QUO VADIS AFRICA UNION? SOME RESEARCH AGENDAS

A Review of Ulf Engel and João Gomes Porto,eds., 2010, Africa's New Peace and Security Architecture: Promoting Norms, Institutionalizing Solutions, Ashgate Publishers, England and USA, ISBN 978 0 7546 7606 5 pbk

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Understanding norms and institutions are the two key concepts in reading through Engel's and Gomes Porto's edited volume. One could even talk of new institutionalism as the main analytic angle and the cross cutting theme that one encounters as one internalises the pages of this excitingly refreshing look at the African Union.

In their opening chapter, the editors kick off by explicitly describing the wrought administrative environment that the OAU functioned in. They vividly describe the corrupt, inept, bureaucratic elite club of dictators in a self made ivory tower removed from society institution that characterized the OAU. Gradually and painstakingly, in July 2000 by the Constitutive Act of the African Union, a new vision and mission of the OAU hence forth renamed the African Union (AU), was borne. The editors, from pp.2-4, outline the fundamental objectives of the new African Union, stressing the core principle that guides the work of the AU, that is, the promotion of peace, security and stability in the continent. The rest of the seven chapters that make up this book analyse one of the reworked and 'new' vision of the AU - the Peace and Security Council (PSC), which the editors have skilfully summarised from pp.4 – 12.

Regional security in a global perspective is the title of the second chapter by Fredrik Söderbaum and Björn Hettne. The attractiveness of this chapter is the conceptual anchorage it provides, from defining and discussing regionalization (p.15) to the current study of new regionalism. The authors posit that new regionalism looks at the increasing set of actors, both state and non-state, and who operate not only regionally but interlink their activities globally. Such that, new ways in which globalisation and regionalism interact and overlap becomes the focal point of analysis. It is important to comprehend their argument from this particular perspective because it introduces two crucial issues

for conceptual understanding, research, analyses and policy innovation. Firstly, new regionalism or analysing the interface of globalisation and regionalism reorients our understanding of peace and security by introducing development or what the authors term, the development-security nexus under the currency Human Security/Human Development. With such a unit of analysis, the authors posit, then new regionalism studies calls attention to how regional bodies, that are concerned with peace and security, interact with global bodies (here in they emphasize the UN) not only on matters concerning peace and security but more so on developmental issues. Two compelling concepts that the authors discuss are development regionalism and security regionalism. Indeed, Söderbaum's and Hettne's concluding observations, that is, whether region centred approach or a UN- led approach is better suited to the development- security nexus (human security) points to a budding field of research that has so far received little attention from researchers, scholars and policy makers alike.

Chapter three, titled Heritage and Transformation – From OAU to AU, traces a gloomy and cynical history of the OAU. Despite its apparent irony, van Walraven's historical contextualisation is invaluable in understanding not only how contextualisation proceeds, but also how through analysing the past, transformations of the present occur. Valuable lessons on institution building form the main attraction of this chapter. From pp. 32 – 55, van Walraven, traces the rationale of the formation of various institutions within the OAU and how these key institutions interacted. Through his vivid depictions, several analytic points can be drawn. His allusion to leadership styles, i.e. personalities and characters, lack of a common will which follows hand in glove with charismatic, visionary leadership v/s. the lack of collective thinking, the interplay of time, space and place, alliance formation, the role of sabotage of ideologies (understood here as ideas that drive society out of its various deadlocks) through the lack of collective action rendered pervasive by power differentials, power struggles, estranged egos and self aggrandisement, unrealistic economic objectives and budgetary issues. Indeed, the analysis of lived experiences and how one can learn from these in order to realise transformation is here the catch phrase.

Chapters four on to Chapter seven are much more empirical chapters that focus on the various pillars of one of the new institutions of the AU, that is, the PSC. Sturman's and Hayatou's Chapter underscores Article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act of the AU, which stipulates 'the right of the Union to intervene' a reworked version of non intervention that had characterized the OAU and which had seriously hampered the work of Union at its formation. The pages 'from design to reality: PAC in action' pp.69-74, however illustrate that despite a newly institutionalised PSC, actions have rather been of a fire brigade nature and numerous instances where the AU has shown reluctance in intervening. What is more disturbing is the lack of political leadership. Getting governance issues right seems to be ever more elusive. The chapter is spot on in bringing to the fore the operative discrepancy that exists between global governance,

epitomised by the UN and individual political leadership as constitutive of the AU and the principal of intervention. The catch 22 is finding a marriage between AU governance strategies and UN global governance operatives. The main issue is, where does the AU's right to intervene in individual member states end and where can the UN then take on the baton. End, might actually not be the correct phrase here rather the question that begs further research analysis is where the AU political leadership is rendered impotent and thus inept at taking action how can the UN then intervene. The case of the mediation efforts of Kofi Annan (representative of the UN global governance) and his team (representative of the AU panel of the wise) in the political stalemate that shrouded Kenya post 2008 general elections is illustrative of how global governance could interact with a continental and regional governance. Sturman and Hayatou further go on to point out to yet another discrepancy that trails the work of the PAC. This, in short, can be summarized as a 'chicken and egg' scenario and which surrounds the principle of humanitarian intervention that is the practiced and institutionalised norm of Article 4(h). Whereas a middle ground "sanctions" has been worked out, one can quickly fathom that in a globalised world, where the building of competitive and more often antagonistic alliances is the practice, sanctions might actually serve to exacerbate the problem rather than solve it (except where a strong unifying alliance of states has been formed and which can hold other less powerful states at ransom e.g. ECOWAS and its successful intervention in Togo). Moreover, the AU is compounded with the problem of taking/not taking on too much responsibility. Confronted with an environment that is poverty and disease ridden, from the empirical cases that the two authors discuss in their chapter, one can fathom the silent strategy the AU engages in of none interference lest it rids the Nation-States of their main mandate of Nation building. The cat and mouse strategy of Eyadema's son, rigged elections and a silent observer AU mission to Togo is quite telling in this respect. Yet again, a discussion on global governance as the check mate of regional governance could be here of handy. The chapter concludes by lamenting the increased non-decisiveness of the PSC, further laying impetus to the ardent calls for a consideration of an AU-UN collaboration beyond financial and logistical interventions.

   A discussion on the underlying logic of the Panel of the Wise, one of the foundational pillars of the PSC is what graces the pages of Murithi's and Mwaura's chapter. Of interest in this chapter is the philosophical correlation the authors draw between this institution and the institution of the council of elders in African traditional societies. The authors not only draw attention to the moral bases of these two institutions but also their operational similarities. What is analytically critical, however, is Murithi's and Mwaura's pointers that despite these similarities, the Panel of the wise is not an enactment of old institutions into new ways of doing. Pages 80-81 outlines some of the differences whilst pps. 81-90 discusses some of the ways in which the panel has sought current social-political relevancy.

One would have wished a scenario where Chapter six is discussed after Chapter seven thus making for a smooth flow of discussion from the panel of the wise on to the African Standby Force (ASF) to the chapter analysing the methodologies underlying the work of the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS). However, this is a matter of style that one could afford to neglect. Chapter six forms an extremely comprehensive analysis of the magnanimous work of the other pillar of the PSC, that is, the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS). This chapter, written by eight authors including the editors elaborately shows how the AU has consistently sought sustained methodological approach/approaches to the study of potential conflict situations and their prevention. This search for methodological approach/approaches moves the actions of the PAC from mere ad hoc action without consequential follow through to a science of intervention with the hall marks of prediction, near precision, hypothesis building, verification and falsification. Critical in this chapter is the illustrative cases of how data is collected and monitoring done. In reading through the chapter, one is left agape at the meticulous manner in which data is collated, graded and indicators, both structural and dynamic, in the analysis of conflict situations is processed pp.100-103. The chapter is extremely informative on the definitional and conceptual understandings of what structural vs. dynamic causes of conflict could entail. The authors further discuss CEWs situation room, early warning unit and the role of desk officers in the compilation of information, such as, country profiles. Needless to say a researcher interested in Peace and Security issues can only ignore such a repository of data bases at their own peril.

Cilliers and Pottgeiter discuss the African Standby Force in quite extensive detail starting from its conceptualisation, on to its development and the various framework documents that have guided implementation. Of critical importance, is their discussion of the concept of Rapid Deployment and the sustainability of this particular pillar in the near future given the limited inflow of resources (budgetary allocations), the lack of supporting regional frameworks, for example, in East Africa to the continued lack of the will to implement, for example, in Central Africa and lack of a common will, for example, in the Arab Maghreb Countries of North Africa.

Chapter eight is a highly provocative chapter where the editors offer a summary of the overarching concerns of each chapter that forms the volume, underscore the functional discrepancies that the Chapter by van Walraven so illustratively explored and put forward certain theses and lines of inquiry that research could look into. First and foremost, the editors' discussion of the concept of architecture is a welcome relief, for upon reading the title, one can easily dismiss the concept of architecture as the engineering of systems. As the editors point out on page 152, architecture conjures images of structure, design, choice of components, systems, forms and functions and thus readily render for a systems-functionality analysis. However, a deeper analysis of the foregoing chapters dismantle this naive understanding of architecture showing how various institutions have sought to be contextually relevant and thus embedded

in society. Indeed, as the authors point out, the critical question here does not concern the concepts of architecture or regime building but rather the sustainability of these institutionalised mechanisms of maintaining peace and security and working towards development. The editors, page 144, quite aptly identify African States as the enemy in itself and consequently the risk par excellence of itself and its citizens. To drive this point home, they turn to the historical chapter by van Walraven. The authors highlight the need for a conceptualisation of a globalisation-regionalism nexus, where global actors, especially the UN, with enough muscles to turn round decision making tables both at the global and the regional levels are introduced as checkmates to the African State. How such a globalisation-regionalism nexus can be envisaged is still a research gap that needs to be filled.

The second provocative thesis the editors put forward is the continued danger of polarization of security and development. Towards this end, the editors call for concerted research and analysis of a human security approach. Although the editors point to protection as being of importance in thinking through a security-development nexus, the kind of protection that could be envisaged is not forthcoming from their discussion. I dare posit that social-economic protection of various groups at different levels in society is still a research theme that has not been taken very seriously. With the continued logic of neo-liberal reforms, one cannot underscore enough the need for fresh analysis into the forms of social-economic protection under market driven conditionalities, what can further be conceptualised as socio-economic protection under capitalistic systems or capital with a human face. So far, there exist pockets of analysis on social entrepreneurship or philanthropic entrepreneurship (third sector analysis) with the missing link being how initiatives can be interlinked to macro-economic structures to create new economic dynamics.

The ownership of processes by African States is a crucial component of the whole issue of sustainability. Underlying it is the question why African States continue to be enemies of itself and its citizens. The editors put forward the concept of regime building as a possible panacea. Here they emphasize the principled and shared understandings of desirable and acceptable forms of societal behaviour. The editors acknowledge that how one can foster compliant behaviours from member states is still an analytic caveat that requires further research. A starting point, the editors posit, could be to look at institutionalised cooperation and raising the stakes of dissidence so high as to warrant complacency. One should immediately add here that a behaviourist approach will certainly not serve the purpose! The editors commentary of integrating different epistemic communities with legitimacy and which claim authority of knowledge in certain areas is critical to the development and sustainability of regimes. The challenge still looms large and research in this direction is a prerequisite if not a necessity.

At best, this edited volume should be read comparatively with Said Adejumobi's and Adebayo Olukoshi's 2008 edited volume titled the African Union and the New Strategies

for Development in Africa, Cambria Press, New York, ISBN 13 9781604975741. The aim of such a comparative reading should not be to contrast endogenous vs. exogenous knowledge production but rather the objective would be a deeper understanding of the parallel processes underlying AU's architecture and regime building efforts by different epistemic communities. One should quickly point out here that the editors of both volumes have a political economic and international relations background giving them a similar disciplinary legitimacy. Research and analysis of the AU architecture and regime building processes by other disciplines is thus highly called for. More especially, the development-security nexus and consensus building around this is a topical research area that sociologists, economists and political scientists in interaction with regional and global policy making bodies cannot afford to ignore. The realisation of an interdisciplinary research collaboration on the aspects outlined above is ardently called for.