Book Review

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Entrepreneurship in Southern Africa: How History Shaped the Present
by: Léo-Paul Dana and Aidin Salamzadeh
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1 A groundbreaking masterpiece on the soul of African enterprise

In this remarkable volume, Léo-Paul Dana and Aidin Salamzadeh have curated more than just a business text; they have produced a definitive masterpiece that captures the vibrant, resilient spirit of Southern African entrepreneurship. By weaving together historical analysis, cultural anthropology, and modern economic theory, the authors challenge the coloniality of knowledge that has long marginalised African perspectives in favour of Western models.

2 Bridging the gap between culture and commerce

The core strength of this work lies in its insistence that business cannot be understood in a vacuum. The authors brilliantly highlight the 'cultural assumptions' – often ignored by mainstream scholars – that are central to understanding how trade functions on the ground. A standout example is the examination of the Indigenous Basuto people in Lesotho, where the ownership of cattle carries a communal obligation that defies Western notions of private property. Such insights remind the reader that in Africa, economic activity is a 'socio-cultural system' as much as it is a financial one.

Dana and Salamzadeh take the reader on an extraordinary journey into the heart of the bazaar economy. They move beyond the impersonal firm-type institutions of wealth maximisation to explore the informal sectors where personal relationships and social networks are the true currency. From the bustling Tukondjeni Market in Windhoek to the street vendors of Maputo, the book provides a visceral look at the people at the bottom of the pyramid who use entrepreneurship as a vital tool for survival and family upliftment.

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3 The power of history and context

The book meticulously documents how the tribulations of the past – from the arbitrary borders of the 1897 *Century Atlas* to the transition from socialist regimes – continue to shape the entrepreneurial landscape. By providing detailed case studies on nations including Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, and South Africa, the authors show how history has created a unique mindset that drives innovation today.

4 Visually rich and ethically grounded

Unique to this academic work is the extensive use of original photography by Léo-Paul Dana and Wilfred Isak April. These images – ranging from traditional cooking pots in Lesotho to modern machinery in Namibia – are used with 'informed consent' and 'cultural sensitivity', grounding the theoretical discussions in the lived realities of the people.

5 A call for a global mindset shift

In the opening chapter, 'The context of Southern African entrepreneurship', Dana and Salamzadeh set the stage by arguing that entrepreneurship in Southern Africa is inextricably linked to complex cultural and social systems that are often invisible at the surface. They establish a critical distinction between:

1 the firm-type economy with impersonal, wealth-maximising institutions

2 the bazaar economy, a socio-cultural system deeply rooted in personal relationships

3 the parallel economy: a vital sector encompassing informal street vending, subsistence activities, and even covert economic transactions.

In Chapter 2: the authors explain the challenging act of balancing diamonds and diversification, by providing a thorough analysis of Botswana's transition from a diamond-dependent economy to one striving for diversification. Strengths of this nation include high political stability, low corruption, and strong government incentives for start-ups. Challenges include chronic trade deficits and a 'mismatch' between educational outcomes and market demands, leading to high youth unemployment. The chapter highlights how street markets in places like Francistown and Gaborone serve as critical employment engines despite a lack of formal social protection.

Chapter 3 focuses on agribusiness and indigenous growth in Eswatini. Here the authors focus on the Kingdom of Eswatini and its reliance on agriculture and its large-scale industrial firms. Of interest here is a system of dual agriculture; the authors examine the unique 'nation land' system where the King distributes land via local chiefs for subsistence farming. They argue for a shift toward a healthy indigenous small business sector to reduce dependence on foreign aid and build a skilled workforce.

Chapter 4 focuses on Lesotho, a kingdom of cultural wealth and animal husbandry. Perhaps one of the most culturally rich chapters, this section explores how history and tradition shape modern Basotho business. The reader gains an understanding of property

paradigms as the authors detail how a person can be 'wealthy and poor simultaneously' because cultural property, like a family home or cattle, has high social value but cannot easily be converted into liquid cash. The chapter describes how herding goats and sheep is a path to wealth that passes knowledge from one generation to the next.

Chapter 5 is about Mozambique and its resilience after conflict. This chapter provides a poignant look at entrepreneurship in a nation shaped by socialism and civil war. The authors explain how a mindset evolved during central planning that equated efficiency with the 'evasion of regulations', creating unique challenges for modern formalisation. Despite reforms, the informal sector remains the primary driver for daily survival in a fertile country still grappling with energy and food security dependencies.

Chapter 6 takes us to Namibia with logistical hubs and Indigenous knowledge. Here, Dana and Salamzadeh provide deep insights into Namibia's long-standing entrepreneurial culture. The chapter highlights the Walvis Bay Port as a key gateway for regional trade. There is a strong emphasis on the government's commitment to technical and vocational education (TVET) to bridge the skills gap. Detailed exhibits show how informal markets enable families to fund education and support extended households.

Chapter 7 examines South Africa discussing history, apartheid, homelands, and the future. The review of South Africa is extensive, covering the nation's journey from early homelands to its current status as a regional economic powerhouse. The chapter traces the impact of the 'homeland' system (including Transkei and Ciskei) and how these historical borders still influence regional development. It maps the challenges of SMEs in the City of Johannesburg and the ongoing struggle to harmonise Western business models with indigenous knowledge systems.

6 Conclusions

By organising the book this way, Dana and Salamzadeh have created a 'masterpiece of coordinated efforts'. They successfully argue that Southern Africa is not a monolith but a collection of 'vibrant cultures' that require a 'nuanced perspective' beyond standard economic theory.

Entrepreneurship in Southern Africa is a clarion call for the world to move past a 'Western cultural lens' and recognise the profound contributions of African views. It is an essential read for anyone – scholar, policymaker, or investor – who wishes to truly understand the 'excitement and promise' of the continent.

Dana and Salamzadeh have not just authored a book; they have ushered in a 'spirit of inclusion' that is necessary for a mature, global understanding of business philosophy. This volume is, without question, a vital addition to the Springer *Ethnic and Indigenous Business Studies* series.