

Review: Tony Karbo and Tim Murithi (eds), The African Union: Autocracy, Diplomacy and Peacebuilding in Africa (2018)

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Tony Karbo and Tim Murithi (eds) (2018), *The African Union: Autocracy, Diplomacy and Peacebuilding in Africa*, London/New York: I.B. Tauris, ISBN: 9781788311496, 324 pp.

The year 2017 marked the 15th anniversary of the African Union's (AU) ceremonious establishment in Durban, South Africa. To chronicle this occasion, Tony Karbo, executive director of the Cape Town–based Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR), and Tim Murithi, esteemed expert on African peace and security, edited *The African Union: Autocracy, Diplomacy and Peacebuilding in Africa*.

This edited volume is divided into three parts. The first engages with Pan-Africanism; the second focuses on governance, security, and development; and the third discusses the African Union's potential hegemony and external partners. The part entitled "Pan-Africanism: From the OAU to the AU" opens with a chapter by Kuruvilla Mathews on the entangled history between Pan-Africanism and the AU as well as the AU's predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which was established in 1963. Molefi Kete Asante continues the analysis of Pan-Africanism by highlighting the role of the African diaspora, and Adonia Ayebare concludes this first part with a chapter on a particular institutionalised form of Pan-Africanism, the Africa Group, a forum for the coordination of the African permanent representatives at the headquarters of the United Nations (UN) in New York. The second part comprises six chapters, each tackling specific institutions and policy areas of the AU. The authors zoom in on the African Governance Architecture (Khabele Matlosa), the African Union Commission (Hesphina Rukato), the African Peer Review Mechanism (Amos Sawyer and Afeikhena Jerome), the African Peace and Security Architecture, with a special emphasis on its African Standby Force (Kasaija Phillip Apuuli), the AU's socio-economic challenges (Charles Mutasa), and the relations between the AU and the Regional Economic Communities (Dawn Nagar and Fritz Nganje). The third part includes a discussion on one of the potential African hegemony, South Africa, by Chris Landsberg, as well as a chapter on the relations between the AU and the UN by Ulf Engel. Preceding the conclusion, David Monyae takes a closer look at AU–China relations.

The edited volume offers an overview of all the key institutions of the AU, its challenges, and the relations it maintains with a variety of actors. The authors do not merely depict formal composition and procedures, but also analyse shortcomings and give constructive suggestions for improvement. In doing so, the volume also provides some historical

and political contextualisation. In highlighting the role of Pan-Africanism throughout the history of the OAU and for today's AU, some authors also point to its potential to guide a revitalisation of institutions and procedures to overcome the lack of political and financial commitment of Africa's leaders to the organisation and its capacity to lead economic, political, and social transformations.

As typical for the genre of overarching appraisals and anniversary volumes on the AU, *The African Union: Autocracy, Diplomacy and Peacebuilding in Africa* also remains fairly general. Still, the clear and confident writing of the authors, all experts in their respective fields, provides the reader with a well-rounded understanding of the various aspects of the AU. Those readers more familiar with the topics will soon suspect that the authors have far greater insight than they have put on paper, and might find themselves wishing that the politics and history behind many of the institutions and programmes had been depicted in more detail.

As the AU was relaunched in the South African city of Durban 15 years ago, it seems fitting that this anniversary volume takes – though not explicitly – a South African perspective. Not only was it published in association with the CCR, but many of its authors are South African, and in the discussion of potential African hegemony South Africa is chosen as an example in Chapter 10. While that chapter is a splendid analysis of South African politics and history vis-à-vis the AU, it would have been apt to complement it with a discussion of the role of Nigeria, Algeria, or other member states. Relatedly, the volume provides a rather Anglophone perspective that even in the discussion of Pan-Africanism only cursorily points towards similar movements in Francophone colonial and postcolonial Africa.

This volume shows how productively so-called identity issues can be brought to a discussion of formal political institutions. The way in which the book includes the history of Pan-Africanism in the discussion of the OAU/AU could have been used to highlight feminist struggles on the continent in relation to the AU's policies. However, issues of gender equality are addressed only sparingly throughout the book; when discussed, then only in connection to the particular topic of the chapter. A combination of authors who could have contributed a feminist critique or thorough gendered analysis would have improved the volume. Indeed, many editors try to avoid such a critique upfront by adding a haphazard or half-hearted “gender chapter” at the end of the volume, which cannot be the desired form of addressing this aspect. Why not critically appraise the AU's Directorate on Women, Gender and Development, when discussing its aspirations towards a people-centred union? As the editors

have excellently compiled a volume that brings together Pan-Africanist debates with an analysis of formal structures and procedures at the AU in a very fruitful way, surely they would have lived up to the challenge of addressing gendered aspects seriously – this might be a task for the 20th-anniversary volume.

In the introduction and conclusion, the editors make reference to current waves of xenophobic, racist, and nationalist tendencies in European and US politics and the subsequent necessity of the AU to firmly position itself to realise its ambitions for the prosperity of the continent and its people given this environment. In such a moment, the volume brings together acclaimed experts who offer frank criticism of, for example, the AU's financial dependence and its elitism, as well as its political leaders' lack of political will and the dominance of narrow-minded national interests. Nevertheless, the authors' hopeful and benevolent attitude towards the African Union indeed shines through; one can only wish that the volume's valuable insights and suggestions be taken seriously by the adolescent AU in the years to come.

- Katharina P. W. Döring