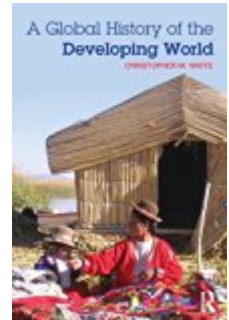


Christopher M. White. *A Global History of the Developing World.* New York: Routledge, 2013. 320 pp. \$44.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-415-69211-3.



Reviewed by Bekeh Utietiang

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In *A Global History of the Developing World*, Christopher M. White explores the struggles that have led to the independence of nations in the Global South. White focuses his narrative on this struggle with the goal of understanding the present geopolitical and socioeconomic status of these nation-states.

The book is an introductory textbook for world history courses. It is divided into four sections that correspond to four key themes: imperialism, nationalism, globalization, and development. In the first three sections, White focuses on Latin America, Asia, and Africa. In his discussion of imperialism, the author does not begin with the second European colonial project, which was mainly focused on Africa and Asia, but starts with the European colonial conquest of Latin America and the Caribbean. He weaves within his analysis the Catholic Church's role in Latin America's colonization as they sought to evangelize and convert the people. For White, "the Church and State were essentially the same institution" (p. 24). In the second European colonial project, Spain and Portu-

gal played less significant roles; Britain, France, Belgium, and Germany were the main actors. White makes an intervention in the historiography on the Berlin conference of 1884-85 that partitioned Africa. He argues that some scholars overstate the importance of this conference as it was "not the event that officially decided the boundaries of the European colonies in Africa" (p. 67). What he does here is get his readers to think about these historical events as being more complex than most readers typically would.

In his exploration of nationalism, White argues that "the Cuban Revolution is the most important event to take place in Latin America during the twentieth century" (p. 82). The revolution defeated Fulgencio Batista, an ally of the United States, and had the potential to curb America's sphere of influence in the region. Unlike Cuba, Asia's independence was not a military revolution, but a social revolution. In India, for example, the author says, the nationalist movement began with Mohandas Gandhi in 1916 "during the peak of European imperialism" (p. 107). Independence

was achieved in 1947 when colonial India was partitioned into India and Pakistan. Independence of African states came in the late 1950s and early 1960s. White posits that “European colonialism, slavery, drought and disease all played a role in Africa’s development foundations prior to independence” (p. 131). Despite independence, he argues, most African countries “were not much better off at the end of the century than they were upon independence two generations before” (p. 130). While this is an important observation of the problems that continue to plague independent Africa, some of White’s readers will find this point debatable. It would be hard to find many Africans who would argue that they would be better off under colonial rule. The nature of colonial rule limited the advancement of Africans because at its structure racial biases existed. While economic growth has been slow in postcolonial Africa, colonialism is partly to be blamed as it created what historian Frederick Cooper calls “Gatekeeper States.”

In the section on globalization, White does an excellent job showing the interconnections between the economies of the world and their impact on local people. He looks at the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) of 1994 and argues that it was responsible for the Mayan revolt. The Mayans wanted self-determination because they found that they could no longer compete with American and Canadian agribusiness. In another example of how international economics affect locals, he argues that NAFTA drove many immigrants to the United States, most of whom are undocumented (p. 164). This argument is ironic given that many American factory workers believe that NAFTA took away jobs to Mexico and one of NAFTA’s purposes was to limit migrations to the United States. It is true that some of the farmers were displaced as a result of NAFTA but another important outcome of NAFTA is that many automobile shops set up assembly plants in Mexico and created many skilled manufacturing

jobs. As a result, American factory workers lost jobs.

White also looks at the conflicts that have become symptomatic of the Global South. The book’s treatment of the conflicts in Rwanda and the Congo is a superb summation of the ugly history in that region of Africa that has left many millions dead. He properly situates the conflicts as regional conflicts rather than national conflicts. The author shows how race and ethnicity has played a role in some of these conflicts.

The last section focuses on the theoretical debates scholars and practitioners have on the causes of development and underdevelopment. Here, White makes a distinction between scholars who hold “a bottom-up perspective of development” and those who hold a top-down perspective (p. 229). For those who hold the former, he begins with Karl Marx, who, he says, has had “more effect on the world than any other author of the social sciences” (p. 233). He is critical of Marxist theory and uses the failure of the communist experiments around the world to discredit it. But the author makes a good distinction between “Marxist analysis and Marxist politics/economics/social planning” (p. 234). He also argues that the dependency theory advanced by economist Raul Prebisch inspires import substitution industrialization which encourages production for internal consumption. In the 1970s, this economic policy encouraged massive spending and corruption in the developing world. With fallen oil prices in the 1980s, governments of the developing world had to privatize these companies.

In his analysis of the scholars who hold the views from above, he describes them as subscribing to the theory of “cultural determinism.” He begins this discussion with Adam Smith’s *Wealth of the Nation* (1776), August Comte’s positivist views, and Max Weber’s protestant ethic. White writes that “capitalism, in its purest theoretical form, as advocated by Adam Smith, Comte, and Max Weber, or in the form carried out by governments in

practice, with all its flaws, is what is most needed to create a better world” (p. 245). He also summarizes the views of economist Milton Friedman and the Chicago school of economics, which advances a neoliberal economic policy: lower taxes, deregulation, privatization, and spending cuts.

The task White undertakes in writing this book is a daunting one; he covers a very large geographical area in a time frame of over five hundred years. For this reason, the book suffers from a lack of in-depth analysis and commits the offense of oversimplification of key events. For example, he discusses Napoleon’s occupation of Egypt leading to French and later British colonization of Egypt in one sentence (p. 44). The next sentence does not tell us how this happened but moves on to mention how the Russians took land from the Ottoman Empire leading to the Crimean War, creating the close ties between Turkey and Europe today. There are too many events conflated here without any unpacking or analysis. In the section on globalization, an engagement with the key theorists in the field and an analysis of opposing viewpoints to show how they are in conversation with one another would have greatly strengthened White’s overall arguments.

Despite these weaknesses, White must be commended for this work. The author’s ability to bring together the historiographies of these diverse regions in a conversation is one of the strengths of the book. The reader will immediately begin to see the commonalities between these regions as they struggle for self-determination from European colonialism and its aftermath. In this conversation, White does not focus his analysis only on the bigger nations, but also pays close attention to the smaller ones, such as Zimbabwe, Burma, and Haiti. Professors and students will find this book helpful as it points them to key events and themes. The questions in each chapter will also help in facilitating class discussions.

I will recommend this book as a textbook for world history survey courses. It is also a good

primer for those wanting a concise explanation of key events in the modern history of the Global South.

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