

Editorial

Dear reader

At the end of last year, the Africa blog of The Economist raised five questions they claimed would be relevant for Africa in the year 2011. The relation between food production and population growth was the first issue they presented; other questions pertained to (fair) trade with Africa, the economic dynamics brought about by Facebook and mobile phones, the rise of Pentacostalism and Islamism and the challenges imposed by Africa's urbanisation. In the course of this past year a number of these issues have come strikingly to the fore: the effects of climate change, war and a failed state were illustrated by the famine that struck the Horn of Africa in July and August 2011; in Tunisia, the first Arab country to overthrow its dictator after the Arab Spring uprisings, the moderate Islamist party won the elections – and the same happened in Morocco; also Facebook has become a genuine phenomenon amongst African youth – especially in countries such as Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa, where millions of people use this social network, mostly accessing it from their mobile devices.

All of these developments are continually being researched and analyzed, in order to understand their present-day impact, to draw lessons for the future and to find ways to arrive at more equality and mutual respect within African societies. It is the aim of the Ghent Africa Platform (GAP) and its journal *Afrika Focus* to reflect on some of this highly relevant research on Africa.

The dossier of the present issue contains two articles which were first presented at the fourth annual GAP symposium (GAPSYM4) held in November 2010. The title of the symposium was *[Un]disciplined encounters: science as terrain of postcolonial interaction between Africa and Europe – past and future*. The central question at this conference was if, how and to what extent scientists have been assessing their positions and interventions in connection with Africa in terms of decolonisation – a question that was the starting point of an open-minded discussion on science as a site of collaboration and distinction, antagonism and complicity between Africa and Europe. In the first article of this issue, Paul Zeleza examines the interconnection between African studies and African-American studies in the United States. He traces the historical origins and evolution of these disciplines and describes the impact upon them of global trends, such as decolonisation, the civil rights movement, African migration streams to the US and new ideologies within the field of diaspora studies. Next, the Cameroonian scholar Emmanuel Yenshu Vubo reflects on the concept of ethnicity, and how this concept has been shaped and re-shaped by successive colonial and post-colonial theorizations. Importantly, it seems that in spite of the work by post-colonial scholars to reconstruct colonial perceptions, those perceptions still seem to linger on in present day conceptualizations of ethnic identity. In addition to

the dossier, this issue contains two more papers, one on female genital cutting and one on food security. In their article, Tammary Esho et al argue that an unintended consequence of campaigns to eradicate female circumcision has in fact been the perpetuation of the practice in a great many cultures. Campaigns often involve a breakdown of certain social structures underpinned in part by the practice of female circumcision, and so pose a threat to the sense of identity of women who belong to traditional communities. The authors do not want to defend the continuation of female circumcision, but they do try to understand the socio-cultural reasons behind its perpetuation. Finally, there is the article on wild edible plants in Ethiopia by Lulekal et al. The authors describe how Ethiopia contains a profusion of edible plants, which are used as seasonal or supplementary food. These plants can (or should) be used to combat food insecurity, hence it is imperative to deal with the environmental and anthropogenic factors that threaten the wild plant wealth.

As is clear from this issue, Afrika Focus specifically tries to offer a platform to African scholars, giving them an opportunity to publish in an international, peer-reviewed and open access journal. We are proud of being able to bring African academic research to the fore. This research – both on Africa and by Africans – is thriving, thus giving us a better insight into the contexts of certain socio-political, economic or cultural issues and demonstrating the urgency and focus with which African scholarship is addressing these pressing issues. It is one of the objectives of Afrika Focus to support and thoroughly coach African authors in their publishing endeavours – an effort that is clearly bearing fruit.

As the Ghent Africa Platform is now a full member of the Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies (AEGIS), the journal Afrika Focus has in recent months consolidated its professional profile.

The journal has designed its own website (<http://www.afrikafocus.eu>), where all necessary information for authors and subscribers can be found – and where the entire online version of the journal is readily available. In addition, Afrika Focus has also been listed in the journal list of the Flemish Academic Bibliographic Database (Vlaamse Academisch Bibliografisch Bestand), which means that a publication in Afrika Focus might be taken into account in various kinds of financial regulations (financing of the universities or faculties, awarding of doctoral bursaries). As a consequence, publishing in Afrika Focus is also advantageous for the individual scholar's career and it can count as one of the criteria required to obtain a doctoral degree.

We can therefore only encourage researchers – or their (African) collaborators to publish in Afrika Focus.

The only negative news in this – success – story is that, because of its professionalization and the increase in personnel costs this involves, Afrika Focus has been obliged to raise the annual subscription costs – to 30 euro for individual subscribers and 45 euro for institutions. We still give readers the possibility to offer an annual subscription to an institution or library in Africa – a so-called gift subscription which costs 50 euro.

I would like to close with a word of gratitude to the rectorate and the International Relations Office of Ghent University. They have made it an important element of their policy to structurally support the Africa Platform. We hope that this commitment will lead to Ghent University being identified as an institution that is deeply engaged on the African continent – collaborating with African academics, welcoming African scholars for internships and sending Flemish students and scholars to Africa for joint research and fieldwork. In this way, academic research in Africa will – finally – be seen as fully-fledged international collaboration that is of equal value to the international cooperation that is commonplace on other continents.

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