The European Union and Africa

Partnership, governance and (re-)evolving relations

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Introduction

Contemporary political relations between the European Union (EU) and Africa are framed within two distinct, though overlapping, discourses, that of governance and of development policy, the joint effect of which is to enhance the regulatory influence of the EU on the countries of the African continent. Since 2000 EU development policy has expanded in scope and content, with an accompanying set of principles on good governance that reflect similar strategies to those of the World Bank in the post-Washington consensus approach. Thus, an internationalizing of EU development policy is recognizable by the shared use of language such as ‘ownership’, ‘participation’, ‘empowerment’, ‘partnership’ and ‘poverty reduction’ (Farrell 2008). While concepts of governance now retain a central position in European internal and external policies, there are notable differences in how the term is deployed conceptually and empirically, across political priorities and geographical areas of interest.

External governance promotion has been linked to tough conditionality clauses associated with institutional and political change in Eastern European countries as part of the package of accession negotiations. In the neighbouring pre-accession states, with no immediate prospect of EU membership on offer, the EU has been more directly involved in supporting institutional change through its emphasis on state building and where ‘the external engagement of the EU is seen as a prerequisite for policy progress … and one where the legitimacy of this intervention, and of the policy prescriptions attached to it, is judged in technical or administrative terms rather than liberal democratic ones’ (Chandler 2010: 70). In the case of EU-Africa relations, the concept of governance has been redefined as ‘good governance’ and, placed within a neo-liberal development framework, it implies the ability of the state to maintain institutions that allow an efficient market to operate. Hout describes the objectives of good governance in terms of ‘efficiency in public administration and public finance management, rule of law, decentralisation and regulation of corporate life, including competition laws and anti-corruption watch-dogs, arms-length procurement processes and the outsourcing of public services and supply’ (Hout 2010a: 2).
There is evidently some degree of overlap in these approaches to external governance promotion; however, the more interesting empirical puzzle relates to how the EU combines politics and the technocratic policy-making in its relations with the continent of Africa—where the challenge of development sits alongside security concerns, fragile/failing states, and a renewed set of initiatives on regional co-operation and integration among the African states. The complex and very varied political and policy responses demanded from this set of challenges set the contemporary era of EU-Africa relations in sharp contrast with the historical experience of co-operation in the immediate post-colonial era.

The EU policy towards Africa is based essentially upon a layered set of separate initiatives, with the countries of North Africa coming within the scope of the European Neighbourhood Policy, while the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership adopted in 2007 covers the entire continent. A form of multi-level governance is emerging in the implementation of the Africa strategy, with a highly institutionalized framework for co-operation between the EU and the African Union (AU), and building upon the involvement of actors from the European Commission, the AU Commission, EU and AU Ministerial Councils, EU and AU member states, EU and African Parliaments, local and decentralized authorities, civil society actors from both regions, African sub-regional organizations, research institutions and the private sector. The EU also has a trade agreement with South Africa and, under the Cotonou Agreement, has negotiated four regional Economic Partnership Agreements. EU engagement with Africa occurs directly through certain areas of European policy, notably trade policy, development policy, research, environment and security, while other European policy areas have an indirect (and sometimes direct) impact on the African countries, including the Common Agricultural Policy and fisheries, the internal market, monetary policy, asylum and migration, and humanitarian aid. In addition to the EU level, the individual member states conduct national development policies, many with a very specific focus on African countries, and this dual level of engagement raises the need for co-ordination and coherence of the European system of multi-level governance (Carbone 2009b).

Relations between the EU and the African continent have historical origins in the spread of colonial occupation during the latter part of the 19th century, when several European countries played out their rivalries outside the European territory. By the early 20th century, most of the African continent was under the authority of the European countries—Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. After the end of colonialism and the emergence of independent African states from the late 1950s, countries in both continents shared an interest in maintaining political and economic ties, though the evident asymmetrical power relations between the two regions would most likely compromise any negotiations and agreements in favour of the former colonial powers.

Much of the academic literature covering the early decades of co-operation between Europe and Africa concentrated attention upon the Yaoundé and Lomé accords, framing these agreements against the backdrop of relations with developing countries generally (Frey-Wouters 1980; Lister 1988; Grilli 1993; Holland 2002). These agreements formed the cornerstone of the (then) European Community’s (EC) development policy, signifying a special relationship between Europe and Africa extending from the early 1960s through to the start of the new millennium. Over this 40-year period these association agreements were criticized by academics and policy communities, yet they remained a stable and central framework of co-operation between the developed European region and the developing African countries.

From 2000 the somewhat fossilized framework for co-operative relations between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries came under scrutiny, and the renewal of the Lomé accords in the Cotonou Agreement launched a new phase of engagement where
the EU imposed more political conditions and demanded full reciprocity from the African countries. Access to African markets and the requirement of integration into the global market accompanied the EU demands for good governance, while the African countries continued to anticipate the largely unspecified benefits from ‘development’ of their economies and the security of the region. A rush of policy initiatives after 2005, including a new Development Consensus document from the European Commission, the push to complete the negotiations on Economic Partnership Agreements, and the conclusion of a new Africa-EU Strategy in December 2007, marked a renewed momentum to relations between the EU and Africa.

To what extent do these developments reflect changing priorities in EU-Africa relations? Does the more direct emphasis on governance suggest an attempt to export a European governance model? With the strong emphasis on a neo-liberal orientation and parallels with the World Bank approach, to what extent can EU-Africa relations be seen in the broader framework of global governance? If there is a distinctive form of EU governance, is this also becoming evident in the African continental and sub-continental regionalism?

EU-Africa relations—historical overview

In the early years of European integration the formal relations established with the African continent began with the Yaoundé Conventions of 1963 and 1969, and were based upon preferential trade and aid agreements between the six member states of the (then) EC and 18 states in the western and eastern parts of the continent. From the beginning, these association arrangements were constructed upon a highly institutionalized structure—with an Association Council, a Parliamentary Conference and a Court of Arbitration—bilateral trade agreements based on reciprocity, and aid disbursed through the European Development Fund. Most accounts of these first institutionalized co-operation arrangements between the former colonial powers and ex-colonies (mainly those under French influence) focused upon contextual and content issues, emphasizing the partnership nature of the arrangements, and ‘freely negotiated agreement among independent states’ (Grilli 1993: 20). Yet many interpreted the arrangements as neo-colonial, limited in their developmental contribution, and essentially incompatible with the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) framework (Holland 2002).

The four Lomé agreements, covering the period from 1975 to 2000, built upon the Yaoundé provisions but substantially broadened the geographic scope—initially from 18 countries to 79 in the ACP bloc and, on the European side, 15 states, some of which had no colonial ties but most of which conducted their own national development policies alongside the European development policy. The Yaoundé agreements’ stated purpose was to further the industrialization of the target countries and to promote diversification of the economies, with free trade agreements as the main instruments of co-operation. Subsequently, these objectives became more ambitious, notwithstanding the fact that many African countries had yet to achieve the desired levels of industrialization and economic diversification. Lomé III and IV proposed to ‘promote and expedite the economic, cultural and social development of ACP states and consolidate and diversify relations in a spirit of solidarity and mutual interest’ (Lomé III and Lomé IV agreements, part one, chapter 1, Article 1).

Areas of joint co-operation had greatly expanded from the mid-1970s to the 1990s, covering commodities trade, industrial and enterprise development, and rural development. The academic literature on this period (from Yaoundé through to Lomé IV) ranged from early general accounts of the institutional arrangements and substantive content with respect to aid and development assistance, to later, more critical, assessments of the perceived failure of these accords to impact upon the developmental prospects of the African countries, and the inequality
of a relationship represented from the European side as one based upon an equal partnership (Arts and Dickson 2004; Babarinde and Faber 2004; Ravenhill 2004).

Certainly, the elaborate institutional arrangements designed to promote dialogue and foster communication among what would become a growing number of actors from Europe and Africa were distinctive, and unlike anything the EU would adopt in other areas of other external relations (Alecu de Flers and Regelsberger 2005; Mahler 1994). These arrangements brought together the high-level actors from both regions—ministers, European Commission officials and a joint EU-ACP parliamentary assembly. Other actors having a direct concern with development, or with an interest in EU-Africa relations, were not involved, and found little place in this rarefied atmosphere. In substance, the agreements offered a mix of aid and trade—technical and financial assistance to the poorest countries, a stabilization support package for primary producers to counter the effects of falling product prices, and a non-reciprocal trade agreement giving access to the European market for (specified) primary products. Largely designed as a specific form of European development policy for the ACP countries, the partnership was regarded by supporters as unique, and by its detractors as a neo-colonial exercise of structural power by the EC (Lister 1988; Holden 2009).

**From development to governance**

The review of the Lomé agreements by the European Commission in the mid-1980s coincided with a shift in political priorities and in development policy (Crawford 1996; Hurt 2003). Globalization represented a significant factor in shaping external action by the European Commission, and development policy was framed within the broader context of trade and external relations policy, as well as by the new neo-liberal preferences for development linked to structural adjustment and market-oriented policies (Gibb 2004; McQueen 1998; Ojo 1996). The review of relations between the EC and the ACP bloc took place against the backdrop of neo-liberalism associated with the move towards the European Single Market. Two other factors were significant: growing dissatisfaction with existing approaches to development and ‘donor fatigue’, amid the debt crises and concerns over corruption in recipient countries; the adoption by the European Commission of conditionality and good governance in the external policies, bringing European development policy closer to the practice of the global institutions, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. By 2000 the EU’s mood for change was already responded to in the provisions of the Cotonou Agreement.

Retaining many of the features of the past, the new accord brought some additional arrangements, in the form of reciprocal trade agreements covering all products, and the establishment of regional trade agreements (Economic Partnership Agreements) between the EU and groups of countries in the ACP bloc. These ‘bilateral’ regional trade agreements were also to be accompanied by regional trade agreements among the African countries, so in effect the Cotonou Agreement proposed a twin-track trade liberalization arrangement between the EU and each Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) (with four EPAs to be negotiated with the African continent, one in the Caribbean and one in the Pacific), and the African countries within each EPA would also establish free trade among themselves.

The Cotonou Agreement marked a departure from the traditional model of EU-Africa relations, heavily institutionalized and hierarchical co-operation based on bilateral economic ties and development assistance with a strong neo-colonial orientation, towards a more post-colonial and global orientation where the influence of the global governance system played a key role in shaping the European policy and the overall focus. Lomé had, by extending trade preferences to certain African countries, contravened the rules of the global trading order thereby presenting
the European Commission with grounds for change (Desta 2006). The World Trade Organization (WTO), and the USA, had been pressurizing the Commission to adapt to the Uruguay Round global trade framework agreed in 1994, and the EU, as an increasingly prominent actor in global trade, had every reason to accommodate its policies to the demands of the global trade governance system. Amid the more general accommodation of WTO demands for trade liberalization there was the EU recognition of the need to sustain its own position in the global trade system.

EU-Africa relations in the period leading up to the Cotonou Agreement were conducted within the framework of an increasingly complex development policy, where trade, aid, poverty reduction, technical assistance, environment, good governance and human rights all came together in an often contradictory manner that frequently undermined the potential development impact in recipient countries. This continued to be the situation from 2000 onwards, and the challenge for the European Commission was to ensure both policy coherence and co-ordination between the individual member states’ development policies and those of the EU (Carbone 2009b; Söderbaum and Stälgren 2010a).

The policy coherence challenge was addressed on several fronts, in a gradual move by the EU towards better co-ordination. The neo-liberal focus in EU policy and politics had seen the shift towards a development policy that reflected much of the thinking and practice within the international institutions, particularly in the World Bank and the IMF. These institutions of global governance shared a belief in reduced state intervention and in the capacity of the market to deliver economic growth and development. According to the prevailing view, liberalization of capital accounts, open competition, privatization and free trade within the global economy provided the right conditions for development and growth; financial liberalization would allow developing countries to attract foreign direct investment which could support a national development strategy, while trade liberalization encouraged an export-oriented development strategy. As neo-liberalism became firmly entrenched in the international public policy approach, the policy instruments and programmes of the institutions of global governance were firmly rooted in a common framework, characterized by a common language, ‘ownership’, ‘participation’, ‘empowerment’, ‘poverty reduction’ (Carbone 2010; Engel and Olsen 2005; Faber and Orbie 2009).

The so-called Washington Consensus shared by the IMF and World Bank was rooted in neo-liberalism, and the support provided to member countries (development loans, debt-financing and re-scheduling) was accompanied by stringent conditionality clauses that the target countries had little option to refuse. The EU had already made effective use of conditionality clauses during the late 1980s and 1990s, requiring the member states that intended to join the eurozone to meet certain ex ante conditions on public finances, including the deficit and debt levels, and macro-economic co-ordination. Subsequently, the Copenhagen criteria (on democracy, functioning market economy, respect for human rights and the rule of law) became established procedure for the accession states in the 2004 EU enlargement. Consequently, the extension of conditionality clauses in EU development policy generally was consistent both with well-established practice within the EU, and with that of the global governance institutions (Farrell 2008; Grimm and Klingebiel 2007; Kohnert 2008).

Similarly, the requirement for the poorest World Bank client countries to present a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper finds a parallel in the EU approach, which is based upon the preparation of a Country Strategy paper. In both institutions the concept of good governance begins to appear in the policy discourse from the beginning of the 1990s and was well established by 2005 when the EU presented its shared vision on development in the European Consensus on Development, a joint communication of the European Commission, the European Parliament.
and the EU Council (representing the member states). While interpretation of the concept of good governance within the respective institutions may vary slightly in emphasis, both the World Bank and the EU appeared to share broadly similar viewpoints about the content of a good governance approach—described by the Bank as ‘the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development’ and in terms of ‘sound development management’ (World Bank 1992). Having started the good governance agenda with a rather comprehensive approach that embraced a target country’s economic, social and political conditions, the Bank’s range of options spanned governmental reform (legal framework, public procurement, privatization), the development of a national development strategy where private enterprise held a central position, with World Bank lending firmly linked to the applicant country’s governance record.

The EU position on good governance emphasized the principles of accountability, transparency and representation (the participation of social groups) in setting the goals and objectives of development plans. However, it also came to adopt a tailored approach to take account of each country’s circumstances—retaining at the same time the emphasis on its own priorities towards democracy promotion, capacity building and trade liberalization (Mold 2007). While the academic literature has recognized that good governance is both a goal of, and a condition for, development co-operation, it would appear that EU efforts to promote good governance in development policy generally, and in relations with Africa in particular, were outweighed by the complex multi-level governance system within the EU (where member states retained policy autonomy alongside European Commission initiatives), and by the growing securitization of international policy and the general complexity of the international arena (Carbone 2010; Hout 2010b).

Security—changing the relationship

The Lomé accords structured relations between the EU and Africa over several decades, but this relationship also served to channel scholarship in a certain direction, and academic interest was focused upon understanding the dynamics of this case, regarded by some as a new model of north-south political co-operation between developed and developing countries, and by critics as an exploitative and asymmetrical relationship that served to reinforce old dependencies. The Economic Partnership Agreements were similarly regarded as an exercise of power on the part of the EU in pursuit of its own external trading interests through the promotion of regional economic integration, while simultaneously exporting the values and norms that had become central to the EU identity.

After 2001 the international political agenda was transformed by the efforts of the USA to pursue the terrorist organizations and individuals that it held responsible for the 11 September 2001 attacks. Security became the dominant concern shaping US foreign policy, and under US influence the internationalization of the security agenda led other countries to adopt various security policies. The European Security Strategy of 2003 explicitly stated the connection between security and development, which translated into a ‘holistic’ approach to policy on Africa where security, development and democracy promotion were essential contributions to political stability on the continent (Bagoyoko and Gibert 2007; Olsen 2005).

The extension of the EU’s engagement with Africa to the security arena was a new departure for both sides. On the European side the common initiatives and actions were now framed within the Common Foreign and Security Policy and not merely part of development policy (Olsen 2006). On the African side there were new actors, arrangements and institutions established under the African Peace and Security Architecture and initiated by the AU to address the continued conflict in several parts of the continent. This African Peace and Security Architecture
comprised a Peace and Security Council as the political decision-making body, a Military Staff Committee and the African Standby Force, an external mediation and advisory body known as the Panel of the Wise, the Continental Early Warning System to act as an intelligence gathering and analysis centre, and the Peace Fund as a special fund to cover the financial costs (European Parliament 2008).

Even though the EU was no military actor and had, at best, a very limited capacity for military engagement, it launched a series of ‘militarized’ initiatives in support of regional security on the continent, ranging from funding and training to actual intervention for peacekeeping and crisis management (Pirozzi 2009; Faria 2004; Gilbert 2007). Military intervention by the EU was, and continues to be, largely in terms of reaction to conflict situations and management of post-conflict conditions, rather than adopting the ex ante role of conflict prevention. The first of these interventions, the Artemis Operation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 2003 was followed by the EUFOR mission in 2006 and a third Chad/DRC mission in 2008–09, all of which attracted much attention in policy and academic circles for the novelty of these actions. However, each intervention mission was of short duration (on average, four months) and despite the EU military presence, the killings continued (Agboluaje 2005). The political differences among the European states over the financing and operation of intervention were clear to be seen; the Artemis Operation, ostensibly an EU operation, was in fact mainly a French action and, though the subsequent EUFOR mission in 2006 involved 21 EU member states, there remained significant disagreement over the rationale and conditions under which humanitarian intervention should take place.

The reluctance of the member states to present a common front and more substantive humanitarian intervention in the African region seems at odds with its identity as a normative actor, and as a defender of democratic values and human rights generally (Crawford 2004; Lucarelli 2007). Indeed, the European states were unwilling to act collectively even under the framework of the responsibility to protect principle, which the global community had proposed as a guideline for intervention in cases of a state’s domestic inaction or inability to protect its citizens. In the absence of a formal adoption of the responsibility to protect principle by the EU, instances of intervention remain dependent upon the existence of a collective political will to intervene (Major 2008). So far, when it comes to intervention the EU has opted for subsidiarity, with national interests determining the degree and scope of intervention, or of relying upon the AU and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for peacekeeping actions (Nivet 2006).

Regionalism—The African way or Europe as model?

Among the priorities of the Africa-EU Strategy is the promotion of regional integration. This is currently envisaged as a two-level process under the Cotonou Agreement—regional economic integration between the EU and the four African regions, and regional economic integration among the countries of each African region.² This dual emphasis on what is the cornerstone of EU-Africa relations calls to mind the European historical experience—where economic integration was used as a basis for political union. The EU is now regarded as a multi-level governance system with the capacity to become an influential actor in the ‘governance of the non-EU’ (Rosamond 2005b: 468).

However, there is no reason to consider that the EU might be exercising this influence in Africa through the export of the European model of regional governance. The EU is committed to concluding the EPAs, yet the level of regional integration (measured by intra-regional trade) among the African regions remains low in comparison with the level of intra-EU trade (Karingi
et al. 2005). At the continental level the AU is a highly institutionalized organization with a strong resemblance to the EU structure, including, among others, an AU Council and a Commission, AU Parliament, a Court of Justice and an Economic and Cultural Council (Kühnhardt 2008). When colonialism was coming to an end, the idea of a pan-African unity was popular among the new African leaders, but the leaders of the newly independent states opted for a gradualist approach to union, favouring integration in sub-regional economic communities (Babarinde 2007). The very limited progress towards economic integration since then appears not to have concerned the African leaders, who have reiterated in the AU heads of state meetings their collective preference for a gradualist approach to continental union.

Region-building processes have taken place in Africa, and continue to operate through enhanced economic, social and cultural cross-border exchanges, even in the absence of distinct formal political initiatives by state leaders (Söderbaum and Taylor 2003). Such regionalization processes can have positive developmental implications and, to the extent that they constitute a bottom-up approach to regionalization where state and non-state actors interact to create intersubjective understanding, can be considered as socially constructed forms of regionalism with a variety of (partly overlapping) motivations and goals: survival and profit-making in larger markets; liberalization; politics and policy-making beyond the state; and strengthening civil society organization.

The depiction of regionalism in Africa suggests a mixed picture, with many formal initiatives and overlapping membership by individual countries in different regional organizations, a fact considered by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) to be inimical to the deepening of regional economic integration. Despite UNECA’s support for regional integration and for consolidation of the existing (formal) regional groupings, the absence of substantive collaboration between UNECA and the EU in this area points to differences in strategy, if not also differences in political outlook among these two bodies. UNECA, itself a component of the global governance system, took a critical view of the economic and welfare impacts likely to result from the Economic Partnership Agreements even as it continues to promote trade and economic integration among the extant formal regional economic communities.

The discourse of global governance, particularly the notion of good governance, found expression in African-led initiatives such as the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), launched in 2001 with the aim to promote African revival (Agboluaje 2005). The NEPAD principles resonated strongly with EU approaches, and also with the principles and objectives to be found in the global governance policy frameworks: good governance as a prerequisite to peace and security, and to economic and social development; promotion of regional and continental integration; ‘partnership’ and ‘ownership’ of initiatives for development; and the linkage of all partnerships with the Millennium Development Goals. However, the reaction of the global policy community to the NEPAD programme, particularly the EU, and the global governance institutions has been lukewarm, in an apparent rejection of their own discourse when framed by the African states as an appeal for partnership and good governance.

NEPAD was justly criticized for its disregard for the unequal power relations between the West and Africa, a reality likely to compromise even the most serious and well-meaning efforts at partnerships in governance (Taylor 2010). Ian Taylor’s critique of the African system, where domination of ruling classes through a system of governance based upon the exercise of patronage, authoritarian rule and the appropriation of state resources for private use, highlights the other major problem with creating the kind of governance systems most likely to sustain political and economic development. Taylor’s reminder about the need to take account of political realities is particularly apposite in the context of a study of the dynamics of EU-Africa relations, and the consideration of how and to what extent these relations fit with global governance.
The European conceptualization of good governance is based on a very technocratic approach, which aims to deliver the institutions to support the efficient market, including ‘efficient public administration and public finance management, rule of law, decentralisation and regulation of corporate life, including competition laws and anti-corruption watchdogs, arms-length procurement processes and the outsourcing of public services and supply’ (Hout 2010a: 2). Similarly, the approach to EU-Africa relations is based upon a strong institutionalized framework wherein the technocratic approach is deeply entrenched, and where political relations become obscured by the misplaced desire to ‘tick the box’ in order to assess the good governance eligibility score card.

The literature on European integration includes well-documented studies of the political relations and impact of integration processes and European policy-making on the individual European member states. Yet there is much less attention in the literature on how the processes associated with EU-Africa relations in general impact upon and interact with national (African) politics (Hurt, Knio and Ryner 2009; Knio 2010). Instead, the African region is treated as a unit, just as the Africa-EU Strategy itself adopts a broad-brush approach to set out the technocratic framework for current policies and joint action by the two regions. The effect of this is to structure much of the research and scholarship directed towards EU-Africa relations around a too narrowly focused inquiry into the causes of and consequences for ‘good governance’.

Though the global governance system has its technocratic framework also, there is a substantial body of literature covering a critical review of the political dynamics by way of evaluating the system against such criteria of representation, legitimacy and effectiveness (Ortega 2007; Weiss 2000). The limited nature of critical literature on the political relations between individual countries, and between individual countries and the superstructure (EU, or EU-Africa, or AU) makes for a very constricted view of the dynamics of inter-regional and global governance, and the fundamental nature of such governance systems.

‘Has Africa got anything to say?’

The preceding section suggested that the scholarship on EU-Africa relations gives inadequate attention to the political relations, and specifically to the politics/interests of the African states as a way of getting a deeper understanding of the dynamics in this multi-level governance system. Yet there is a case (both normative and intellectual) for this kind of scholarship. Karen Smith suggests that international relations (IR) scholarship can learn from Africa, and that ‘African and other developing world insights into IR will be significantly different to the ones we are familiar with, and that they warrant an exploration’ (K.E. Smith 2009: 272).

Crawford Young pointed to the tendency for a generalized narrative of the African experience (‘big man politics’, clientelism and corruption) to overshadow the more detailed, differentiated and critical examination of particular national experiences, and that the notion of the post-colonial state is no longer a true reflection of the reality for many African states (C. Young 2004). In those African countries where political stability and economic development have become the hallmarks of normal political life in the state, then international relations will also be ‘normalized’, and IR theory has something to say about how we explain and understand the behaviour of those states and non-state actors in relations with other actors, and with the international system generally (Lavelle 2005; Lemke 2003; Nkiwane 2001). The more important task lies in taking the time to look at the political relations within and between states, as Smith argues ‘theory is seeing “what is” … this would mean that if much of “what is” international relations is occurring on the African continent, ways of seeing/recogising that would be potentially valuable contributions to theory’ (K.E. Smith 2009: 275).
In particular, we could seek to explore the complex interplay of factors that played a role in particular states’ positions towards the EPAs, or the Africa-EU Strategy, or more generally concerning the global governance system, how to decide on which state might represent the continent on the Security Council, or in the institutions of global governance, the IMF and World Bank (Sailu and Omotola 2008). There is also the interconnection between regional and global governance, and in the African case of regional integration there is much to learn about the political relations between state and non-state actors, and the changing nature of regional governance systems that are emerging.

In this regard, the literature on EU-Africa relations and, even more so, the literature on global governance, might learn from the critical perspectives in the development literature, having recognized the failure of the post-war development project in Africa and ‘suggested that the failings are the result of flaws in the ideas which inform the project rather than just superficial problems regarding the way in which the project has been implemented’ (Matthews 2004: 382). Many of the countries on the African continent are evidently highly dependent upon the institutions of global governance, involved in Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper processes (or the EU’s Country Strategy Paper process), yet states are (re-)defining strategies and national policies to suit the national context and the different local interests in contexts of ‘fractured liberalism’ (Harrison 2010).

If we can recognize some malleability within the accepted position of dominant neo-liberalism as a constraint on political action and policy choices, or of the general narrative of African politics as neo-patrimonialism, then it is possible to conceptualize the diversity of African governance practice in other equally realistic situations. For the EU there are pressing questions about how the future regional and global order might look, and specifically what role the EU itself might play in this global order (Gnesotto and Grevi 2006; Grevi and de Vasconcelos 2008; Grevi 2009; ISS 2009). Speculation about a multipolar order in the 21st century has prompted the EU to consider the modalities of engagement with other regional actors, notably Brazil, the People’s Republic of China and India. The rapid rise of China’s presence in Africa took the EU by surprise, and it has forced the EU to re-evaluate its relations with Africa (Gu, Humphrey and Messner 2008). The presence of a new actor with different strategies and interests has, for a while at least, opened up the political arena and allowed the African states to pursue new competitive and bargaining strategies. The initial fears of the traditional donors (including the EU) that China might impact on existing inter-regional governance practice by supporting rogue states, encouraging indebtedness and lowering environmental and labour standards, and subverting the developmental assistance regime is not borne out by the evidence (Woods 2008).

Conclusion

EU-Africa relations, originating in the former colonial ties and the desire of certain European states to retain economic and political relations with post-colonial states, have undergone significant changes over the past couple of decades. General malaise among the European states and the donor community about the effectiveness of aid programmes and developmental assistance regimes played some part in the shift of policy direction by the EU. What resulted was a new focus and set of priorities, an emphasis on a developmental assistance regime where governance and conditionality were intertwined within a neo-liberal regime closely aligned to the practice followed by the global governance institutions. In line with the nature of the EU as a multi-level governance system, co-ordination and coherence between member state policies and the EU level was essential to the unity of the European approach.
This chapter has highlighted the changing priorities on the part of the EU, and the new emphasis upon security that tested the EU internal order where there is a gap in terms of common policies. The EU engagement in humanitarian intervention in Africa constituted some test of its own internal political unity, and there is little doubt that opportunities for humanitarian and security intervention will arise in the future.

After many years of inter-regional co-operation, the institutionalized framework for EU-Africa dialogue and the regular nature of this engagement has structured EU-Africa relations so as to also effect a structuring of the literature. Notwithstanding the growing literature on this aspect of European inter-regionalism, there is an obvious gap in the literature with the neglect of political relations within and between the African states in the broader context of actors in this process. The chapter has emphasized the need to take this into account, and not to allow the more technocratic approach of EU-Africa governance to determine the lines of inquiry, a plea that extends to the examination of EU-Africa relations as a case of inter-regionalism within the global governance system. As one observer has noted, ‘a view of international politics from the bottom up may … help, not only to illuminate the impact of the global system on those who are least able to resist, but to provide a perspective on that system, and hence on the study of international relations as a whole, which may complement and even correct the perspective gained by looking from the top downwards’ (Clapham 1996: 4).

Notes

1 Yaoundé I covered the period 1964–69; Yaoundé II, 1969–75.
2 The European Commission proposed four regional EPAs—1) West Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d’Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierre Leone and Togo); 2) Central Africa (Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and São Tomé and Príncipe); 3) East and Southern Africa (Burundi, the Comoros, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dibjouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe); 4) Southern African Development Community (Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland and Tanzania). EPA negotiations were, however, conducted on a bilateral basis, between the European Commission and the individual countries, in a manner similar to the approach adopted for accession negotiations between the Commission and applicant states prior to joining the EU.
3 The sub-title is taken from the title of an article by K.E. Smith (2009).