“What Africa really requires is a fully integrated transport system for the continent, properly planned by a central organization, which will examine the relative potentials and economics of road, rail, river, air, and sea systems in correlation with an overall plan for inter-African trade and progressive economic and social development,” declared Kwame Nkrumah in his famous manifesto for a truly independent Africa.[1] Based on this premise, Hugh Lamarque and Paul Nugent’s *Transport Corridors in Africa* serves as an important addition to the literature on Africa’s economic and transport history and Africa’s international affairs. This volume showcases to its readers the level of development in Africa’s transport infrastructure to facilitate the smooth transfer of products and services across the continent, as Nkrumah envisioned. *Transport Corridors in Africa* has also come at an opportune time to provide much-sought-after explanations for ongoing Chinese investments in Africa and their consequences, and for major political developments on the continent that affect transnational trade. It is not surprising that the editors chose to focus on this theme, considering the “transformative potential” of transport corridors regarding infrastructure (p. 3).

One major strength of this volume lies in its organization. The editors do an exceptional job guiding their readers through the varied and fascinating interpretations of the term “corridors” in African history, underscoring that corridors already existed in Africa before the arrival of Europeans. Having established this important foundation, the book gives readers a deeper understanding of the implementation, challenges, and impacts of transport corridors on the African continent and in global affairs. Lamarque and Nugent explain that a transport corridor can only exist on the shoulders of adequate infrastructure and enough security to ensure the easy and safe transportation of people and goods. Another strength of the volume is the range of the contributors. In addition to academics, who present the theoretical basis for such topics, the volume includes contributors who work directly with policymakers to analyze feasibility studies for the construction of major corridors.

Both groups wrestle with the technical definition of “corridors” and offer pathbreaking insights. Studying correspondence between policymakers and financiers of development, Sidy Cissokho sees corridors “as a set of measures, laws, institutions, customs reforms, and infrastructures that combine to facilitate free trade at a regional level” (p. 49). Cissokho argues that making corridors the medium for free trade makes corridors and transport infrastructure the backbone of de-
velopment on the continent. Building on this argument, Sergio Oliete Josa and Francesc Magrinyà conclude that support for the transport sector would strengthen African integration if balanced per the existing resources. Meanwhile, Paul Nugent explains that the meaning attached to the corridor can be highly biased based on the region used for the analysis. For example, he explains that corridor signifiers cannot include short shipping lanes, because they are scarce on the continent. Likewise, referring to urban-to-urban connections in Africa is complicated, because typical corridors are considered to start at the “coastal port and end with a conurbation or a mining cluster” (p. 7). Pushing beyond conventional explanations of how ordinary roads get promoted to “corridors,” Nugent asserts that “at the most fundamental level, a corridor exists when governments, donors, and planners think it does, or should, exist” (p. 212).

Focusing on what “corridors” meant for the historical actors who used them, Isabella Soi’s brilliant analysis of trade corridors argues that they are not new phenomena to Africans. She uses the existence of important historical trade routes and ports that connected Kumasi to the coast and to the Sahel to show that the survival of the Trans-Saharan Trade depended heavily on the existence of a corridor that stretched across the continent. She also explains how the availability of physical security was a mandatory requirement for trade historically, just as it is for modern-day corridors. Soi uses these factors to explain that modern-day trade corridors were built upon existing trade routes that existed during the precolonial era. She argues that “if we start to conceive of transport corridors as explicitly modernist constructs that cover over the traces of their pasts, we can also arrive at a more nuanced appreciation of how infrastructure actually works and is related to by local actors” (p. 14).

Too many security checks on the corridors have also been regarded as a challenge to truckers and commuters who ply these routes, as Paul Nugent examines. Using the Abidjan-Lagos corridor as a case study, Nugent explains how too many roadblocks along corridors tend to create more harm than good, as the officers who are deployed to staff these roadblocks adopt their “own conventions” (p. 16). Readers are cautioned not to take happenings at these borders between officials and truckers or traders at face value, because most policymakers have no practical experience regarding activities on the borders. However, all the roadblocks set up to provide security and ensure commuters conform to established regulations by government agencies make traveling along corridors expensive, and elongate the time needed to move from port to final destination. On top of all these roadblocks are the different regulations of Regional Economic Communities on the continent. Nugent uses the example of West African nations that belong to both the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and l’Union Économique et Monétaire Ouest-Africaine (UEMOA). A border historian, Nugent maintains that despite several attempts to “harmonize the rules,” there are still some differences that lead to frequent stops along different corridors. These blocks do not only affect truckers but also “impact especially on the profit margins of small-scale traders” (p. 225). Bruce Byiers and Sean Woolfrey use the same West African route to highlight the negative impacts of the high cost of moving goods from ports to their final destinations. To these authors, “high transport costs raise the cost of doing business and trading across borders, hampering private investment, and undermining opportunities for job creation and poverty reduction, particularly in the hinterland countries and regions of West Africa” (p. 105). Such challenges have prevented corridors from having the intended positive impact on the continent.

Major corridors passing through border towns have both positive and negative impacts on these regions. In some cases, these corridors generate funds from cross-border trade, positively im-
pacting the development of the border towns, and providing migrants with an avenue for finding greener pastures. Jérôme Lombard, however, charges that the trade between Dakar and Bamako hardly benefits national development. Lombard explains that while the two main cities benefit immensely from this corridor, territories in the interior such as landlocked areas have yet to enjoy the benefits of having a major corridor passing through them. For such reasons, Hugh Lamarque, a development economist, maintains that different dynamics have impacted the motivation of coastal and interior territories when it comes to discussing issues on corridor development. As someone who worked directly with policymakers, he explains how Kenyan and Tanzanian authorities only seek to ensure they monopolize trade flows along their respective corridors, but inland states focus on finding different routes to the coast.

At the global level, Elisa Gambino explores the challenges posed by the Chinese financing of transport corridor construction. She explains that transport corridors in Africa crept into the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative without being part of the original policy. She narrates how this policy twist toed the slippery-slope path, which brought Chinese investors, contractors, laborers, and retired security experts into Africa. All these happened (and are happening) despite the Chinese policy of nonintervention in the internal affairs of countries. Gambino claims that the open secret resides in the Resource-for-Infrastructure (RFI) framework which “allows governments to access financing for the development of infrastructure without ... having to produce sufficient revenues to support its financing but instead pledging to provide resources for the repayment” (p. 229).

Sergio Oliete Josa and Francesc Magrinyà also set out to compare the African transport network and the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T). They argue that even though “transport infrastructure is tangible and politically attractive, and can act as a catalyst for pan-African integration [Nkrumah’s vision], ... this process should in all cases be begun between densely-populated nearby territories that can constitute a market” (p. 96). After analyzing official narratives, stakeholder analysis, and planning and funding instruments, Oliete (a civil engineer) and Magrinyà (an urban planner) demonstrate how difficult it is to copy and implement in Africa corridor approaches implemented in Europe, even though Africa faces similar challenges ranging from “investment needs, insufficient funding, a larger surface area to cover, [and] lower densities [to] lack of maintenance” (p. 96). To the contributors, Africa can only learn from Europe to make its process a better one.

The volume’s lack of coverage of North Africa poses a challenge in attaining a complete understanding of Africa’s trade relations with Europe. Nevertheless, the contributors’ conceptualization of “corridors” offers new possibilities for how to study important transport links in the region, like the Suez Canal. Located in Egypt, the canal remains a vital link between the continent, Europe, and Asia, having played a crucial role in Egypt’s economy and global trade throughout modern history. Despite this omission and considering its methodological innovations, the volume contributes significantly to the fields of economics and economic history, transport and transport history, and international affairs.

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