

'New Perspectives on Africa: Concluding Remarks'

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The contributors to this special issue of *Political Perspectives* raised and discussed highly pertinent topics on contemporary socio-political developments in Africa. Furthermore, the research topics the authors investigated are also indicative of the thematic breadth of contemporary and future research on Africa. The themes covered include democracy, customary laws versus state laws, continental security, forms of external involvement in Africa, the political economy of famine, relationships between the state and non-state actors, local perceptions of HIV/AIDS, the impacts of male dominated discourse and gender relationships, and the challenges faced by the education sector in Africa.

As the papers themselves demonstrate, most of the authors did not only describe and explain the issues theoretically and empirically, but they also indicated the policy implications of their findings and future directions of research. Therefore, the significance of the issues covered in this edition should not be limited to addressing the specific research topics each author raised. Most importantly the themes the authors explored and their analyses provided the necessary basis for in-depth investigations into these and other areas of research on Africa in the future.

The Nigerian experience Omotola discussed calls for further explanations concerning the contradictory roles countries dare to assume in promoting democracy, regional integration and conflict resolution without addressing the antagonisms in state-society relationships in domestic political realms. Dzivenu's contribution brought forward the resilience of the tensions between state laws and customary laws in Africa. While this by no means constitute the only research on the relationship between state-laws and customary laws, this could serve as a constant reminder of the need for more investigations as to why

African politico-legal structures under utilize their societies' intellectual, historical and cultural assets, including customary laws, to the benefit of African peoples. Girmachew's paper looked at Africa's 'security dilemma', whereby African head of states and governments long ago wanted to form a system of collective security at the continental level, and yet they were unable to do so, not only from the point of view of financial constraints, but also because of other important challenges which need to be rigorously re-examined.

In the second part of the issue Ero's work provided a critical perspective on the forms of external involvements in Africa by placing the policies of the United States of America at the centre of analysis. In this respect, the author has touched upon the intersections of the policies as well as the practices of superpower domination and the modes of knowledge production. Hence, interrogating the intellectual basis of 'globalising' policies and 'humanitarian' intervention will continue to form the source of critically oriented intellectual engagement in this area. At another level, mainstream approaches have for a long time considered that it was 'predictable' that famine or poverty would affect countries or societies exhibiting certain socio-economic and cultural characteristics identified through the help of parameters that could not capture the historical specificity of these problems. Therefore, as Alexander's work on Ethiopia suggested, it is necessary to undertake research that provides fresh perspectives on famine, poverty and the lack of development. In this regard, scholars would require the development of methodologies capable of explaining the specific forms of state-society relationships and external dynamics that contribute to the problem. Moreover there is a need to identify approaches that could reveal the political significance of those relationships, with a view to understand famine and poverty, their major causes and the likely policy implications.

The struggle between the state and non-state actors, especially on externally generated financial resources as addressed by Höhn's paper also invites to

interrogate the question of which actor(s) in a given country, or from the outside, should be considered the primary vehicle for allocation of economic resources. As it can be observed from Rasmussen's analysis on the relationship between local discourses of HIV/AIDS and gender inequality, there should be even more research which critically responds to male dominated discourses. Moreover, there is a need to adopt emancipatory perspectives and methodologies, which would practically support women's struggle for their own protection and for gender equality. Chankseliani's paper on the barriers to education for young Mozambican girls effectively demonstrated that a lot remains to be done in terms of critically responding to the gap between officially proclaimed goals and the reality of low level educational opportunity for Africa's younger generation in general and for the girls in particular.

The objectives for which research on New Perspectives on Africa was initiated are largely achieved. Primarily, the significance of this publication rests in the collective efforts made to focus on African issues and perspectives that remained marginal in relation to issues considered central to the mainstream perspectives on international politics. New Perspectives on Africa also provided the scope for intellectual and professional engagement for those who are involved in the course of realizing its aims. I hope that the online Journal *Political Perspective* will continue to be the locus for future research on these and other pertinent topics.

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