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African agency in international politics: an introduction

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Chapter 1: African agency in international politics

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The study of Africa's international relations has for a long time been dominated by a concern to explain how the continent has been shaped, dominated and marginalized by external actors. In periods of economic crisis and political upheaval (much of the 1980s and 1990s), in which powerful outside actors were prominent, this approach was perhaps understandable, if misguided. Even in those years, the portrayal of Africa as the inert victim of exogenous forces, bound by immovable structural constraints, was always a limited understanding of international relations in the region. In the second decade of the twenty-first Century, when African actors have established a sustained track record of assertive, high-level diplomacy and in which the continent has seen long-term economic growth, this approach has started to look ever more anachronistic. For this is an era in which African states, leaders and diplomats have been centrally engaged in global negotiations over climate change, world trade, aid disbursal and intervention norms, in which African politicians have made strategic choices in how they reshape existing relations with western donors and fashion new relationships with rising powers, and one in which African non-state actors have been critical both to the definition and implementation of policies in fields as diverse as governance, security, health, environment, and migration. It is thus high time that we approach Africa's international relations from a different perspective.

This book seeks to open up such a starting point for the analysis of Africa's international relations by turning the established approach on its head. Rather than asking how do external actors determine African realities, we ask how far and in what ways are African political

actors impacting on and operating within the international system? What are the key sites and sources of agency in Africa? What does African agency look like and how can we understand it? The shift is an important one. But it is not an effort to deny the very obviously tight corners which constrain Africa's choices within the international system[1]. These, whether in the form of great powers, structures of economic disadvantage or disabling discourses, are real and persistent. However, analysis that begins with such constraints always struggles to articulate any real engagement with the political actions of those operating within these tight corners. A new starting point is therefore more of a signal of intellectual intent. It is an intent to take African politics, actions, preferences, strategies and purposes seriously, to get beyond the tired tropes of an Africa that is victimised, chaotic, violent and poor. It is also an intent to focus on interaction rather than one-way domination, tensions between reproduction and transformation of structured relationships rather than recurrence and repetition.

The content of this book, and the beginnings of such analysis, stems from a series of seminars sponsored by the United Kingdom (UK) Economic Social Research Council (ESRC) in 2011.[2] The series of seminars sought to approach Africa's international politics from the standpoint of how African actors exert agency in international negotiations; in peace, conflict and intervention processes; in transnational security issues; as well as undertaking a reflection on the implications of African agency for International Relations theory and Southern African perspectives on this. This book presents a range of research arising from different perspectives on African agency and on a diverse set of issues. These are all motivated by a desire to look at Africa's international relations from a new perspective, to break away from the important yet determinist structural accounts of Africa's international relations to question how African actors impact on the international system.

Agency and Africa

This book seeks to effect such a turnaround in perspective by beginning with a focus on agency. Tackling questions of agency has a number of effects on the kind of analytical project we construct. For one, it returns to the desire to look at international relations 'from the bottom up' as, in different ways, both Clapham (1996) and Bayart (1993) have done in the past. Second, it puts the issue of political action by, and purposes of, African actors to the fore in our analysis by engaging with the constrained choices they face and respond to. Third, it encourages greater engagement with those areas of fluidity, change and transformation as exist in African's international relations. Finally, a focus on agency sheds light on those political actors and processes often ignored or unseen and accounts for difference and alternative spaces of political engagement within the international system.

As we will explore further below, there are at least two groups of questions around agency that contributions to this volume explore. The first approaches agency as a question about how much influence or power is being exerted and how much freedom of action African political actors have available to them. This group of questions involves enquiries into where and how African agents are making an impact on international politics and identification of those factors, whether at the level of the international system or in domestic politics, that enable or constrain that influence. In this respect it is worth pointing out that an analytical focus on agency does not presume any premature conclusions that African agents are *necessarily* having a significantly greater impact than at some previous time. It can certainly be argued, as suggested above, that there are issue areas where African agency seen in this way has increased, however this is not a view shared by all observers nor is it necessarily true

in all fields. Indeed, authors differ considerably in their assessments of African agency in contemporary circumstances. A focus on agency seen as an ability to influence or exert power does not therefore simply invert the conventional approach to stress an unconstrained, voluntaristic view of agency—as Mamdani warned, '…it is only when abstracted from structural constraint that agency appears as lacking in historical specificity' (Mamdani, 1996: 10-11). What it does do is prompt us to identify such room for manoeuvre as exists and to explain the forces at work that open or close down those spaces.

Analysis of agency also calls on us to explain what might be done with that room for manoeuvre. As a result, the second group of questions of agency is more concerned with explaining the *kind* of agency that is being enacted. This is both in terms of identification of the specific agents at work (organisations, states, leaders or civil society actors), the social context within which they act and therefore the political purposes they carry into the international arena (what is it that they seek to achieve or change; whose interests are being pursued). This necessitates consideration of the tools actors use to enact agency within the contexts they operate in and in pursuit of specific goals. This could be a reassertion of sovereign claims to governance, the playing of identity politics to garner the support of a specific population, naming and shaming of those that do not seek the same objectives, or the use of force or financial bargaining and leverage. In many ways African agency is different from other forms of agency because of the structural constraints on that agency. However as this book argues such constraints do not mean agency does not exist, it just means the tools and sites of such agency may differ and offer something new for our understanding.

Before seeing how this analytical turnaround might shape different African diplomatic investigations, however, we need also to pause to consider the use of the term 'Africa'. Why focus on Africa and to what extent can we even talk about an 'African' agency at all without slipping into the very same stereotypes we are trying to escape?

Africa is in some senses an exemplar of minor powers or 'small states' in the international system. As such it provides a set of cases through which to explore the view of international relations that begins somewhere other than with the great powers. Notwithstanding the understandable focus of much IR on great powers, Africa does in fact matter for a range of policy areas, particularly those involving multilateral forums, international collective action, or areas where there are marked relations of interdependence between the continent and outside powers. Africa matters in setting the global trade agenda, peace and conflict mitigation, and discussions on rising powers, and human security threats such as climate change and health. In exploring questions of agency in international politics, Africa serves as something of a limit case—if anywhere might be characterised as most bound by existing structures of power it is surely Africa. Major shifts in the polarity of the international system have not been significantly affected, or effected, by African states and significant structures of economic and political governance appear to remain stubbornly resistant to programmes of change from any other than the biggest powers. It is thus important to consider why this is the case and how smaller, African states can exert influence or effect change.

Such arguments also draw us into a more fundamental question that has to be addressed before developing ideas about African agency, namely, to what extent we can speak of Africa as a singular whole. Indeed, any attempt to define a field described as broadly as this one is

bound to run the risk of partiality and over-generalisation. To speak of African agency of course is a non-starter if that were taken *unproblematically* to be a unified and undifferentiated agency in international politics. Although a history of colonisation is part of the shared history of almost all African states, as Harrison argues, even here the diversity of experience and diversity of the impacts of colonialism make this a unity based on the 'broadest of sweeps'(Harrison, 2010: 15). Aside from that, one might talk of an African agency in terms the instances of collective assertion by African states of influence in the international arena, something we will look more at below, but which as Zondi notes in his chapter, has a patchy record at best. A third notion of an African agency is more discursive, in the way that Africa is constructed as an entity both by outsiders and by African political actors and intellectuals (Harrison, 2010: 16-17). This arises in particular in the realm of development policy where common problems and solutions are frequently ascribed to 'Africa' as a whole.

Assessing agency at this more generalised level therefore invites analysis of African agency in three senses. First are the concrete impact of African states acting collectively, and the nature of that collective action, in international forums. Second is the range of very different actors coming from the continent and who are identified by others or by themselves in some senses as African. Finally, there is the extent to which Africa as a category is utilised by African and non-African actors to construct forms of political action internationally. This latter sense includes questions about whether such constructions create opportunities or constraint for such African collective action or individual state projects as well as the ways in which African political actors themselves, both state and non-state, utilise the notion of 'Africa' as a means to define and extend their actions in the external world.

Arenas and extent of African agency

The range of arenas within which African political actors exert their influence is wide and contributions to this book represent an initial but necessarily incomplete exploration of some of the key ones that the study of African agency in international politics has to engage with. Broadly they focus on four, sometimes overlapping, locations: multilateral intergovernmental negotiations; bilateral relations with external powers; a realm of intra-regional co-operation and fields of sub-state or transnational political action.

First, and most obvious to external observers, are the highly visible African interventions on the global stages of the United Nations (UN), World Trade Organisation (WTO) and international financial institutions such as the World Bank. All three of these have witnessed an upsurge in developing country assertiveness within which African participation has been important. With the end of the Cold War and an increasingly active Security Council, the legitimacy and representativeness of the UN came into question. As, Zondi points out in his chapter, as the largest regional block of countries—a quarter of the UN membership—Africa has been among those clamouring for a reform of the inherited post-Second World War structures. However, it has been in the more specific policy areas of world trade and climate change that African numbers have been made to count for more. In the WTO African states have moved from playing a critical but relatively passive role to engaging in a concerted effort to increase influence, build capacity to scrutinise proposals and to reject those which run counter to the declared developmental goals of the post-Seattle Doha 'Development' Round. Such prominence was also displayed to a world audience as South Africa joined the emerging powers of Brazil, China and India in the critical stages of the Copenhagen

conference on climate change in 2009. And contrary to some expectations, South Africa followed this up by hosting what, by climate change standards, was a relatively successful summit in Durban in 2011. Over and above these examples, African states have also played important roles in negotiations around international efforts to control conflict diamonds, landmines, trade in small arms and toxic waste, among others (Shaw, Cheru and Cornelissen, 2012). African membership, specifically South African membership, of the G20, new alliances such as the BRICS, and prominence in the UN General Assembly all add to the growing presence of African actors in international decision-making and diplomacy (Cornelissen, 2009).

Less prominent, but often of more direct and immediate impact, has been a growing assertiveness of African states within the varied bilateral relationships they are involved in. This is not least in relations with western aid donors. It is in aid relationships above all that the image of the 1980s and 1990s, of a group of countries totally subservient to external dictates and policy whims of western states and the Bretton Woods institutions, took hold most strongly. While more careful studies of donor influence have unpicked parts of that image (Mosely et al, 1991; Killick, 1998; Whitfield, 2009), there is nevertheless a sense that even where African governments have shown resistance to particular donor interventions, this was often piecemeal and short-term rather than concerted and strategic. This is still the case for some countries. However, for others, the 21st Century has seen a much more overt effort to redefine the relationship with donors, from forging a new partnership at the global level via the G8, to national efforts to control and direct donor activity. Rwanda and Uganda both demonstrate this assertiveness very clearly and three chapters in this volume assess the strategic thinking of the Kampala and Kigale governments in managing their external

linkages. However, such bilateral relationships extend also to the security field with which they overlap in many respects. The renewed importance of some African countries to post-9/11 western policy has given added sources of leverage utilised especially by countries like Uganda. In Uganda, Fisher argues in his chapter, Museveni has combined diplomatic manoeuvring and image management to create greater space to define relations with the west. It is these emerging sites and tools of African agency that present new insights to how we understand agency in international politics.

Sitting somewhere between these two is a third arena of regional and sub-regional activity. This has been centred on the African Union but also encompasses the various sub-regional organisations operating in the fields of security and economic integration. The arrival of the African Union in (2002) was a significant statement of a new era in African diplomacy extending from the global stages described above down to the management of sub-regional processes and relationships. Indeed, the formation of the AU has given African states a platform from which to participate internationally, as well as forming the basis of a new phase of the management of intra-regional matters. As such it has been central both to ideas of an African renaissance and of finding 'African solutions to African problems' (Williams, 2011). While old problems persist—underfunding, lack of capacity and the inability to live up to grand declarations among them—the AU, despite being work in progress, has made a step change in the ability of Africa to act collectively within the region and outside of it (Coleman, 2011; Engel and Porto, 2010; Williams, 2009).

Finally, African agency is enacted in a diverse set of arenas at more remove from the formal state-based and intergovernmental areas. Non-state and transnational actors interact, either

directly or mediated via national states, with international organisations and agencies of various kinds. This is apparent in the aid, environmental and health fields where non-state actors are critical to the successful implementation of the policy of both national and international organisations. They also have the capacity, as in issues relating to drugs trade and migration, to shape policy agendas themselves (as Hammerstad (2012) has explored in relation to migration, security and South African foreign policy). Away from the direct intergovernmental dealings with states in the aid and security fields, it is often 'non-state' actors and processes of migration, environmental change, trade and financial linkages that help to define the interdependencies that Africa experiences with western states. This overcomes one of the central limitations of understanding agency—a reassertion of a preoccupation with states, or specifically the African state—in order to shift the focus to a plethora of political activity that has an impact on national and international policy. Moreover transnational or non-state sites of agency have become a preoccupation of the international community as something to build under the rubric of 'good governance.' For aspects of the international community, the agency of non-state actors is of primary importance in the promotion of democracy in Africa. It is therefore important to consider how non-state actors operate within the parameters of what is seen as 'appropriate' agency by international actors and to what extent non-state actors challenge this appropriateness and offer an alternative idea of agency.

Even if there is some agreement on the range of locations within which African agency is being enacted, contributions to this volume differ in their assessments of the extent of African agency both within each of these locations and between them. For example, while for Donna Lee the WTO has seen sustained African efforts to participate fully in the Doha Development

Round, to some considerable effect in negotiations on cotton among other areas, Stephen Hurt argues that this success has come at a price. Confronted by developing country assertiveness in the global forum, major powers have shifted their focus to bilateral and regional deals exemplified by the European Union's (EU) negotiation of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with African sub-regional groupings where it is better able to constrain African bargaining power. For Zondi also, steps forward in African collective influence in UN reform and climate change negotiations, won through the formation of common negotiating positions, have been weakened by the persistence of strong and divergent national preferences. Fisher, Beswick and Grimm all outline ways in which 'weak' African states are able to actively manage relations with much more powerful allies through image management, balancing of threats and active coordination, respectively. However, they all recognise limitations to these strategies. In reviewing the UK's role, Tom Cargill argues that while boosting Africa's standing in policy circles under Tony Blair's premiership, the UK has been inconsistent, often presuming to speak 'for' Africa and Africans. In making more general assessments, Andreasson sees state weakness in Africa as persistently undercutting attempts by the continent's governments to exert themselves in a hostile international system.

These divergent takes on the extent of African agency, emphasise the multiple determinants of agency within global politics and reinforce the point made above that the analytical focus on African agency does not presume a picture of increasing African influence. Indeed, one of the messages of the contributions to this book is that the picture is very mixed, issue-specific and fluid. However, the examples covered demonstrate an ability of some African actors to be able to make use of the contingencies of the moment they encounter in a proactive way.

The period since the start of the twenty-first century has certainly witnessed deliberate efforts on a wider canvas to try to redefine the relationship with, and Africa's role within, the international system on a broader basis. These have not all been successful and the old issues of power that Andreasson emphasises so strongly, continue to constrain such agency. Nevertheless it is only by beginning with a focus on agency that we can tease out such possibilities and constraints, successes and failures.

Determinants and purposes of agency

The analysis of agency has to go beyond such quasi-quantitative assessments of influence, important though they are. Explanatory and normative judgements of African agency require us to tackle questions with regard to those factors that make exercises of agency possible and those that limit the reach and scope of agency. Moreover it is important to consider how to characterise and conceptualises different types of agent and their political purposes. A key factor in the opening up of greater space in the international arena for African states' activism has been the tectonic shifts in power at international system level, especially through the impact of powers such as China and India in the institutions of international governance. Shifts in polarity—to what Siphamandla Zondi, following Huntington refers to as a 'uni-multipolar hybrid' with the USA's unquestioned military advantage matched by a broader dispersal of economic power (Huntington, 1999)—have altered the landscape of international governance. For Zondi, 'the growth of multilateralism in an increasingly multipolar world with the rise of China and India to challenge the north-Atlantic axis has had a positive effect on Africa's participation in global affairs'(see Zondi this book). None have been more important than China whose rise has done much to reshape overall polarity in the international system and, together with India and Brazil, in multilateral forums. This in turn

has enabled African governments to try to make numbers count where they can and the pursuit of common positions by the AU is a clear attempt to seize the potential provided by this opening. As Lee demonstrates, within the WTO this has had some success, as the main players become more finely balanced; more room is provided for countries with less market power to exert influence. China's and India's increasing importance in the aid field (see Grimm this book and Taylor, 2012) have also done much to enable some African states to fashion increasing leverage in bilateral relations with western donors.

However, these geopolitical shifts have not provided unqualified benefits to African agency. For one, the more difficult it is for major powers to lead and control multilateral forums, the more their temptation to sideline those arenas, as Hurt's analysis of the EU shows. The paradox for African states is that such an impasse leaves them with something of a pyrrhic victory, the influence of 'saying no' in the WTO but without much prospect that the forum can deliver policy outcomes in the form of a more development-friendly trade regime. In addition, new Asian powers have their own agendas and African states risk being pawns in their contests with the west, as the climate change negotiations showed. As China, the EU and the USA battled it out, having Africa 'on side' began to matter more than hitherto. Against this however, China's success in getting Africa's numbers lined up behind a negotiating stance (against binding limits on its emissions) which cannot deliver the necessary changes needed to protect Africa from the worst effects of climate change, may leave a more damaging legacy.

For Africa, making use of this changed geopolitical context rests on the twin pillars of collective action and pivotal states. As we have noted above (and as explored further by

Zondi), the extent to which the AU can articulate a collective voice for Africa is heavily influenced by the role of South Africa and Nigeria. When these two states operated in concert, especially once Nigeria had moved back to civilian rule in 1999, Africa enjoyed a 'golden age' of diplomacy (Landsberg, 2011, 2012; Abegunrin, 2009). Both used their capacity and international standing to make a mark on the global stage but did so in pursuit of a shared continental ambition. The dissipation, even crisis, of this alliance has meant these advances have also waned. While Andreasson argues that even South Africa's agency is undermined by domestic weakness, it has done more to sustain a presence and role internationally than Nigeria. South Africa's position as Africa's leading state also comes with its own problems, creating a dual imperative to speak for itself and for Africa as a whole. The fate of the AU as the collective voice of the continent is also brought into doubt by the fluctuations of influence exerted by such key states both in terms of how their international standing reflects upon the regional body and in the more mundane but vital issues of funding and capacity building for the AU.

Investigations into state agency, even for the most powerful African states, necessarily also leads us into questions of the agency of leaders and issues of state capacity. Noted by several contributors to this book, African diplomacy has relied on the particular role played by individual leaders. Such 'personalised' policy confers both benefits and weaknesses on African agency. When leaders coalesce around a shared vision, as claimed during the 'golden age' (Landsberg, 2011), it marshals key African states to a common cause. However, rivalries and conflicting personal loyalties also sow division as has been seen in West Africa's response to the Cote d'Ivoire crisis in 2011, South Africa's response to the Zimbabwe crisis, and in the AU's response to the Libyan conflict in 2011. Leadership and 'big man politics'

remains a component of state agency in Africa, however this is not to obscure the other sites

of agency among women and young people that are increasingly challenging these

prominent, but often stereotyped, aspects of African agency.

For all African states, questions of internal strength—policy development, bureaucratic

capacity and diplomatic presence—all play a key role in enabling participation in and

influence over external relations. Geopolitical strength, particularly as translated in the realm

of international negotiations, is critically dependent on state capacities and whether African

states have the institutional and political strength to effectively consider interests and

formulate and articulate policy. As Whitfield and Fraser have argued, a strong sense of

national interest and the ability to carry that forward has been important for African states in

bilateral aid relationships (Whitfield and Fraser, 2010). In both bilateral and multilateral aid

negotiations, countries such as Rwanda and Ethiopia have both been able to preserve some

policy autonomy from donors partly as a result of internal political processes and conditions

(Whitfield and Fraser, 2010). As such, capacity questions here mesh with a series of other

internal and external factors that determine recipients' negotiating strength in aid bargaining,

others being wider economic conditions, geopolitical contexts, levels of indebtedness and

institutional factors such as the history of relations with donors. Contributors to this book

differ in their assessments, from Andreasson's negative evaluation of state strength to Lee's

more positive account of capacity building within the WTO, to Beswick's and Grimm's

accounts of strategic thinking in Rwanda's foreign policy.

Such questions also take us into more complex issues around how we understand state

agency itself, an issue explored in depth by Williams' contribution, where external and

internal influences combine to shape the nature of that agency and the acceptance of African states as agents externally. But it also draws our attention to the political character of African agency and the purpose of such agency. Such normative questions—whether increased African agency is to be welcomed—rest to a significant degree on how one judges these political purposes. Some western state institutions like the World Bank and some NGOs, clearly present the ideas that it is to be welcomed, having provided support for African capacity-building in world trade and climate change negotiations as well as in providing funding for the AU and its security-related operations. Some of this may be motivated by a sense of global justice—that it is right that weaker states have a greater say in international politics (certainly that is the rhetoric used by the UK Department for International Development, DfID, 2009). In different ways, the debate over UN reform and new aid norms as expressed in the Paris Declaration also point towards rhetorical support for weaker states to have greater voice in international affairs. There are also, of course, significant elements of self-interest in such external support for greater African agency. In climate change negotiations, a larger voice for Africa generally works in the EU's favour by supporting the EU's call for a binding treaty on emissions reductions (a situation which the EU sought to play on in the run-up to the Durban summit[3]. In the security field, an unwillingness of western states to provide troops for peacekeeping operations means there is little alternative but to develop greater African capacity in that area (Coleman, 2011; Engel and Porto, 2010; Williams, 2009).

However, judgements on African agency are also bound up with the political effects of increased agency, and who benefits from it, within Africa. Beswick's analysis of Rwandan foreign policy clearly suggests that the aim of regime survival is key to Rwandan strategy.

This argument returns to the well-established issue of the ways in which regimes can draw resources from the international arena (aid, tariffs, climate change funding) to bolster their domestic positions (Clapham, 1996; Bayart, 1993; Taylor, 2010). Viewed in this way, increased agency enacted via the prominent role of leaders in African diplomacy, takes on a slightly different hue, and draws us into the structured political hinterland of African agents themselves. It inevitably means that analysis of African agency internationally also requires a careful engagement with the political strategies, relationships and purposes of political leaders within Africa. Both Fisher and Beswick see internal political priorities of Museveni and Kigame, which diverge from western stated interests to a considerable extent, as playing a significant role in shaping their external diplomacy.

Finally, political discourses and policy framings have a bearing on the scope for and character of African agency. Within the multilateral arena, Lee argues that changes in trade discourse have had a major impact in re-framing the contests within the WTO. States which lack market power, she argues, 'make up for this structural subordination by using discursive power' (Lee, 2012: 86). In a different context, Fisher analyses how Museveni's government pursued an active policy of trying to manage and shape donor perceptions of Uganda, in a way which keeps donors 'on side' despite serious misgivings about the domestic political situation in Uganda and the country's involvement in the DRC conflict. 'Through managing donor perceptions' Fisher claims in his chapter, 'the Ugandan regime has chosen to subvert the structural logic of aid dependence.' In several other contexts, most notably in health and climate change, the effects of 'securitising discourses' have also been hotly debated in terms of their effects on African agency, enabling agency by increasing funding for HIV programmes and participation in high-level meetings but also limiting that agency by

increasing external shaping of policy in a particular securitised direction (McInnes and Rushton, 2010). Cargill also notes how the particularly British discourses on Africa, and the role of the idea of Africa within Britain, has increased the importance of Africa within UK government policy but in a particular way, with Africa seen as the poor disadvantaged 'Other' in need of British assistance.

What all this tells us about African agency is that it is determined by a fluid combination of external and internal factors dependent on the issue in which agency is being expressed and the site of such agency. External factors such as the legitimacy conferred to different forms of African agency and geopolitical shifts within the international system all require specific forms of agency and intentions for those African actors expressing it. Internal factors such as leadership, position in the region and the changing political climate all determine the purpose of agency and how that purpose is viewed by others. Issues of framing and purposes of agency open up wider questions as to legitimate agency and who or what infers legitimacy on a specific form of agency. Legitimacy to a degree is the value ascribed to agency by internal and external actors and the outcome of expressions of agency, in this sense it is a contested and messy grey area that is context, agent and issue specific.

Outline of the book

The structure of this book is organised into three parts. The first part 'Negotiating Internationally' considers African agency on the global scale, by looking at agency in the context of trade negotiations, aid discussions, and the U,nited Nations. Chapters in this part of the book draw on the problems of common positions, limitations on space of agency, and how agents manage the shifting parameters of negotiation but also outline the clear sites and

spaces in which African agency has been prominent. Siphamandla Zondi assesses the efforts of the 54 member states of the African Union, who constitute about 28 per cent of the UN membership, to harmonize their individual negotiating positions on major international issues in order to turn their numbers into real political clout. While the African Group has existed in UN processes since the 1960s, it is only in the last two decades that it has adopted a more a proactive approach and for advancing nuanced and distinct positions in key international negotiations. The strengthening of continental and regional integration has given further impetus to this notion of concerted diplomacy by Africa. Using examples of the UN Reform and Climate Change negotiations as case studies, Zondi suggests that increasingly the common African positions are derived more from an enlightened view of Africa's common interests than the interests of dominant African states. Yet, this positive trend in African diplomacy is undermined by a number of problems including weak leadership, the persistence of national interests and the exclusion of civil society in African diplomacy.

Donna Lee's careful analysis of the impact of African countries within the WTO is one of the key examples of a claimed increase in African agency. Focusing on the use of discourse, Lee shows how African states have utilised the language of development within trade negotiations to emerge as key protagonists in the WTO Doha Development Round. This increased activism is surprising given the relatively weak market power of states such as Kenya, Burkina Faso, Mali and Egypt in the global trade system. These, and other African states, have overcome some of the structural power constraints inherent in the global trade regime by developing more effective diplomatic capacity in WTO trade negotiations. However, they have also utilised the shifts in trade discourse, with an increased prominence of developmental concerns in the Doha Round, to shape a 'won't do' strategy to block

agreements in non-agricultural trade negotiations that they argue would not enhance their economic development.

A different interpretation of African agency in trade negotiations is offered in Stephen Hurt's chapter, which suggests scepticism about the extent of African agency in contemporary international politics. Defining agency as an ability to change existing material and ideational structures, he argues from a political economy standpoint that the major inequities of world trade remain stubbornly in place. Taking up the story from Lee, Hurt claims that while African countries may well have made advances within the WTO forum, this very success has led to a shift in tactics by the advanced countries and a mushrooming of bilateral and mini-lateral trade initiatives within which the structural power of the major economies is retained. African bargaining strength is weaker here (partly and paradoxically because of the diversion of African diplomatic resources to the WTO) and EU leverage greater. While Hurt notes there has been some resistance to the EU's proposed EPAs, the EU remains set on achieving in this sub-regional set of agreements what it could not (yet) achieve in the WTO.

In the final chapter of the 'Negotiating Internationally' section, Tom Cargill looks at UK policy towards Africa, tracing the emergence of a renewed focus on Africa in the Labour governments (1997-2010) and assessing its impact on African agency. While this shift combined with African diplomatic initiatives to elevate Africa up the agenda of the G8 in particular, older ideas about Africa as a place where Britain could 'do good' undermined the gains this had for African agency internationally. Blunders under the Blair government, notably on Zimbabwe, and an assumption by Labour ministers that they would be received with open arms by Africa, raised further question marks. The transition to the Conservative-

led coalition in 2010 heralded a partial rethink of UK policy with UK national interests, particularly over trade, coming more to the fore. Conflicts over the Libya crisis further strained relations and added to a feeling that Africa's influence and interests were being downgraded in UK government circles.

The second part of the book 'Agency: new modes, new sites' considers emerging areas and spaces for African agency in the contemporary era by reflecting on the growth of new tools of agency, such as public relations; the opportunities the presence of new actors such as China present to African agency; and the changing arenas for agency in the business world created by the rise of corporate social responsibility norms. Sven Grimm's chapter focuses on Rwanda and the distinctive ability of the Kigali regime to fashion coherent, long-term strategies for managing its external affairs. Grimm analyses the relationship between Rwanda and its donors and notes how successful it has been in persuading western DAC donors to align with Rwandan sectoral priorities in aid allocations. Here Rwanda has made good political use of the Paris Declaration to act as co-ordinator of western donors. However, in relations with non-DAC donors, particularly China, Rwanda has been less successful and China retains considerable control over its aid programmes in Rwanda. While China's rise has therefore assisted Rwanda's leverage over western donors, it has not been an unqualified benefit to the country's agency, although Grimm concludes that Rwanda could utilise other resources in its relationships with China.

Jonathan Fisher develops analyses on how African states manage external relations to maximise agency by focusing on how Museveni's government has pursued an active policy of trying to manage and shape donor perceptions of Uganda, in a way which keeps donors

'on side' despite serious misgivings about the domestic political situation in Uganda and the country's involvement in the DRC conflict. However, this strategy relies on two other conditions: that donors are unwilling to impose harsh conditions on countries that are 'useful' in other respects, such as in trade or foreign policy; and secondly that limited detailed donor knowledge of recipient countries allows space for such 'perception management.'

Scarlett Cornelissen finishes this assessment of new sites of agency by considering the role of corporate social responsibility in sub-Saharan Africa and how it both creates and limits space for agency. For Cornelissen, corporate social responsibility brings with it an added layer of complexity for agency and negotiation in the African context. The chapter marks the rise of corporate social responsibility in the region and the changing balance between public and private agency and shifting relations between the state, civil society and their capacities to influence policy and ideas.

The third section of the book addresses the ever-pertinent and present issue of 'States and agency.' This section reflects on what is particularly African about problems of state agency and the practice of agency with particular relevance to state weakness, leadership and the reassertion of global perceptions and prescriptions of such problems. It is the notion of the 'acceptable face' of state agency that preoccupies David Williams' contribution. Williams argues that problems of understanding state agency are not specific to Africa, however, he argues that what is different about African state agency is the extent to which state agency is subjected to greater external scrutiny than other states in the international system. Any state agency has to be produced and reproduced through political and other practices, Williams maintains, in terms of the ways in which the state is perceived to act as a whole unit, the

extent to which states generate effective collective action ('large scale organised 'doings'')
and the extent to which others' actions are seen as 'state' actions through processes of
authorisation and representation. Indeed, it is through insistence by external actors on
particular authorisation rules (such as democracy) and particular interpretations of what
effective state action should amount to, that external actors seek to shape the particular
character of African state agency. 'In other words' Williams argues 'the politics of state
agency played a central role in the internal and international politics of many newly formed
African states…In more recent times western states and agencies have become more and
more concerned with the authorising rules within all African states that would generate
legitimate representation.'

Stefan Andreasson makes one of the more pessimistic assessments of the extent of African
agency in this book. Surveying the place of weak states in the international system he
maintains that all African states, to a greater or lesser extent, are weak states and that internal
weakness forms a self-reinforcing process with external weakness. 'Because we live in a
system in which state capabilities and strength remains central to the pursuit of national
interest' Andreasson maintains '… it is Africa's relative, and in some cases near-complete,
lack of empirical statehood…which explains its persistently peripheral role'. Even South
Africa, which Andreasson takes as the strongest case with which to test his argument, signs
of internal weakness threaten its ability to act as the continent's voice internationally.

The emphasis on making effective use of the room for manoeuvre that does exist is explored
further by Danielle Beswick. Beswick resurrects Steven David's theory of 'omnibalancing' to
reinterpret Rwanda's management of its foreign relations, emphasising the active use of

regional and international alliances to create space for state agency. Originally formulated to analyse developing countries' foreign policies in the context of the bi-polar cold war system, Beswick reinterprets the theory to analyse the foreign policy choices facing Rwanda drawing attention to the way in which Rwanda has appeased regional adversaries and placated international allies in order to free up state capacity to deal with domestic political challengers. It was this combination that led Rwanda into its surprise alignment with the DRC in 2009 to tackle Congo-based militia groups, Beswick argues, thus extricating Rwanda from international criticism of its involvement in the DRC and reducing the potential for domestic opponents to ally with international donors. Beswick argues that the theory allows us to see how ''weak' African leaders, seemingly lacking agency, play off threats at different levels in order to prevent a perfect storm of alignment between domestic threats and international actors…'

Taken together, the chapters diverge both in their assessments of the extent of African agency and in judgements about its character and purposes. Given the very different agencies at work and the different contexts within which they operate, this is perhaps not surprising. However, what they share is a serious engagement with the realities facing African political actors in the international system and an intent to assess the emerging spaces for African agency. Whether, in an international system that is in a historic period of change, we will see African agents able to find enough room for manoeuvre to significantly reshape their international political environment—and indeed whether they seriously try to do so—remains to be seen.

[1] The phrase comes from Lonsdale (2000)

[2] Economic and Social Research Council grant EOA RES-451-26-0810 African Agency in International Politics. The findings of the series and the questions it engendered are largely presented here. However, those papers that specifically focused on the security dimensions of African agency are published in a special issue of the journal *Conflict, Security and Development* edited by Danielle Beswick and Anne Hammerstad. The issue of security is addressed implicitly in some of the chapters in this book but more detailed and issue-based accounts of agency and security are explored in the CSD special issue.

[3] 'Durban Climate Deal: the verdict' *The Guardian*, London, Monday 12 December http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2011/dec/12/durban-climate-deal-verdict