

Book Review

Ivor Agyeman-Duah (2010). *Pilgrims of the Night: Development Challenges and Opportunities in Africa.* Ayebia Clarke Publishing (189 pages).

Elinam Amevor

Adjunct Assistant Lecturer, Department of Communication Studies, Islamic University College, Accra-Ghana

There probably have not been so many concerns raised, and so many publications on the subject of the socio-economic and political problems facing Africa in any period other than the earliest part of the 21st-Century till date, over what many policy experts believe are the bane of Africa's development.

There have also been so many workshops and conferences on the way forward for Africa in salvaging herself from the doldrums of underdevelopment, spurred by conflicts, bad governance, and to some extent, Western machinations to topple the few 'recalcitrant,' 'anti-imperialist' leaders left on the continent.

Although several publications exist on the problems and prospects of Africa, there virtually is no publication that has ever seized the opportunity to 'anthologize' critical essays from scholars, policy analysts, and political leaders, from a diversified knowledge stock like *Pilgrims of the Night: Development Challenges and Opportunities in Africa*.

In any case, if there were any academic discipline as "Development Challenges and Opportunities in Africa," *Pilgrims of the Night*, which paints the most glaring picture of the development challenges facing the African continent, with such literary wit and analogies that make the book an interesting reading, would have become a seminal textbook for the course.

The ten-chapter anthology discusses in supreme detail, topical issues that lay credence to the very problems that undermine the development of Africa, and yet within the same development problems, lay the prognoses that offer incredible opportunities for Africa to assert her independence as a continent paralysed by all the ills of exploitation.

The authors of the various essays of the anthology argue strongly, why Africa must control her own precious natural resources, reform her state institutions, modify her trade and economic pacts, and form new relationships with emerging economies in order to improve conditions of her people.

The development challenges confronting Africa as a result of bad leadership, and other socio-cultural factors such as ethnicity, illiteracy, and gender superiority, have been seen as some of the factors hindering development in many parts of Africa.

The above-mentioned socio-economic factors identified and analysed in the anthology would enable readers, who are concerned about issues of Africa's underdevelopment, to understand for instance, why the Democratic Republic of Congo, which is the third largest country in Africa and the largest producer of natural resources such as copper, cobalt and industrial diamond; one of the richest countries on earth in terms of rivers and gold in per capita terms, is considered one of the poorest countries in the world.

Pilgrims of the Night: Development Challenges and Opportunities in Africa on the other hand, argues comparatively, the reasons why other African countries such as Botswana, Namibia, and surprisingly small Rwanda, who are poorer than the Democratic Republic of Congo in terms of natural resources, are these days spoken of in more respectable terms than the latter.

This problem boils down to how we prioritise the issue of leadership; sustainable development and the role of governance in Africa; management of natural resource booms in Africa; the issue of hidden epidemic diseases on the continent; the problem of electoral integrity; as well as aid and Africa's economic relations with other economies, which form the core of this anthology.

The first chapter of the book, an essay by former President of Ghana, John Agyekum Kufuor, examines critically, the issue of leadership, government and entrepreneurship in Africa, and asserts that notwithstanding the landmark development successes chalked by several African countries on the back of good leadership, Africa's underdevelopment is not entirely the continent's doing, but also as a result of colonialism.

Much as it is true that the exploitative era of colonialism is partly the bane of Africa's development, must we as a people, sit down with hands buried in between our thighs and continue to blame Africa's 21st-Century underdevelopment on the ravages of colonialism?

Chapters two to four of the anthology each focuses on the broader concept of climate change from varied scholarly perspectives. However, they all converge on one nagging issue that concerns the impact of climate change on Africa, and the role of governments in mitigating its effects on food shortages on the continent.

Chapter five of the book, which discusses the issue of managing natural resources in Africa, proposes that for Africa to manage her natural resource booms, transparency and governance; saving and investing;

diversification and economic growth, are the necessary policy recommendations.

African leaders' ability to tackle the problems of hidden epidemic of diseases, and the challenges of water sustainability and security constitute the foci of chapters six and seven of the anthology respectively.

Arrangement of chapters in the book has been coherent, with one topical issue dovetailing into the other. The last chapter of the anthology offers the reader a moment for conscious reflection on Ghana's democratic journey since independence from Britain in 1957.

The eighth chapter of the book examines the importance that successive governments in Ghana attach to state monuments, looking at what prominent public monuments and squares were renamed and in whose honor -- whether for Nkrumah or Danquah and their associates, or a mixture of both; and the question as to whose photos should be on the re-denominated currencies.

The ninth chapter of the anthology offers Wole Soyinka yet another opportunity to reiterate his advocacy for constitutional rule in Africa, but cautions young democracies in Africa, the price they are bound to pay if they blindly copy elements in established democracies.

Agyeman-Duah has succeeded in closing the last chapter of the anthology with a careful look at aid, and Africa's economic relations with other developed economies, especially Japan, and the socio-economic impact of such relations on the development of Ghana. Ivor sounds more prophetic, when he believes that:

"Some day would come when the burdens of humanity could subside to create comfort in return for the millions of afflicted people across the developing world of Africa, the Caribbean, and those living in poverty amidst wealth" (p.189).

You may not understand the power behind the above "prophesy" until you go through the pages of *Pilgrims of the Night ...*, and end up reasoning in unison with Ivor Agyeman-Duah, whose vast experience of the economic history of Africa, gives him the strong belief that there is a cure for Africa's underdevelopment.