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Abstract

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Dei and Adjei (2014) have compiled a series of chapters that are truly emerging perspectives on what they term “African Development.” Both editors wrote chapters and recruited an articulate set of authors that have a common thread in earning degrees from or working at the University of Toronto. The core components of the emerging perspectives are to acknowledge that development is very much a Western way of thinking and to resituate African development to be African-centered, anticolonial, and drawn from Indigenous knowledge and science perspectives. Much of this grows out of the prolific and profound body of work from Dei. In previous work, Dei (2011) theorized Indigeneity in a way that recognizes the ontological and epistemological lineage of people displaced and dispersed. In the midst of the inherent struggle to disentangle control of knowledge production from the colonizer, Dei (2011) proposed 12 interrelated principles that constitute a critical Indigenous discursive framework.

A core tenet of this edited volume on development is the recognition that poverty is not an independent construct, but a state of being that has been created by structural arrangements. Essential to the large discourse by Dei are notions of Divinity, the Land, and a higher purpose for life and social existence. These notions are aligned with the critical Indigenous discursive framework. The emerging perspective on development is to live in relation to the Land and Nature to inform how to act responsibly.

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The chapters cover a wide range of topics including democracy, governance, epistemology, Indigenous governance, Euro-Western dominance, anticoloniality, African Indigenous women, regional integration, a communal approach, and environmental stewardship. Each of the book’s 10 chapters has a unique perspective and a valuable contribution, but I offer a few of the highlights in the following review.

In the first topical chapter, Dei covers democracy, good governance, and education. A foundational point of the chapter is that much of what development organizations (e.g., the World Bank) deliver in the way of education is filtered through a Western epistemological lens. The same groups criticize the binary of good and bad governance attributed to development levels with standards that are not applied to wealthy industrialized countries. In this chapter, Dei (2014) defines Indigenous African democracy as the “socio-political processes ensuring collective decision making to actualize people’s social existence as members of a given community” (p. 28). The definition and the 10 principles that follow are detached from the Western lens that is so often applied in the development arena and used to establish a rethinking of African schooling and education.

The next chapter covers ontological and epistemological understandings of an Indigenous African process used to mediate conflicts and disputes. Texas A&M University currently has a development lab that is partially funded by the United States Agency for International Development (25 million USD for 5 years) to study conflict and development. What is not present in much of the material produced by Western units that engage in development work are the Indigenous institutions including Chiefs, Village Heads, Head of Clan, and Head of Household. In this chapter on mediation, Adjei (2014) outlines how an indigenous approach to mediation has implications for policy building, good governance, and social democracy.

Many of the national borders on the continent of Africa were drawn by colonial powers around warring tribes, making the nation-state a continuously suspect unit of analysis and organizing principles. In chapter three, Sium (2014) explores this notion and advocates for Western colonial distance and for progress to be measured by “African peoples’ ability to take control of local resources, determine development priorities, and regulate implementation on the ground” (p. 65). This notion is explained through an anticolonial Indigenist framework.

Other chapters expand upon foundational notions by targeting Canada’s global education program as hegemonic and challenging the overall dominance of Euro-Western epistemological dominance. The trend in many of the chapters is identifying some aspect of the central epistemological dominance in development and showing some element of anticolonial and Indigenist frameworks as a potential solution. Though many of the chapters follow this pattern, it is not repetitive, but shows many facets of a large problem. Traditional development topics like basic education, women, and the environment are recast through a communal anticolonial approach.

The book is well constructed and valuable for readers and researchers across varying levels of consciousness. For those who are new to the larger frameworks put forth by Dei and colleagues, this short volume will serve as a worthy introduction and in depth exploration. For researchers
using an anticolonial or Indigenist approach, this volume adds new layers and perspectives by
drawing in emerging scholars with a great ability to apply critical frameworks to the development
industry that was born in the Western world.

References
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About the Author
Christopher S. Collins, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of Higher Education at Azusa Pacific
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