Rethinking Africa's 'Great Runner': Authoritarianism and Development in Post-Cold War Ethiopia

Authors : Frew Yirgalem Mane

Abstract : This study has examined Africa's experiment with authoritarian model of development drawing from the experience of Ethiopia. With the tectonic crisis of neoliberal ideology, the dominant policy agenda in Africa pertains to bringing the state back to development. More concretely, countries epitomized by Ethiopia, Rwanda and Uganda have been constructing a highly interventionist state with authoritarian character. The central motive appears to facilitate development and salvage people out of appalling and grinding poverty. Each country warrants closer inspection. However, this study focuses on Ethiopia- a country often applauded as 'Africa's Great Run' for delivering socio-economic success over the past two decades. In fact, inspired by East Asia's including Chinese model of authoritarian development, Ethiopia orchestrated a vanguard party, centralized rent control system with politicized bureaucracy and militaristic mobilization resources for development. This arrangement may explain Ethiopia economic success story as one the fastest growing countries in the world. However, this paper detected, Ethiopia's attempt to bring the state back in development has precipitated institutionalization of a new breed of authoritarianism and informalization of public institutions. Ethiopia's model of state-led development may constitute a noticeable shift away from the vengeful adherence to neoliberal policies. However, the manner the model has been practiced proved to be neither smooth nor appears to address Ethiopia's aspiration for political and economic transformation. Partly, this can be illustrated by recent widespread grievances that fed into the popular uprising and animated opposition against the state. Sources of the grievance are complex, but they are highly ingrained with the way the authoritarian model of development is functioning and also the model's dis-functioning in terms of benefiting people. In light of these findings, the study has arrived at the following conclusion. Africa's attempt to emulate development models from other countries is not such a 'bad' thing. However, emulation makes sense if it is contextualized and sensitive to complex local socio-economic interests.
Keywords : Africa, authoritarianism, development, Ethiopia, neoliberalism
Conference Title : ICAAR 2019 : International Conference on Authoritarianism and Authoritarian Regimes
Conference Location : Sydney, Australia
Conference Dates : May 16-17, 2019