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Editorial: New Directions in International Relations and Africa

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New Directions in International Relations and Africa
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This special issue provides a collection of new interpretations of Africa's international relations. Africa's place in the contemporary international system presents a series of challenges to scholars and practitioners alike. Not only, for example, must we try to understand the impact of changes in the world economic and political landscapes such as the rapid development of China and the growing influence of developing countries in governance projects such as the G20, we must also seek to better understand changes within Africa. A series of transformations form the modern renaissance of Africa arising from the end of apartheid in South Africa to the emergence of new or reinvigorated institutional mechanisms of governance such as the African Union and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), multilateral lending, and democratisation in a number of African states. Vital issues like conflict and peacemaking, aid, health, migration and liberalisation, are given new form in Africa as a result of the continent's engagements with a range of other sub-regional, regional and systemic level actors including states, governmental and non-governmental organisations, multinational business, and civil society groups.

The period since the end of the Cold War has seen a series of important studies of Africa's international relations. Some, such as Christopher Clapham's landmark *Africa in the International System* and Taylor and Williams' *Africa in International Politics* have provided critical analyses of the multiple dimensions of Africa's political and economic linkages with the world. Others, such as Dunn and Shaw's *Africa's Challenge to International Relations Theory* have focused on the theoretical implications that the study of Africa's international relations poses. The latter particularly raises a debate about to what extent, if any, existing theoretical traditions within the discipline of International Relations (IR) are adequate to meet the analytical problems faced.

New research in the field picks up these substantive and theoretical debates. For some, received theory needs to be transcended in order to raise legitimate questions about the nature and boundaries of the study of Africa's international relations. For others, new directions mean exploring how new and emerging approaches within the discipline of IR, and within International Political Economy, can develop new insights that help us to theorise not only what the study of 'the international' tells us about Africa, but what the politics of Africa offers for theoretical conceptions of international relations. Others still try to enhance more state-centric discourses of international relations by exploring the role of different kinds of political actors and issues as central to the processes of international relations. More substantively, research has begun to target key contemporary and long-standing issues such as education, the environment, health and HIV/AIDS; political issues of governance and the much contested 'African state', civil society and relationships with international organisations, as well as offering new conceptual approaches both to the study of African politics and international relations. Key to this emerging, broad-ranging research has been the participation of a range of scholars engaging with these issues from different parts of the continent as well as outside and from different disciplinary backgrounds.

This rich empirical and theoretical research has combined to offer new ways of understanding both politics in Africa, and the implications of these understandings for our conception of the discipline and practice of international relations. It is the purpose of this special issue to speak to the dual engagement between what international relations tells us about Africa and what Africa tells us about the theory and practice of international relations.

This special issue addresses some of the most important contemporary issues facing the continent and reflects upon some of the key themes and issues arising from a recent workshop and the wider research activities of the working group. It offers new empirical research and theoretical understandings of warlords; state building; Congo and governance as a way of deconstructing and reconstructing 'the international' in, and of, Africa. The issues addressed include the broad themes of Africa and international relations theory, liberal governance, liberal peace and security as well as specific policy concerns of health, migration, development and political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe. These issues reflect the

dominant discourse of the liberal politics of international relations and how contemporary developments in Africa have engaged with liberal practice and liberal theory. The collected papers provide an insight into how contemporary issues confront African politics and the nexus between international intervention on the continent and international global public problems arising from the continent.

Of course, the special issue does not purport to be comprehensive in its coverage of issues that are significant to scholars and practitioners interested in Africa and international politics. Nor do the papers provide geographical coverage of all countries within Africa. But then no single volume could cover the wealth of issues, knowledge, and new research agendas emerging out of the continent. However, in dealing with the issues that are covered, the papers also signal new ways of thinking about Africa's international relations and open up the duality of the debate of Africa and international relations.

Indeed, the contributions to this special issue share a number of overlapping themes and issues. First, three of the articles make a direct contribution to theoretical debates. Karen Smith's paper *Has Africa got anything to say? African contributions to the theoretical development of international relations* sets up some of the central debates that have been raised by scholars critical of the discipline of IR. In her paper, Smith takes issue with what she sees as the uni-directional relationship between IR and Africa that treats Africa as subject/object of research. In contrast, Smith articulates the need to bring Africa and African international relations in from the periphery to see how alternative narratives and story-telling help us confront our understanding of state-centric liberal, Western international relations.

William Brown's paper *Reconsidering the aid relationship: international relations and social development* also addresses this problematic but instead explores how far the historical sociological concept of uneven and combined development can address the need for IR theory to encompass 'international' and 'social developmental' dimensions of Africa's aid relations. This challenge is also picked up by Stephen Hurt, Karim Knio and Magnus Ryner's contribution *Social Forces and the effects of the (Post)-Washington Consensus Policy in Africa: Comparing Tunisia and South Africa.* Here they outline a research agenda that uses a Coxian framework to understand the role of social forces in world order and how this might be

utilised to explore policy reform within South Africa and Tunisia. Similar to Brown, Hurt et al emphasise the need to unravel processes of social development through the complex interaction of social formations. Hurt et al pose the need for further rigorous research to uncover what constitutes political agency within poverty in Africa.

Both Brown and Hurt et al also share a concern to address the prospects and fate of liberal governance in Africa. For Hurt et al this centres on the need to see how the question of poverty, and the multiple political identities that such catch-all concepts hide, challenge the promotion of liberal democratic models of global governance. For Brown, the liberal governance agenda pursued by donors through the aid relationship, and the power relations it encompasses, need to be set within a broader understanding of the social developmental purposes of aid.

Also addressing this theme, Paul Jackson's paper *'Negotiating with ghosts': religion, conflict and peace in Northern Uganda*, and Danielle Beswick's article *The challenge of warlordism to post-conflict state-building: the case of Laurent Nkunda in eastern Congo* both present critical appraisals of the attempts to create a 'liberal peace' in some of Africa's most pressing conflict zones. Jackson builds on some of the themes of duality between liberal international relations and African experience in focusing upon the need for an integration of traditional conceptions of liberal peace and more 'traditional justice' in the conflict in Northern Uganda. He also argues for a shift away from a single coherent model of liberal justice to a form of justice that incorporates historically-embedded interests and the significant social groups within reconciliation. The false dichotomy of liberal justice and peace articulated by Jackson is developed by Beswick. Similar to Jackson's analysis of 'one-size fits all' justice, Beswick outlines the shortcomings of the single sovereign, top-down approach adopted in reconciling state-building in post-conflict Congo. Beswick highlights the need to include multiple actors, including warlords, within the process as recognised political actors so as to fully interpret their role in power brokerage within the Congo.

Within these explorations of liberal governance, as well as the wider literature on Africa's international relations, a prominent axis is the relationship between north and south, western and African. It is this angle, taken up partly in comparative mode, which runs through the

contributions of Scarlett Cornelissen and Sandra and David MacLean. Cornelissen explores the differences between dominant policy responses in the west and in southern Africa to the issue of migration in her paper *Migration and the politics of difference in contemporary Southern Africa.* Cornelissen points to the complexity of addressing the long-term structural determinants that underpin migratory flows with the tendency towards state xenophobia, bias and scapegoating of migrants. According to Cornelissen, the problem of reconciling short-term state reactions to migration and entrenched structural determinants leads to a fragmented system, inadequate to address the full extent of the problem.

Similarly, Sandra and David MacLean's paper *A 'New Scramble for Africa: the struggle in sub-Saharan Africa to set the terms of global health* investigates how far health policy approaches in the north, where both 'biomedical' and social determinant approaches are evident, are replicated in the African health policies being promoted by global health institutions. In fact, they depict the competing actors, regimes, and agendas emerging in response to global health concerns as a 'new scramble for Africa' wherein the social determinants of ill-health are ignored in favour of the predominance of a biomedical/clinical agenda. This biomedical/clinical agenda is underpinned by a neoliberal orthodoxy based on competition, individualism and private provision. The multiple actors involved promote this agenda at the expense of social development and addressing the structural determinants of poor health.

Finally, James Hamill and John Hoffman's paper *'Quiet Diplomacy' or appeasement? South African Policy towards Zimbabwe* presents a polemical piece on the high profile question of the government of South Africa's response to the political crisis in Zimbabwe. Hamill and Hoffman conclude the special issue by presenting a paradox within South Africa's foreign policies: the promotion of liberal values in the AU, NEPAD and more widely at the same time as tolerating internal repression in Zimbabwe. In discussing some of the explanations as to why South Africa has maintained an apparently supportive role to the Mugabe regime, Hamill and Hoffman delineate the problem faced by the government of South Africa as being that between liberal democracy or liberation solidarity, a problem at the heart of Africa's role in international relations.

In addressing these contemporary theoretical and policy issues each of the articles draws attention to, and informs, a broader discussion of how international events and developments impact on Africa and, conversely, how events and developments in Africa impact on the international. We think this is an important theme that deserves much more consideration by scholars and practitioners. In bringing together the articles in this special issue our aim is to encourage further research and discussion of the theoretical as well as practical implications of the linkages between the international and Africa.

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