

Rethinking International Relations Theory through the Lens of Outside-in Logic of State-Building

Authors : Nana Kwasi Amoateng

Abstract : The paper uses secondary information to investigate some longstanding limitations in International Relations (IR) theory. Specifically, the analysis highlights IR theory through the lens of J. C. Sharman's brilliant concept of outside-in state-building logic in which some states, particularly those in Africa, have relied mainly on foreign resources to address local threats. The key findings are that IR theory has been largely understood from the perspective of an inside-out state-building logic, whereby Western and other advanced states have heavily relied on local resources to address foreign threats. In this vein, IR theorists, including Critical Theorists, have not been able to fully grasp African states and states elsewhere that have generally relied on an outside-in logic of state-building. The paper helps to fill a major gap in IR theory, which has mainly addressed criticisms of being Euro- or Western-centric or failing to include the unique experiences of states and other actors in the Global South by developing critical theories such as post-colonial theory and neo-colonialism. Although this has helped to understand some experiences of actors in the Global South, the fundamental difference between state-building in the West and the Global South, particularly Africa, has not been adequately explored to fully comprehend why, despite the works of Critical Theorists, IR theory still fails to capture many political and socioeconomic realities in Africa and elsewhere.

Keywords : international relations theory, outside-in state-building logic, inside-out state-building logic, Africa

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