation must take cognizance to its society a blueprint for reform.

² For the state of art of International Relations as a field of Study in Nigeria, see: [Adebayo, Briggs 2019].

³ For the state of art of International Relations as a Field of Studies in Universities in Senegal, see: [Dyduck 2019].

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