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**Thompson, Gardner. 2015. African Democracy: Its Origins and Development in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 466 pages.**

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## REVIEWS

groups suffered from whites and fought against their oppression, while the divisions are explained by the differences in the levels of exploitation of blacks by whites in different parts of the world (p. 94).

The author points to a recent tendency to improve the relations and mutual understanding between African-Americans and African migrants, who face similar socio-economic problems. In general, however, as Bondarenko aptly notes, to the majority of both communities, the postulate of the brotherhood of all black people “seems no more than an ideological slogan, wrong and even absurd” (p. 152).

The text offers numerous detailed data, presents and supplements the views of representatives of both the African-American community and of migrants from many countries of sub-Saharan Africa, thus reflecting the mutual perceptions of two large population groups in the USA. With this book, Dmitri Bondarenko makes a significant contribution to modern social anthropology and to the history of the American and African continents.

Tatyana Denisova

**Thompson, Gardner. 2015. *African Democracy: Its Origins and Development in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania*.**

**Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 466 pages.**

African democracy is one of the principal scholarly topics of interest for both political scientists and Africanists. While the former approach the problem mostly without much knowledge of African realities, the latter struggle with the theoretical framework for their African research. The reviewed publication mostly belongs to the second type of research. Gardner Thomson is a renowned British scholar in African studies, who has dedicated his academic work to a more profound grasp of African history, especially of British colonial rule in Eastern Africa. We could refer here to his fundamental work, *Governing Uganda: British Colonial Rule and its Legacy* (2003).

In the book under review, however, the author investigates a topic he is not very familiar with. The comprehensive analysis of (African)

democracy, good government, and constitutionalism is a demanding topic even for political scientists, and even more so for a scholar focused on African studies. The author mentions that “the primary purpose of this book is to explain how democracy in East Africa was born, reborn, and has come to assume its 21st century shape. A secondary purpose is to review, in the course of the main analysis, the various roles that Britain and the West have played in this sometimes troubled and continuing narrative” (p. ix.). A few pages later he promises to provide “a new historical analysis of the provenance of three governments” (p. 3).

The book is divided into five main parts. In the first part, the author attempts – not very successfully – to develop a theoretical framework for his research. Two chapters first try to characterise democracy with African characteristics and then deal with reflections on democracy, good government and constitutions. These two chapters, that should provide the reader with an overview of the current state of African democracy and its specifics, are unfortunately a rather inauspicious attempt to indicate the main developments in the current state of the topic.

The author’s introduction emphasises the historicity of African governments; he believes that African governments “are the products of [their] own history and culture” and that “the form of government deserves its own, new, label” (p.4). Based on this assertion (and arguments about Chinese socialism) he concludes that we meet (numerous) variants of African democracy in sub-Saharan Africa, too, and that these are based on African interests, values, and priorities. The author endorses J.F. Bayart’s concept that “Africans are actors in their own history, always ready to turn external constraints into new creation.” This approach is obviously not innovative and we anyway observe that many scholars – even those who Thompson draws on – turn to history and the roots of African democracy (the aforementioned J. F. Bayart, P. Chabal, J. P. Daloz, J. Herbst, and many others).

If readers expect to become well acquainted with the concept of democracy with African characteristics, they will be disappointed. The author presents only four basic research presumptions, first, people generally behave according to the situation in which they

find themselves; second, the history of humans in society has been determined more by underlying continuity than by eye-catching change; third, change is best if it is home-grown and organic; and finally, things could have turned out differently, but there are impersonal limits to what individuals or groups of people in any generation can achieve (pp. 7–8). The author then introduces the sections of his book, in which he perhaps somewhat prematurely arrives at some of his final evaluations.

The following chapter “Reflections on Democracy, Good Government and Constitutions” does not inspire political scientists either. The author turns to traditional theories of democracy, which he believes were exported to the African continent from Europe during World War II (p. 20). The reader has to wade through pages of ideas about Greek democracy that have previously been elaborated many times (and better), read passages about the roots of the American constitution, and “learn” about the British democratic tradition. The text about good government and constitutions is handled similarly. The author refers not only to Lincoln and the French revolutionaries but also to the more modern versions of revolutionary government approaches of the Chinese, Russian and Cambodian revolutions or the German government of the 1920s. In the case of constitutions, he analyses in detail some articles of the American constitution.

While this reviewer understands the author’s attempt to define the basic terms of his research, the absence of references to current research on democracy, good government and constitutionalisation is alarming. The author systematically overlooks fundamental research on African democracy, African good government and African constitutionalism, which emerged after 1990, when the African continent somewhat returned to the spotlight of Euro-American but also African academia due to processes of democratisation. Tens of publications and perhaps even hundreds of academic studies have emerged in the past 26 years investigating various aspects of this field. The concept of African democracy and its specificity are one of the key topics of interest for political scientists and scholars of Africa. A list of authors on this subject would be long and it is not the task of the reviewer to mention them here.

Parts 2, 3 and 4 are dedicated to a not very systematic analysis of the political developments in three East African countries, namely, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. The author does not explain well why he selected these three African countries, as the East African region usually covers 20 other countries. The explanation on page 13 that these countries were all British colonial possessions in East Africa would be valid for many other former British colonies in the region as well, as is much as his other argument that their political trajectories during the period of transition from colonial rule and following independence were distinctive. After all, the concept of Eastern Africa is not defined in the publication either.

The author's lack of a systematic approach is clear from the actual structure of these sections. Part 2 includes the author's analysis of colonial rule in Uganda until 1958 and in Kenya until 1957. Similarly, the third part comprehensively studies the transition to independence in both countries and one chapter attempts to introduce the decolonisation process in East Africa. The reader only finds a chapter in which the three countries are analysed, including Tanganyika/Tanzania, in Part 4. The author introduces the policies of Obote-Amin-Obote and Museveni in Uganda in a rather limited space, then analyses the Kenyan democracy under the rule of Kenyatta, Moi and others, and analyses African socialism during the rule of president J. Nyerere and after his resignation. The final Part 5 focuses on the influence of the West and other parts of the world, especially China.

The author is trying to overcome some deeply rooted paradigms, such as the importance of nationalism in the process of acquiring political independence (p. 12). However, he does not offer other reasonable explanations why much of the Black population so unequivocally supported the main national liberation movements during the first free and democratic elections. If it was not nationalism, which should reflect itself in the longing for freedom and political independence (here I agree with the author) of the non-existent African nation, then he should be able to explain the huge success of these nationalist organisations, which in their programmes and electoral statements mostly referred to nationalism and Pan-Africanism. The role of a common enemy (colonialism) could have played a role in unifying the various ethnic and cultural groups into one entity led by an

unambiguous political interlocutor. Yet, the reviewer thinks that even in this case nationalism was more than just a leading ideology.

Undeniably, the author is an excellent historian. Individual chapters dedicated to British colonialism in Uganda and Kenya, and partly also Tanzania, are lucid, well argued and represent a bright side of the author's research and his deep knowledge of the area. The chapters on post-independence development are mostly synopses but the reader finds interesting observations and conclusions. The research slightly lags behind when the author tries to provide political reflections and conclusions

Even though the reviewer as a political scientist has some reservations about the topic at hand, which relate mostly to more general research topics (African democracy, good government, constitutionalism), as an Africanist the reviewer must confirm that the book generally leaves the reader with a good impression. Lucid analyses of the colonial development, searching for the common roots of African democracy, the work of the government and the enforcement of constitutionalism in past and current political practice are important contributions to finding the specific features of these topics in the three Eastern African countries. The book under review will become a prime source for political analyses and will be of interest especially to scholars of African studies, including their students.

Vlastimil Fiala

**Fiala, Vlastimil. 2015. *Politické stranictví v západní Africe (Benin)*. [Political Partisanship in West Africa (Benin)]. Ústí nad Orlicí-Hradec Králové: OFTIS, 159 pages, Czech language, English summary.**

Within an extensive research project concerning individual African states (see St. Thomas and Principe, 2010; Botswana, Malawi, Ghana, Ethiopia and Eritrea, 2010; Mozambique, 2011; Senegal and Gambia, 2015; and others) the author makes a profound analysis of the Republic of Benin's political development. The Introduction (pp. 5–8) offers the basic geographic, demographic, and economic data of Benin; it also presents the book's composition along with the