

EDITORIAL

Governance, Conflict and Dispute Resolution: Introduction

The last decade has been, for scholars and policy makers working on development, a decade of governance. The institutionalist wave that swept across the social sciences, as well as the attention in policy circles for the institutional determinants of growth and development, has produced a focus on governance, defined as ‘the formation and stewardship of the formal and informal rules that regulate the public realm, the arena in which state as well as economic and societal actors interact to make decisions’ [1]. The articles in this Supplement analyse their particular cases in relation to this broad definition, which does not privilege an understanding of narrow-defined political arenas and political behaviour, but rather opts for a broader conceptualisation of ways in which the public realm is influenced by socio-economic interests, material conditions, and ideologies.

Over the past decade, governance frameworks have been studied in relation to a multitude of social, political and economic issues. The contributions to this Supplement of the *Open Area Studies Journal* relate, in different ways, to various forms of social and political conflict. The following articles address how governance regimes impact on and, in certain cases, channel social and political conflicts into peaceful interaction among actors in what used to be called the ‘Third World’ – a part of the world that has become a world of diversity as a result of pervasive political, economic and technological changes.

Conflict, most social scientists will agree, is of all times and inherent to all forms of social interaction. Yet, the forms that specific conflicts take, change over time and vary from place to place. Moreover, some conflicts are solved with peaceful means, within broadly accepted governance settings, while others turn into violent confrontations, in which the rules governing the public realm are contested and become the subject of the conflict.

The contributions to this Supplement focus on the way in which governance frameworks serve to regulate social and political conflicts in more and less stable political environments. The articles that are included in this Supplement of the *Open Area Studies Journal* were presented at the 2008 ‘Development Dialogue’ held at the International Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, The Netherlands. The Development Dialogue is a conference for PhD students. It is organised annually and is attended by PhD students from all over Europe and beyond.

The articles in this Supplement all reflect the work of scholars at the beginning of their career. The material presented here has been collected as part of the PhD projects that the authors have been working on over the past several years at their respective universities. The articles reflect the quality of work undertaken at the PhD level – all authors attempt to present novel interpretations of data collected in their fieldwork with the help of suitable theoretical frameworks, built on profound academic research.

The collection of articles that is presented here has been selected in two stages. In the first stage, 50 papers were selected from among over 130 submissions received for the Development Dialogue 2008. In the second stage, a more limited number of papers have been selected by the editors because of their quality and relevance to the overall topic of the Supplement.

Henry Kifordu discusses the nature of the Nigerian elite since independence in 1960. His article focuses on the surprising stability of political executive elite composition in Nigeria despite the fundamental changes characterising the political and economic structure of the country, related, most notably, to the repeated changes from civil to military regimes, and vice versa, and the increasing reliance of the country on revenues from oil extraction.

Patricia Agapusi’s article focuses on the political transformation in South Africa after the end of the Apartheid regime in the early 1990s. The article traces the evolution of the positions of different organisations within the anti-apartheid coalition from the onset of their rise to power and discusses the different groups’ interests and their exertion of power and influence. Agapusi argues that the transfer of power from whites to blacks and the rise to power of the ANC has not resulted in deep political and social change because of the embrace of neoliberal policy precepts by the new ruling elites.

The article by Lucia Cusmano and Fredy Preciado analyses the rural department of Casanare in Colombia. The institutional environment of Casanare is interpreted as a ‘frontier’, a peripheral space of migration and clashes of elites, where populations who are excluded from the centre compete for opportunities and resources. The permanent confrontation generates conflicts and frequent changes in institutional forms and rules, so that uncertainty represents a defining character of the local system.

Valeria Saggiomo’s contribution studies the role that Islamic charities have played in the governance of the educational sector in Somalia, which is generally considered as a ‘failed state’. The study focuses, in particular on the role that Islamic humanitarianism has played in central southern Somalia by tracing the origins of Islamic charities, their funding mechanisms and modalities of redistribution. The article relates to the direct and indirect role of the charities in shaping a political constituency for emerging Islamic leadership and its eventual role in supporting transformation in the Somali socio-political landscape.

In his article on post-colonial Angola, Mathieu Petithomme argues that war may become an alternative form of societal order and that warring factions may lose interest in bringing the conflict to an end. Petithomme’s analysis of the UNITA-MPLA conflict illustrates how political elites, either in government or in opposition, benefit from political disorder, as the continuous state

of emergency prevents an assessment of the legitimacy of their cause. The article highlights how different parties have adopted diverse informal political strategies, related to the private extraction of Angola's natural resources and the coordination of informal international relations.

Shyamika Jayasundara-Smiths's Marxist analysis of the protracted conflict in Sri Lanka, as well as the way in which the local and international societal understanding of the conflict has been shaped by different discourses, focuses on the rise and use of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. The paper attempts to contribute to a better understanding of the role of class and class relations in the governance of post-colonial Sri Lanka by analysing various discourses produced on the causes of the country's conflict.

REFERENCES

- [1] Hyden G, Court J, Mease K, Eds. Making Sense of governance: empirical evidence from 16 developing countries. Lynne Rienner: Boulder 2004; p. 16.

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