

Editorial Introduction: New Perspectives on Africa

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The second International Politics issue of *Political Perspectives* is the fruit of ideas and exchanges that have matured at the University of Manchester Africa Forum. Since its establishment in 2006 the Africa Forum has continued to encourage informal debates on African politics and methodological discussions on empirical research in Africa amongst PhD students and more established academics. The informality of the group has always been recognised as its greatest strength, nonetheless the participants also nurtured a desire to open the discussions to a wider audience and give the forum more visibility. It is in this context that the idea of producing a special issue on Africa was generated and thereafter supported.

This issue's regional focus fits not only within the overreaching scope of the journal but it also comes at a critical point in time, one where processes of political and economic restructuring are accelerating throughout the continent and where the international community – particularly the G8, the UN and the EU – has repeatedly renewed its commitment to aiding the political, economic and social development of Africa. Yet, despite changes and policy interventions unfolding at different levels and paces, the continent continues to witness the highest concentration of severe crises and wars in the world (HHIK 2006) and to lag behind in all the indicators of social development (ECA 2007: 12). If conflicts and the challenges of development are generally but arguably portrayed as part and parcel of the state of Africa today, it seems plausible to contend that this characterisation obscures not only the more nuanced and intricate relationships between agents and structures but also the quiet and patchy 'renaissance' that is slowly transforming the continent (Shaw and Nyang'oro 2000). This is the analytical point of departure of this project, which is intentionally open-ended but also sufficiently comprehensive to capture the new directions of research undertaken by the postgraduate students and contributors to this issue.

From the outset it must be stressed that the issue does not intend to ring-fence or treat Africa as a homogenous geo-political entity divorced from the broader structural dynamics of the global political economy. The focus on the region has been purposefully chosen to offer a space for engendering debate, disseminate new research findings and analyses on contemporary political issues and broader socio-economic transformations in Africa or that directly affect Africa from a critical perspective. In a recent article, Gruffyd Jones (2005) has drawn attention to the fact that International Relations' research has paid little attention to Africa or the question of global poverty and that the continent has 'suffered consistent marginalisation within the discipline' (Jones 2005: 993). The political connotations the word 'marginalisation' assume here are multiple and go beyond mere inattention to Africa. First, 'marginalisation' denotes the frequent representation of an economically or politically decaying continent at the periphery of the international system, and is a depiction open to systematic challenges (Bayart 2000: 237-246). Second, it is suggestive of the partial and top-down characterisation of African politics ensuing from IR's 'Eurocentrism', which, with its unsatisfactory notions of statehood and sovereignty, has detracted attention away from the kinds of political organisations, internal and external relations that do not conform with established assumptions (Clapham 1996: 3-24). Equally important is the observation that these narrow analytical lenses have removed the important distributional questions of deprivation and affluence (Jones 2005: 993). *New Perspectives on Africa* thus seeks to abate the construct of marginalisation and the challenges posed by mainstream theories by repositioning Africa at the centre of postgraduate scholarship while shedding new light on integration, change and resistance from different methodological and disciplinary approaches.

Having defined the context and aims of the project, it is time to turn to the structure and content of the issue. This collection of eight papers is grouped into two broadly defined themes. In the first part the contributions look at the issues of democracy, justice administration and security in an attempt to unravel both domestic and supranational political developments. The second part groups together articles which look more closely at the agents and

multiple facets of the processes of development focussing on themes such as development policies, poverty, NGOs-state relations, HIV/AIDS and education. Although the articles present and analyse distinct political transformations, commonalities can be found in the recurrent identification of the role and influence of the US and international organisations in Africa, the question of 'democratisation' and the themes and targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Before presenting a brief overview of each paper, it is also worth noting that what characterises this issue is not only the originality and diversity of the contributions but also the policy recommendations that many contributors sought to develop in order to establish firmer links between academic research and pragmatic political reforms.

Shola Omotola opens the first part with a thorough analysis of Nigeria's transition from 'importer' of democratic values to that of a champion of democracy promotion throughout Africa. The paper interrogates Nigeria's autocratic past, the efforts to strengthen democratic institutions and practices domestically and abroad as well as the reasons why, since 1999, Nigeria has ventured into the political endeavour of 'exporting' democracy. The paper argues that Nigeria's efforts to condemn unconstitutional change of governments and to promote the restoration of democracy and peace can be deemed largely successful. Nonetheless, it also advances the case that Nigeria needs to confront its internal political, social and economic contradictions before its foreign policy interventions can be regarded as meaningful.

The second article by Setri Dzivenu approaches the subject of traditional authorities and justice administration in Africa from a historico-legal perspective. By comparing the colonial and post-colonial history of Botswana and Ghana the paper contends that upon independence legal amendments were introduced to withdraw the judiciary power traditionally allocated to chiefs or to co-opt chiefs and their customary courts into common law. Nonetheless, it is argued that even if these changes may appear to have diminished the de facto power of chiefs in the modern African state,

chieftaincy continues to thrive. The paper investigates the reason why this parallel system of justice enjoys widespread appeal and considers the implication of its importance for the modern legal system.

Girmachew Alemu Aneme concludes the first part of the issue with a legal analysis of the prospects and challenges facing the African Union's Standby Force (ASF) under mission scenario six, namely the African Union's (AU) right to armed intervention in cases of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Using primary policy documents such as the AU Constitutive Act, the AU Policy Framework for the Establishment of the AFS and the AU Roadmap for the Operationalisation of the ASF, the paper appraises the ASF's mandate, doctrine and operationalisation under scenario six and establishes that in order to make the ASF an effective organ for military intervention the ASF doctrine needs to be clarified and the issue of funding needs to be addressed.

The second part critically interrogates development strategies, policies and programmes in Africa. The contribution by Ikponwosa Ero analyses the nature of US developmental programmes and aid contributions towards Africa throughout the past decade. The paper argues that strategic interests in US-Africa relations and the 'securitisation' of development have become more evident since 9/11. It further posits that the failure amongst American development scholars, Easterly and Sachs in particular, to reach an agreement over an overarching strategy to serve the interests of Africa contributes to fostering the reproduction of self-interested policies in an area that calls for 'sensitised humanitarianism'.

Alexander Attilio Vadala contributes to this thematic section with an analytical piece on famine, poverty and politics in contemporary Ethiopia. Against a background of successive famines and the persistence of vulnerability to famine in the country, the article looks at the internal as well as the external determinants and actors that are impairing the full realisation of the right to food and freedom from hunger in Ethiopia. Moving beyond conventional climatic or economic explanations, the author argues, following Amartya Sen's seminal contribution to understanding famine, that Ethiopia's quasi-democratic

political structure, the far-reaching influence of the International Financial Institutions and the selective provision of development aid have not relieved poor peasants and pastoralists from food deprivation and food shortage. While exposure to such insecurity continues to exist the proposal of an 'anti-famine' contract is explored as a means to redress the persistence of vulnerability to hunger.

In the third article Sabine Höhn investigates the changing relationships between civil society, the state and donors in contemporary Namibia. Drawing on primary interviews with Namibian research and advocacy NGOs and donors the paper sets to explain how decline in funding available for local NGOs has reconfigured the political role and capacity of these organisations. The paper contends that the perception of the Namibian state as a consolidating democracy has diverted donors' funds away from NGOs towards the Namibian government. Furthermore, it provides an ethnographic account of how a 'shrinking' NGO sector is creatively reacting, resisting and adopting changes in a time of 'crisis'. The research concludes that as the sector is unwillingly forced to scale down essential knowledge, expertise and grassroots voices on Namibia's developmental trajectory are being lost.

Elaborating upon Foucault's later works, the fourth contribution sheds new light on the responses to HIV/AIDS prevention programmes that explicitly target men in sub-Saharan Africa. Building on extensive fieldwork conducted in Uganda, Louise Rasmussen's paper compares 'Operation Gideon' and the 'Be a Man' campaign and analyses how particular narratives of culture, traditions and gender shape the way in which these programmes help to produce gendered subject-positions. The paper maintains that the assumptions and practices of both initiatives position Ugandan men as 'the powerful' and 'the ones in control'. By placing this argument within the wider gender and development literature it is suggested the reproduction of these gendered stereotypes contributes to naturalising unequal gender relations and, perhaps, even reinforces them by granting men custodianship of HIV/AIDS prevention.

The fifth paper by Maia Chankseliani looks at the barriers to equal opportunities in primary school education for Mozambican girls from a liberal economic-efficiency perspective. The paper introduces the analysis by providing a factual and statistical overview of gender inequality in primary education in Mozambique and explains that the three major barriers to gender parity and progress to lower and upper primary education are primarily economic, socio-cultural and geographical (i.e. urban-rural divide). Based on international research documents the paper then explores the feasibility of several policy proposals while arguing that in order to meet the targets set in the second MDG 'compensatory policies are necessary to make primary schooling socio-culturally acceptable and economically worthwhile for [Mozambican] schoolgirls and their parents'.

The last contribution by the Junior Editor Solomon Gofie concludes the issue by reflecting on the value of the research agenda on Africa set in this issue, how this is likely to evolve in the future and what challenges it needs to confront.

I hope that our readers will appreciate the spectrum of themes covered in *New Perspectives on Africa* and the new research questions addressed in each paper and that these will provide a springboard for further debate and scholarly engagement. Though this project has now been completed *Political Perspectives* is committed to continue offering a supportive publishing outlet for researchers focussing on the politics and political economy of the developing world.

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