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Susan Arndt, Yacouba Banhoro, Taibat Lawanson, Enocent Msindo, and Peter T. Simatei (Eds.) *Covid-19 in Africa: Governance and Containment*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2023, 266 pages. eBook ISBN: 978-3-031-36139-5.

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The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted societies worldwide for about four years and significantly impacted socio-economic and political activities in Africa. Although governments at all levels quickly introduced measures to mitigate its effect, a major challenge to containing the pandemic on the continent was the role politics and economic needs played in shaping interventions across Africa's geographic, cultural, and epidemiological landscape. In their edited volume, *Covid-19 in Africa: Governance and Containment*, Susan Arndt, Yacouba Banhoro, Taibat Lawanson, Enocent Msindo, and Peter Simatei critically examine how the various multi-level government interventions during the pandemic shaped people's experiences of the crisis in Africa. Rather than providing linear narratives about the impacts of state-led interventions, contributors in the volume show the complex ways responses of states and non-state actors enhanced people's access to Covid-19 supportive measures in some places and how similar responses produced unintended consequences or were used to pursue other socio-political and economic agendas elsewhere in Africa.

In ten thoroughly researched chapters, in addition to the introduction, the volume highlights how the Covid-19 pandemic induced duplicity, multivocality, and a multiplicity of approaches that were accompanied by implementation challenges as global health actors interacted with national, regional, and local state actors to contain the virus. The thematic approach of contributors to governance and containment measures in Part I of the volume and the regional perspectives in Part II reveal the multiple ways the crisis opened new spaces for innovation while exacerbating existing tensions between and within African states.

A central theme of the volume is state-led interventions and how people perceive and respond to them. While contributors reflect that the World Health Organization's (WHO) Covid-19 support for African states provided containment

guidelines—physical distancing, restrictions on travel and public gatherings, and testing/screening – national governments and their local populations responded to these measures differently. For instance, Bationo and Nikiema use data from the screening unit at the Nongre-Massom Health District of Ouagadougou in chapter two to demonstrate the reluctance of Burkina Faso's residents to leave their homes for Covid-19 screening centers because they perceived testing and other health protocols "to be too drastic and demanding on them" (pp. 14-15). This highlights how perceptions of Covid-19 testing differ in contrast to the problem of access and stigmatization many experienced during the HIV/AIDs pandemic in Africa. In contrast to the apathy and lack of engagement with the Covid-19 programs in Burkina Faso, Ugandans actively engaged with the containment measures because the ruling party tried to exploit the programs for their political interests in ways that threatened participatory politics. In their discussion of mobility issues in chapter three, Kinyera and Doevenspeck explain the Ugandan government's use of security forces to enforce presidential orders disguised as public health measures - a biopolitical intervention to legitimize the control of the 2021 general elections by immobilizing the subaltern strategies that helped subvert the restrictions. Though insightful, the analysis of popular resistance to state-led coercive and politically motivated health measures in the chapter leaves us with little knowledge of the effectiveness of the pandemic measures in the country. However, the authors' perspectives on how authoritarian impulses during the pandemic impacted governance and state-society relations add to the literature on Covid-19 in Africa.

In chapter six, Santos paints a similar picture of resistance, bringing the voices of Xhosa-speaking subsistence fishers in South Africa's Eastern Cape province into the narrative. By demonstrating how fishers in the small coastal town of Kenton-on-Sea challenged the government's power over access to and use of rivers during the Covid-19 lockdown, the author shows the threat some Covid-19 measures posed to food security and people's livelihood, underscoring the enduring role of systemic inequality in the struggles of marginalized communities for access to resources.

To further complicate the analysis of how state power shaped Covid-19 containment measures, Agbedahin's chapter four presents a nuanced view of military involvement in public health during the pandemic using the South African National Defence Force (SANDF). Indeed, the army's presence on streets in African cities, especially under civilian administrations, is often considered a threat to civil liberties given the unpleasant history of military-society relations across the continent. In this case, however, we see SANDF's positive contribution to public health during the "war" against Covid-19. Using the experiences they gained in regional peacekeeping missions, "where they were exposed to the Ebola crisis in the Democratic Republic

of Congo and Liberia, [SANDF troops] played educational roles in communities where they were deployed in South Africa to curb the spread of the coronavirus" (p. 71). Despite adding another layer to the nuanced analyses in the volume, Agbedahin may have swung the pendulum too far with the image of an undifferentiated local population, suggesting widespread consent to SANDF's involvement in public health matters without any cases of conflict or resistance, abuse, or misconduct by soldiers. Contributors in the volume also engage in public health communication and governance issues, showing how poor information management and infrastructural gaps impacted compliance with Covid-19 measures and worsened socio-economic disparities. Drawing on social media interactions about the pandemic and political interference in the distribution of Covid-19 relief materials in chapter five, Olajide, Lawanson, and Odekunle point out the governments' ineffective coordination of pandemic responses in Nigeria—a failure that exacerbated the socio-economic impacts of the crisis on vulnerable groups. Eleshin's chapter seven provides a valuable example of serious miscommunication of information in Lagos, which the author blames on the failure of state authorities and NGOs to use the Indigenous language to transfer health-related messages during the public health crisis. Findings from his survey of 54 Covid-19-related banners across three local government areas of the state not only corroborate the engendered inequality Olajide et al. attribute to the lack of clear communication strategies and accountability but also expose how poor translation of health information created an infodemic in the mega-city, underscoring the need for improved governance structures across Africa.

Beyond national responses, the comparative analysis of regional initiatives to contain the pandemic in Part II of the volume illustrates the delicate balance between implementing global health protocols, national priorities, and regional cooperation in Africa. By pursuing self-help during the public health crisis instead of deepening multilateral cooperation to contain the virus, the contrasting state approaches Oluoch demonstrates within the East African Community (EAC) in chapter nine reveal how the pandemic strained multilateral relations, as evident in the stringent cross-border measures and the poor treatment of long-distance truckers.

While Matui blames the individualist state imperatives on the weakness of regional multilateralism in chapter ten, Makulilo and Kapuya indicate in chapter nine that local populations in the region largely resisted top-down containment measures like lockdowns and curfews due to the strain they placed on their livelihoods and economic activities, making their implementation difficult. Interestingly, in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Dione's use of data from the African Development Bank, the World Bank, and official statistics from the Regional Center for Surveillance and Disease Control in chapter eleven suggest that

Senegal, Ghana, and Nigeria draw on lessons from their previous experience of similar (Ebola) crises for new models of regional cooperation, including calling individually and collectively for debt relief from regional and international financial institutions. Indeed, the comparative analysis here unveils the social realities on the ground in the region and the efforts to tackle some of the challenges the pandemic imposed. However, the chapter does not explain the impact of the relief programs discussed, the perception of the local population on whether the programs met their needs, and issues surrounding access, especially for lower-class citizens in countries with endemic corruption like Nigeria, where politicians reportedly hoarded Covid-19 relief materials during the pandemic.

Finally, the appropriate title of this volume should be "Covid-19 in Tropical Africa," as all case studies were drawn from the sub-Saharan region, even though the first reported case of Covid-19 in the continent was in Egypt on February 14, 2020. In this context, anyone interested in how North Africans experienced or responded to the pandemic would be disappointed in this volume. Nonetheless, the thematic organization of the chapters offers valuable understanding of the varied and complex responses to Covid-19 across different contexts in sub-Saharan Africa.

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