

Editorial

Dear reader

There is no need to tell you that Africa is inspiring, its peoples dynamic and its ever-changing cultural history utterly fascinating. And on a political level, Africa surprises, time and again. But how much do we know – or have we been at all informed – about the three recent elections in Africa? In Somalia presidential elections were held on 30 November; in Gambia the highly anticipated presidential elections took place on 1 December; and in Ghana general elections were held on 7 December, 2016. If we, in Europe, want to get information on these political developments, we have to consult alternative media channels, often solely accessible online. When did I last hear about Africa through our regular media (radio and TV news)? Granted, a few weeks ago we learnt about the student protests in South Africa. However, when we manage to delve beyond these superficial news flashes, and have a look at www.mo.be or www.africa.com African political developments are truly surprising, or rather encouraging.

We then learn about Fadumo Dayib, who was in the running to become Somalia's first female president. She was born in a refugee camp in Kenya, then later moved to Somalia and finally went on to start a new life in Finland. She has led an extraordinary life – although a life that is very recognizable to the large majority of Somalis. Human rights, security and women's access to resources will be high on her list of priorities should she succeed in gaining a political mandate. What can we do to convince Western journalists that broadcasting this news item would boost pride and self-confidence amongst large sections of the (female) African diaspora in Europe? It might also begin to change common perceptions about the Horn of Africa as the true Heart of Darkness of this planet (besides Nigeria and DR Congo, of course).

Alternative media channels also tell us that Jacob Zuma has been facing a vote of no confidence from the leaders of his own party, the ANC. Times are changing in South Africa, where socio-economic dissatisfaction has led to outbreaks of violence on university campuses across the country. Also this should be interpreted as a sign of hope – not only the fact that students can be mobilized around socio-economic issues, which has become rare in Europe, but also the fact that these revolts have an impact at the highest political level (significantly adding to the pressure created by the scandals, allegations of corruption and lack of leadership that have characterized Zuma's presidency). Currently, the liberation party ANC is highly divided over whether or not to remain loyal to its leader and this in itself is a triumph of democracy. Indeed, democratic institutions are working in South Africa, a message enthusiastically reinforced by 82-year-old Albie Sachs, who delivered the third Mandela Lecture at Ghent University on 3 October 2016. Against all odds, it is most likely that democracy will survive in South Africa, or even become stronger, as the ANC will lose its majority position. However, this fundamental

shift in politics has not been brought to our attention on radio and TV. We do get images about rioting students, but no information about internal political developments that will change South Africa for the better.

Ultimately, this is one of our greatest challenges: trying to change the negative and stereotypical perceptions people commonly have about Africa. In an era of the fast, furious and sensational this mission will be difficult to accomplish. On top of that, the media clearly seems to have taken sides – and it is not our side. On an academic level, however, collaboration with Africa is gaining prominence, as this type of collaboration is no longer depicted as development cooperation, but as true international collaboration, a form traditionally reserved for collaboration with partners from the global north. Since the beginning of 2016 Ghent University has developed a brand new internationalization policy, with Regional Platforms, International Thematic Networks and Institutional Strategic Partnerships. The African Platform GAP, which will be celebrating its 10th anniversary in January 2017, is one of the Regional Platforms (including the China Platform and the India Platform) that have already been in existence for quite a long time at Ghent University. This year, three additional (Prospect) Regional Platforms have come into existence: the Southeast Asia Platform ASEANplus, the Latin America Platform CESAM and the Russia Platform. These six platforms bring together all relevant expertise at Ghent University concerning a certain region of focus. They offer support, facilities and advice to the Ghent University community with the objective of expanding or setting up new forms of cooperation with or within a particular region. The Africa Platform has been a dynamic force at the Ghent University Association for many years already, but its operations have now become more structurally embedded in the internationalization policy of Ghent University. The new policy has also given GAP the opportunity to re-invent itself and set new targets. In the ongoing search for new synergies, the Africa Platform has always been very active in bringing together in-house expertise on Africa. It has always tried to brand Ghent University Association as the centre of academic expertise on Africa in Belgium – and it has succeeded in doing so by establishing firm contacts with the media, the business world and socio-cultural stakeholders. On the other hand, GAP does need to invest more energy in pro-actively developing new forms of collaboration with Africa, for instance by screening funding channels or actively recruiting students from Africa. The Africa Platform also needs to enhance its impact in the region, by intensifying its network with local universities, NGOs, embassies, companies, and (last but not least) UGent alumni living in Africa. This will demand more time and energy in 2017, but the fact that these efforts will be backed by the university, and be an inherent part of a structural internationalization policy, are extremely positive.

The publication of *Afrika Focus* remains one of the core mandates of the Africa Platform. We are truly proud that more and more young African scholars are finding their way to our journal and see it as a valid publication channel. *Afrika Focus* claims to be unique, in the sense that we are a multidisciplinary journal and in the sense that we are committed to offering a forum to young (African) scholars, who may not yet have experienced publishing work in an international and peer-reviewed journal. The added value is that

Afrika Focus is indexed by the International Bibliography of Social Sciences, which turns it into an accredited journal in many countries across the globe. Our target audience is clearly defined: academics working in or on Africa and, above all, African authors and readers. For that reason we will remain faithful to our gold open access policy, meaning that publishing an article in our open access journal is free of charge, just like consulting and reading our online articles – that is also fairly unique.

In this current issue we offer you five top articles from a wide range of different disciplines. Two articles are located in South Africa, one within health sciences and one in theatre studies. Museums in Cameroon, international legal frameworks linking the UK and Mauritius, and the European slave trade in 17th century Madagascar sum up the content of the remaining three articles. As always, we also publish a number of reports, mostly summaries of PhDs on Africa defended at Ghent University. The objective of these reports is to give you an overview of the Africa research taking place at Ghent University. In addition, we also want to give some visibility to these junior researchers, so please have a look at their topics and do not hesitate to get in touch with them for further questions and comments. Enjoy and... have you had a look already at the results of the presidential elections in Somalia?

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