Rethinking Africa's Future beyond its European Past

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The EU and Africa: From Eurafrique to Afro-Europa
by Adekeye Adebajo and Kaye Whiteman, eds
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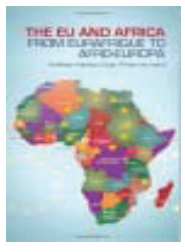
This collection attempts a critical evaluation of Europe's relationship with Africa in historical perspective. It offers a focus that is at once institutional (i.e. vis-à-vis the African Union (AU) and European Union (EU)) and political (drawing on the experiences of the institutional actors at national and regional levels). The book commences at the Conference of Berlin in1884, which decided the fate of the African continent, and draws its implications for current Africa-EU relations. It covers a variety of topics, including economic integration and security governance. At the heart of this work is a search for change in the dynamics of the postcolonial relationship engendered by the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) of 2007. The book justifies the intellectual inquiry into contemporary Africa-EU relations by the on-going shifts within the international political economy.

Importantly, this volume is framed within the discursive construction of Europe's continued relationship with Africa, Eurafrique, a relationship grounded in past colonial history. Whereas some qualitative changes have occurred in their relationship since decolonisation begun, Africa and Europe have not yet extricated themselves from some of the constraints of the past, a sentiment that is captured in the conclusion. Divided into six parts, and consisting of twenty-two chapters, this is a book that addresses a diversity of policy areas and research interests and thus appeals to just about anyone who is interested in both the historical and contemporary dimensions of politics, economics and development in Europe's encounter with Africa.

The first part of the collection describes how key moments in the history of Europeans' engagement in Africa have shaped the detrimental dimensions of Africa-EU relations. This is indeed the argument intended to frame the collection. One of the insights offered is the fact that, although economic and purportedly postcolonial in nature, the relationship with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries was not benign, and the suggestion is made that Africa should not be seeking a privileged relationship with Europe, but rather seek to break with Europe in favour of emerging powers; yet, new relations with emerging powers will necessarily come with their own baggage.



In any case, one of the questions raised early on in the book is whether the AU models itself after the EU. Chapter 3 examines the relationship between the two, using a comparative approach to juxtapose the similarities in both institutions. Yet, I would suggest that because the impetus for these two institutions is different and woven into the fabric of institution building, the AU is more than a replication of the EU, rather an attempt to adopt best practices in regional integration. Moreover, the 'EU as a model' construct is firmly challenged in the subsequent chapter by someone who was at the heart of the institutional design. This example reflects one of several issues of internal coherence within the volume that is left unaddressed by the editors. Nevertheless, one gets the sense at the end of this part that, despite the lengthy engagement between Africa and Europe, efforts to establish a new dynamic association that underscores the positive relations between both continents and their institutions is still elusive. For Africa particularly, Adebajo advocates a more systematic approach that identifies the key priorities of the new integration project, sequencing the process of integration and especially dedicating more resources to the institutional development at the continental and sub-regional levels.

Part Two is very much focused on the processes of regional integration so far and their implications for the political, economic and strategic relationship of Africa and Europe. Here, Africa's integration story is situated in the development of its (sub-) regional economic communities within a capitalist paradigm of development and underdevelopment. The analysis of Africa's regionalisation contributes agency to the African integration narrative, which is invaluable for the acquisition of core knowledge on regions and integration.

This section begins a recurrent thread of the book that criticises the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) of the EU. In particular, the focus here is on the threat to Africa's developmental aims, including regional fragmentation supported by market-driven liberalism. Certainly, by undermining regional cohesion, the EU challenges its own external relations strategy, which claims to support regionalism elsewhere and indeed claims normative eminence in this area. The EPAs illustrate this first instance of internal inconsistencies in the EU's foreign policy approach towards Africa. However, while many Western civil society advocates critique these divisions for economic purposes, they seem to encourage it for other purposes arguing that a holistic approach to Africa risks homogenisation. It would seem then that wariness of EU institutions with regards to this issue of fragmentation is justified just as much as that of civil society organisations. Unfortunately, the volume does not engage much with civil society perspectives. Further, while Africa's drive for regional integration is fiercely defended, there is no challenge to the assumption that the neoliberal paradigm can offer something that differs from the EPAs, which are depicted as effectively forcing liberalisation on relatively weak economies in Africa.

As is often the case in any discussion on Europe's relationship with Africa, the point of departure for a substantive portion of the book is the development and economic dimension of Africa-EU relations. First, De Vos suggests a particular frame for understanding Africa-EU relationship: that of a corporation best tended by the much-criticised Washington Consensus,[1] while highlighting the importance of institutions and leadership, a perspective that is often absent from social science discourses but has recently found analytical resurgence. Similar to the econometric analysis of Africa's investment environment later on in the book, which seems to miss the point about striving for human development, there is a glorification of the neo-liberal ideal of economic governance. While rightfully noting that, contrary to the inferred aims of the editors, limited infrastructure undermines development, there is no coherent engagement with the question: to what extent has European political engagement on the continent brought about this underdevelopment? The unquestioning acceptance of the neo-liberal model for development is especially disconcerting for this reason and offers an uncritical and ahistorical assessment of Africa's relationship with Europe.

In the assessment of the EU's strategic partnerships, South Africa stands apart from the rest of the continent due to its history of apartheid.

Historically, Europe's engagement with apartheid South Africa lacked coherence: whereas Britain maintained strong ties to the racist regime, Scandinavian countries, for example, were outright critical, while the European Commission tried to maintain neutrality. While EU-South Africa relations are presently very different, the continued practice of setting South Africa apart from the rest of Africa raises the question of whether this difference is good for Africa-EU relations in general, as it undermines Europe's approach to the whole of Africa. Yet, it cannot be expected that South Africa itself would give up this privileged position either. Similarly, north Africa, which is often set apart, is treated with the rest of the continent in this volume, giving more breadth to typical assessments of Africa-EU relations by addressing EU instruments outside of the ACP Agreements, and the 2005 EU Strategy for Africa. These instruments, which frame most of north Africa's relationship with the EU as a whole and, to an extent, bi-lateral engagements with specific European countries, includes the Euro-Med Partnership, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and, lately, the Union for the Mediterranean. These instruments purportedly seek to establish joint ownership. Joint ownership suggests that both the EU and the north African countries share certain values and common interests, which are then reflected in the resulting policy approaches. In short, joint ownership is intended to challenge the pernicious implications of conditionality within development assistance. However the asymmetries in Europe's relationship with countries in the Global South suggest that the assumption of common values and interests is problematic, because it assumes shared meaning by all actors. Recent missteps in the wake of the Arab Spring and in Europe's perception of north Africa as a source of extremist threats are clearly misguided. This chapter underscores a key argument of the collection, which is that the EU's relationship with Africa must be restructured not only in words, but also in deed.

Undertaking a critique of the EU's strategic partnerships, Shada Islam highlights the internal inconsistencies in Europe's foreign policies – another key theme of the volume. Long thought to have credibility only as an economic power, the EU seeks to shed this singular identity by overstretching itself with its many strategic partnerships. An assessment of Asia, especially India and China, albeit marred by many inconsistencies, is undertaken to highlight lessons for Africa-EU relations. First, the purposes of these partnerships are unclear. Yet, this is not surprising, given that the EU itself has been accused convincingly of lacking a grand strategy with which to reinforce its desired credibility as a holistic international actor. Second, while the opportunity for a systematic cooperation on Africa is provided in the engagements between Europe and Asia, nothing substantive has yet to come of it. One reason often given for the lack of cooperation between China and Europe on Africa, for example, is that both are in competition for the 'affection' of African countries. Yet, Carbone's[2] assessment suggests that the real reason is the lack of consistency within the EU's external relations, which has translated into missed opportunities for trilateral collaborative engagement on Africa.

While the suggestion is made that the special relationship between Africa and Europe is seen as eroding in favour of other multilateral groupings like the G8 and G20, the questioning of the idea of Eurafrique challenges this assertion. If anything, there is more EU-led engagement in Africa, even if one may argue that its relative influence is waning. Europe clearly remains engaged in Africa, politically, economically and socially, and while there is more engagement between other G20 members and African states, there is no substantive correlation between an increase in these new relationships and decrease in Africa-EU relations. In any case, the EU's commitment to effective multilateralism should ultimately promote closer ties between Africa and other multilateral bodies as a normative imperative of its foreign policies. Part 3 concludes with a descriptive analysis of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) – a harmful policy whose existence contradicts the EU's stated aims of supporting Africa's development. CAP typifies the power asymmetries and inconsistencies in Europe's Africa policies.

In perhaps the most thematically coherent section, Part 4 focuses on security governance. The first chapter of this section is an overview of recent cooperation between the AU and the EU. Security governance and cooperation are situated in existing economic and development relations, emphasising a nexus between security and development. The chapter evaluates institutional innovations in both Europe (through the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)) and Africa (through the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA)), which have both supported the expansion of the areas of cooperation between Europe and Africa.

Yet, security governance in Africa is uneven, with the EU engaging only when its member states are all in agreement, despite the guiding framework of the JAES. Nevertheless, security signals the potential for change in Africa-EU relations, given the commitment and necessity for African elites to take ownership of the processes of security and the general unwillingness of the North to engage in African crises. Where security is increasingly linked to development, it might provide an entry point to correct the asymmetries in Africa-EU relations, although it may also be manipulated so that development is militarised. The subsequent chapters in this part explore the practicalities of EU mission planning and implementation, in addition to the political dimensions of EU security engagement outside of Europe – in the Great Lakes, Chad, and Central African Republic. Importantly, Europe's security engagement in Africa has served as a way of bolstering the EU's image as a global security actor while helping to shape its strategic culture. Yet, focusing on Africa's security challenges for Europe, while consistent with Eurafrique, cannot be the priority in European support for African security. As set out in the JAES, Europe must consider African initiatives and priorities first in order to truly transform relations and contribute to sustainable security and development on the continent.

Part 5 examines some of the key European players whose colonial legacies have dictated a certain caution in their approach to Africa and who continue to influence EU policies towards Africa, both positively and negatively. Whereas both France and Portugal continue to intertwine their destinies with Francophone and Lusophone Africa respectively, Britain's engagement has been ambivalent at times and much more dispersed on the continent. The image of France evoked in this section is one that depicts a pernicious hegemon lording it over passive victims. While France's postcolonial role in Africa is at best controversial and at worst neo-colonial, this contribution is often polemical and lacks a critical approach, thus rendering Africa and Africans impotent and without any agency in the past six decades. This depiction is as dangerous as the problematical elements of France's foreign policies. Further, it is in stark contrast to the more balanced assessments of Williams (on Britain), Vines (on Portugal) and Hammerstad (on the Scandinavian Countries)

The analysis of Portugal's 'new' role as mediator between African countries and EU member states is worth noting, especially as Portugal, acting for the EU, has been central to the drive for transformation, hosting the Africa-EU Summit in 2007 and the launch of the JAES. In northern Europe, the assumption that Nordic, especially Scandinavian, countries converge in their Africa policies is challenged. At the heart of this story on Danish, Norwegian and Swedish foreign policies is the argument that national interests, framed in different ways, have resulted in less cooperation between these three countries on Africa despite existing mechanisms of cooperation. It is clear then that, despite increased Europeanisation of certain aspects of foreign policy, individual European countries still have a significant role in Africa-EU relations

In the final part of this collection, three chapters address the issue of migration and race in Africa's relationship with Europe; the section concludes by revisiting the idea of Eurafrique in the postcolonial environment. European countries have been especially criticised for their heavy-handed approach to immigrants from Africa, a criticism that became louder with the tragedy at Lampedusa in 2013 that saw the death of over 360 African migrants in search of a better life in Europe. The increasingly impenetrable fortress that is Europe encourages human traffickers and organised criminal groups. Yet, European countries continue to respond to migrant flows, not by tackling the root causes of flight from African countries but by enacting draconian laws that engender a negative narrative of immigration, implying economic and social burdens on the so-called indigenous populations. Yet, as the concluding chapter of this book suggests, if only Europe would consider outsider perspectives, such as those from sending countries for example, mutual partnerships can help to avoid future tragedies; but this is a lesson that is yet to be learnt.

Indeed, for the EU to leave the confines of the Eurafrique problematic, which has been determined by Europe's dominance in and outlook on international relations, it must pursue a more global outlook that has the rest of the world, rather than Europe, at its centre. Although European countries would hardly abandon their own self-interests (after all, they have responsibilities for their citizens at the very least), a global outlook that might help Africa-EU relations to achieve the core aims of the JAES, including partnership and joint ownership between Africa and Europe, is essential to a mutually beneficial future.

Despite its astute observations, this book does have some fundamental weaknesses that potentially detract from its overall message of change. One such weakness is the attempt to use the discursive construction of Eurafrique as a unifying theme. The application of this idea within the volume is patchy and serves only as a descriptive term for the European perspective of its encounters with Africa rather than a substantive or coherent theory. The lack of theoretical coherence makes it challenging to resolve some of the important contradictions in the positions of the contributors, as already highlighted. Nowhere is this more evident than in the chapter on race and transformation in global governance, an extremely fascinating essay by one of Africa's eminent sons, Ali Mazrui. Yet, although fascinating, this chapter represents a thematic outlier and its contribution to contemporary Africa-Europe discourses is unclear.

Further, in parts of the volume, authors seem confused about the differences between the EU's Africa Strategy of 2005 and the JAES of 2007, sometimes using them interchangeably. This inconsistency permeates the entire text and leads to some confusing assumptions about the nature of these two important policy frameworks and especially their relationship to each other. While depicted as an extension of the 2005 strategy, the JAES is a response to the criticisms of the 2005 framework. The main criticism of course was that the EU Strategy of 2005 failed to consider what Africans wanted in their relationship with

Europeans, a sentiment that persists to some extent. The failure to acknowledge the contributions of African policymakers, civil society actors and citizens to the basic framework of Africa-EU relations is also to deny Africa's agency in international affairs, however flawed or limited in its reach.

Like many similar works, it does not truly leave the policy realm.

This volume is nevertheless essential for those seeking to understand the on-going evolution of Africa's relationship to Europe.

Notes

1. D. Rodrik, 2006, 'Goodbye Washington Consensus, Hello Washington Confusion? A Review of the World Bank's Economic Growth in the 1990s: Learning from a Decade of Reform', *Journal of Economic Literature*, 44, 4, pp. 973-987.
2. Maurizio Carbone, 2011, 'The European Union and China's rise in Africa: Competing Visions, External Coherence and Trilateral Cooperation', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 29, 2, pp. 203-221.