

*Dimensions of Development with Emphasis on Africa.*  
By Tekeste Negash and Lars Rudebeck, eds. Uppsala, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet  
and Forum for Development Studies, 1995, 279p.

Paul Tiyambe Zeleza \*

Interdisciplinarity is in vogue in many academic circles, including those in the beleaguered field of development studies. But too often this amounts to nothing more than glorified soliloquies as scholars from different disciplines enclosed in the same room or book covers mutter to themselves. A product of the 'First Uppsala Interdisciplinary Conference on Third World Studies' organised in 1994 by the University of Uppsala's Forum for Development Studies, this book is an example of that. Each chapter stands in splendid isolation, wallowing in its own authorial and disciplinary noises, indifferent to the analytical voices emanating from the others. Scholarly conversations that aspire to the status of integrated interdisciplinary discourse deserve more. And so does development theory, which as is generally recognised, is in deep trouble. In short, the book offers little that is remarkable or refreshing either in the practice of interdisciplinarity or the theory of development.

This is of course not from lack of trying. The book is divided into four parts. Part I on 'Some Philosophical and Theoretical Parameters' has three chapters. Havnevik seeks to interrogate the development knowledge system as a scientific formation, but only offers a tepid description of World Bank policies, the development of modern Western science, and a call for collaboration with African researchers. Palmberg's chapter on 'Cultural Images in and of Africa' is simply an itemised research agenda, not the sustained analysis inserting culture in development studies it originally promises. Rudebeck's Chapter 'From National Liberation to Liberal Democratisation' presents a facetious discussion of highly dichotomised patterns of political struggles in Africa, pitting popular sovereignty and constitutionalism, as he puts it, against each other.

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\* University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

Part II on the 'Dynamics and Constraints of Development' is no better. It is a collection of disparate issues and countries. Darnoff's chapter on political campaigning in Botswana and Zimbabwe merely enumerates the various direct and indirect channels of communication used in the two countries, seeing them, as a typical Western journalist would, as pale imitations of electioneering campaigns among the Western democracies. Larsson-Lidén discusses the challenges of land reform in Zimbabwe in a manner that is not particularly informative to those familiar with the subject. More fascinating, not for the insights it draws on the ideological and institutional intersections of politics, religion, economy, and gender, let alone development practice and theory, but as an anthropological travelogue, is Hansson's report of the 'Mbuya Juliana Movement' in Zimbabwe. This is followed by Ström's prosaic account of the role of the United Nations in Namibia's decolonisation, from which he concludes that 'New methods of settling and resolving conflicts were learnt and institutionalised.... These may also be used to resolve new conflicts, and new manifestations of armed conflicts or confrontations' (p.128). The section closes with Wort's chapter on 'The Promotion of Support Strategies for In-service Primary School Teachers in Tanzania through Distance Education', which reads like a manual a ministry bureaucrat might have written.

The papers in Part III on 'Environment, Development and Economic Resources' are mostly prescriptive treatises. Hylander rightly accuses the industrialised countries of incurring heavy 'environmental debts' for the world and says they 'must immediately stop destructive activities and enforce development of environmentally adapted technology, including economy with and recycling of resources' (p.147). This is followed by Sinclair's call for promoting the development of environmental archaeology in Africa through multidisciplinary research networks. Engdahl deviates from the prescriptive mould and presents one of the few textured analyses in the book, an examination of the contexts and contradictions in the appropriation and establishment of a forest reserve by the colonial state in Uganda in 1906. Jumping to the present, in the next chapter Seppälä challenges the prevailing view that Tanzanian villages are passive victims of external dependency and celebrates their efforts to diversify their productive activities. Then in a desperate attempt to

theorise he tries to raise 'diversification as a mode of development' (p.215).

The book closes with four chapters in Part VI on 'Ethnicity and Conflict', two of which are on countries outside Africa. Ahmad presents a 'cross-cultural and trans-generational study of post-traumatic stress reactions' among Kurdish children. Swain looks at the environmental migration of Bangladeshis into India and the political conflicts it has spawned. Bovin takes us back to Africa, to show how the pastoralists of the 'WoDaaBe tribe' understand drought (as an act of Allah), and survive it through sedentarisation and migration. Needless to say, the literature on pastoralist ecological stress management points to a far more complex range of responses and strategies than these desultory extreme measures. Negash closes the book with a reinterpretation of Eritrean nationalist movements between 1953 and 1981. He argues that Eritrean nationalism was not only an articulated reconstruction of an imagined community, originally inscribed by Italian colonialism, but that there were at least two sharply distinct imaginations of Eritrea based on the divergent social and ideological bases imbricated with Islam and Christianity, which eventually became embodied in the competing Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF). It is a fascinating, persuasive thesis. One only wishes the other chapters had offered similarly intricate and engaged analysis, rather than the superficial gaze of intellectual or policy tourism that dominates development studies.