A Social Movement for African Capitalism? A Comparison of Business Associations in Two African Cities

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DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/525160

Abstract

Perhaps as a result of the persistent developmental difficulties African economies have faced, a substantial amount has been written on the nature of African capitalism (Berman and Leys 1994; Iliffe 1983; Kennedy 1988; Sandbrook 1985; 1993). While this literature spans the ideological spectrum from advocacy of the free market to Marxian socialism, there seems to be a consensus on two points: first, that some form of capitalism has emerged in most African countries, and second, that this capitalism is flawed in fundamental ways that render its ability to promote growth problematic. One of the questions suggested by this literature is whether the social forces exist to support a more productive economic system. In other words, is there evidence of a social movement for African capitalism?

To date most analyses of the advance and/or stagnation of African capitalism have employed a structural and/or systemic framework, emphasizing factors such as class relations, role in the world economy, degree of proletarianization/peasantization and the emergence of a capitalist state. In this paper, we use a social movements approach to examine aspects of the development, consolidation and reform of capitalism in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and Kano, Nigeria. We hope to illustrate that the business communities in both these cities can be viewed as coalitions of class, ethnic and sectoral interest groups with a shared common goal to facilitate political and economic reforms conducive to the advancement of a capitalist system. As opposed to structural approaches, a social movements framework highlights the role of ideas and human agency.

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