

# **AFRICA UNDER NEOLIBERALISM**

Edited by Nana Poku and Jim Whitman



**Contemporary African Politics**

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The period since the 1980s has seen sustained pressure on Africa's political elite to anchor the continent's development strategies in neoliberalism in exchange for vitally needed development assistance. Rafts of policies and programmes have come to underpin the relationship between continental governments and the donor communities of the West and particularly their institutions of global governance – the International Financial Institutions. Over time, these policies and programmes have sought to transform the authority and capacity of the state to effect social, political and economic change, while opening up the domestic space for transnational capital and ideas. The outcome is a continent now more open to international capital, export-oriented and liberal in its political governance. Has neoliberalism finally arrested underdevelopment in Africa?

Bringing together leading researchers and analysts to examine key questions from a multidisciplinary perspective, this book involves a fundamental departure from orthodox analysis which often predicates colonialism as the referent object. Here, three decades of neoliberalism with its complex social and economic philosophy are given primacy. With the changed focus, an elucidation of the relationship between global development and local changes is examined through a myriad of pressing contemporary issues to offer a critical multidisciplinary appraisal of challenge and change in Africa over the past three decades.

**Nana Poku** is Research Professor of Health Economics at the Health Economics and AIDS Research Division (HEARD) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. He was formerly Executive Director, United Nations Commission on HIV/AIDS and Governance in Africa (2003–05) and Director of Operational Research, World Bank AIDS Treatment Acceleration Programme (2004–06).

**Jim Whitman** is Professorial Fellow and Co-Director of the HEARD PhD Programme, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, and General Editor of the Palgrave *Global Issues* series.

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*Edited by  
Nana Poku and  
Jim Whitman*

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# CONTRIBUTORS

**Lekan Akinosho** is a political historian, writer and researcher on issues of human rights, civil society and democracy in Africa. He holds a Bachelor's degree in History from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria and two Masters degrees from Brock University and the University of Waterloo, Canada. He has worked as a journalist, and with pro-democracy organizations that shaped the process of democratization in Nigeria after prolonged military rule.

**Patrick Bond** is Professor of Political Economy at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. Recent books include *BRICS: An Anti-Capitalist Critique* (co-edited, 2016) and *Elite Transition* (3rd edn, 2014). He directed the University of KwaZulu-Natal Centre for Civil Society from 2004–16.

**Pádraig Carmody** teaches Geography at Trinity College, University of Dublin, where he did his undergraduate and Masters work. His PhD is from the University of Minnesota in the US, where after graduation he also taught at the University of Vermont. At TCD, he co-directs the TCD-UCD Masters in Development Practice. His research centres on the political economy of globalization in Africa and he has published in journals such as *European Journal of Development Research*, *Review of African Political Economy*, *Economic Geography* and *World Development*.

**Augustin Kwasi Fosu** is Professor, ISSER, University of Ghana; Extraordinary Professor, University of Pretoria, South Africa; Visiting Professor of Economics, Aalto University, Finland; and CSAE Research Associate, University of Oxford, UK. Previously he was Deputy Director, UNU-WIDER, Helsinki; Senior Policy Advisor/Chief Economist, UN-ECA, Addis Ababa; and Director of Research, AERC, Nairobi. He holds a PhD in Economics from Northwestern University, USA.

**Bonny Ibhawoh** is a Professor of Global Human Rights History, and Peace and Conflict Studies at McMaster University, Canada. He has taught in universities in Nigeria, the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada. He is the author of several books on African history, human rights and peace and conflict studies, including *Imperialism and Human Rights* and *Imperial Justice: Africans in Empire's Court*.

**Eric Kehinde Ogunleye**, PhD, is currently serving as a Technical Adviser (Policy and Planning) to Nigeria's Honourable Minister of Budget and National Planning. He is widely published on development, macroeconomic and trade issues.

**Francis Owusu** is Professor and Chair of the Department of Community and Regional Planning at Iowa State University. He holds a PhD in Geography from the University of Minnesota. He teaches courses on international development, world cities and globalization, economic and urban planning, and planning methods. His research focus includes development policy, public sector reforms and capacity building, as well as urban development and livelihood issues, and has published extensively on these topics. He has consulted for several international development agencies, including the World Bank, Partnership for African Social and Governance Research (PASGR), Africa Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) and National Science Foundation (NSF). He chaired the Africa Specialty Group of the Association of American Geographers from 2005 to 2008.

**Jeffrey W. Paller** is Assistant Professor of Politics at the University of San Francisco. He was previously a postdoctoral research fellow at the Earth Institute at Columbia University, working with the Center for Sustainable Urban Development. He has written extensively on African urban issues.

**Amy S. Patterson** is a Professor of Politics at the University of the South, Tennessee, USA. She is editor of *The African State and the AIDS Crisis*, and author of *The Politics of AIDS in Africa*, *The Church and AIDS in Africa*, *Africa in Global Health Governance* (2017), and *Dependent Agency in the Global Health Regime* (with Emma-Louise Anderson, 2016). She has published articles on AIDS, civil society, religion and gender in Africa in *Africa Today*, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, *African Journal of AIDS Research*, *Global Public Health*, *Contemporary Politics*, *African Affairs* and *African Studies Review*. She teaches courses on international relations, African politics, global health and development, the politics of AIDS and democratization.

**Nana Poku** is Research Professor of Health Economics at the Health Economics and AIDS Research Division (HEARD) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He was formerly Executive Director, United Nations Commission on HIV/AIDS and Governance in Africa (2003–05) and Director of Operational Research, World Bank AIDS Treatment Acceleration Programme (2004–06).

**Adam Sneyd** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and the International Development Studies programme at the University of Guelph. His research focuses on the global politics of commodities, and emphasizes food, resource and development challenges particularly in African contexts. He has published solely authored academic books on the politics of cotton in the Polity Press *Resources Series* and Palgrave Macmillan's *International Political Economy Series*. Adam is currently conducting research on the politics of responsibility in Cameroon's commodity sector.

**Larry A. Swatuk** is Professor and Director of the Master of Development programme in the School of Environment, Enterprise and Development, University of Waterloo. His latest book is *Water in Southern Africa* (UKZN Press).

**Jim Whitman** is Professorial Fellow and Co-Director of the HEARD PhD Programme, University of KwaZulu-Natal and General Editor of the Palgrave *Global Issues* series.

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# ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| AAACP     | All African Agricultural Commodities Programme                          |
| ACA       | African Cotton Association  |
| ACP       | African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States                          |
| ACTIF     | African Cotton and Textile Industries Federation                        |
| ADMARC    | Agricultural and Development Marketing Corporation                      |
| AERC      | African Economic Research Consortium                                    |
| AG        | Action Group  |
| ANC       | African National Congress   |
| AProCA    | African Cotton Producers Association                                    |
| AU        | African Union   |
| BCI       | Better Cotton Initiative  |
| BRICS     | Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa                              |
| BWI       | Bretton Woods Institutions  |
| CAADP     | Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme                  |
| CBO       | Community-Based Organization  |
| CD        | Campaign for Democracy  |
| CDHR      | Committee for the Defence of Human Rights                               |
| CEEAC     | Communauté Économique des États de l'Afrique Centrale                   |
| CEMAC     | Communauté Économique et Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale                |
| CLO       | Civil Liberties Organization  |
| CmiA      | Cotton Made in Africa   |
| CODESRIA  | Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa        |
| COMESA    | Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa                           |
| COS-Coton | Comité d'orientation et de suivi du Partenariat UE-Afrique sur le coton |
| CPR       | Constitutional Rights Projects  |
| CSR       | Corporate Social Responsibility   |

## **xiv** Abbreviations and acronyms

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| ECA     | Economic Commission for Africa                              |
| ECOWAS  | Economic Community of West African States                   |
| ERP     | Economic Recovery Programme                                 |
| ESAF    | Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility                     |
| EU      | European Union  |
| FAL     | Final Act of Lagos  |
| FAO     | Food and Agriculture Organization                           |
| FDI     | Foreign Direct Investment                                   |
| GDP     | Gross Domestic Product                                      |
| Ha      | Hectare   |
| HDI     | Human Development Index                                     |
| HIPC    | Heavily Indebted Poor Countries                             |
| ICAC    | International Cotton Advisory Committee                     |
| ICTSD   | International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development  |
| IFF     | Illicit Financial Flows                                     |
| IMF     | International Monetary Fund                                 |
| ING     | Interim National Government                                 |
| ITC     | International Trade Centre                                  |
| IWRM    | Integrated Water Resources Management                       |
| LFF     | Licit Financial Flows                                       |
| LPA     | Lagos Plan of Action  |
| MOSOP   | Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People                   |
| NANS    | National Association of Nigerian Students                   |
| NBA     | Nigeria Bar Association                                     |
| NCF     | National Consultative Forum                                 |
| NCNC    | National Council of Nigerian Citizens                       |
| NEPAD   | New Economic Partnership for Economic Development           |
| NGO     | Nongovernmental Organization                                |
| NMA     | Nigeria Medical Association                                 |
| NNAASP  | New Asian–African Strategic Partnership                     |
| NPC     | Northern People’s Congress                                  |
| NUJ     | Nigerian Union of Journalists                               |
| NUPENG  | National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers Union   |
| OAU     | Organization of African Unity                               |
| OECD    | Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development       |
| OFDI    | Overseas Foreign Direct Investment                          |
| PACRM   | EU–Africa Partnership on Cotton                             |
| PAMSCAD | Program of Action to Mitigate the Social Cost of Adjustment |
| PPCP    | Public–Private–Community Partnership                        |
| PPP     | Public–Private Partnership                                  |
| PRC     | Provisional Ruling Council                                  |
| SADC    | Southern African Development Community                      |
| SAP     | Structural Adjustment Programme                             |
| SDG     | Sustainable Development Goals                               |

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| SEZ    | Special Economic Zone                              |
| SF     | Syndrome-Free                                      |
| SNC    | Sovereign National Conference                      |
| SOE    | State-Owned Enterprise                             |
| SSA    | Sub-Saharan Africa                                 |
| TFP    | Total Factor Productivity                          |
| TNC    | Transnational Corporation                          |
| ToT    | Terms of Trade                                     |
| UEMOA  | L'Union Économique et Monétaire Ouest-Africaine    |
| UK     | United Kingdom                                     |
| UN     | United Nations                                     |
| UNCTAD | United Nations Conference on Trade and Development |
| UNDP   | United Nations Development Programme               |
| UNECA  | United Nations Economic Commission for Africa      |
| US     | United States                                      |
| US\$   | US Dollar  |
| WC     | Washington Consensus                               |
| WIN    | Women in Nigeria                                   |
| WTO    | World Trade Organization                           |



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# 1

## AFRICA UNDER NEOLIBERALISM

*Nana Poku and Jim Whitman*

### **The expansion and consolidation of neoliberalism**

Neoliberalism is now both everywhere and nowhere. In political discourse and in academic literature, the visibility of ‘neoliberalism’ as a primary term in International Political Economy has shrunk very considerably<sup>1</sup> while, at the same time, it has taken adjectival form in research fields as diverse as conservation, criminal justice, urban studies, health care reform, higher education and party politics. The puzzling diffusion of the term can be accounted for in part by the remarkably wide and often imprecise ways in which it has been deployed. Indeed, one research project which examined the literature over a 14-year span concluded that ‘the term is often undefined; it is employed unevenly across ideological divides; and it is used to characterize an excessively broad variety of phenomena’ (Boas and Gans-Morse 2009, 161). Yet ‘neoliberalism’ is still frequently invoked in ways that signal both its embeddedness and its decades-long, pervasive effects, often as shorthand to depict – and frequently, to castigate – the inequities of capitalism.

‘Neoliberalism’ has resisted definitional consensus for many other reasons: its complex history; the involvement of a multitude of both state and non-state actors; shifting, highly adaptable purposes; and varying forms and degrees of political and financial expression. It is not monolithic; unilinear; irresistible; unambiguously good or bad; and in terms of its far-reaching effects, not easy to comprehend from a single viewpoint – socio-political, economic or institutional. But although ‘neoliberalism’ lacks precision, it has after all taken explicit ideological and programmatic forms; and there are sufficient commonalities between its varieties and phases to make the term meaningful and its history coherent. For our purposes, we can characterize as neoliberal the philosophical and political determination to give primacy to free markets over state-led regulatory regimes for business and trade; and over forms of tax-generated public subsidies. So neoliberalism is concerned essentially with the configuration and

re-configuration of relational qualities, particularly between states, citizens and markets (Jones 2012; Burgin 2012). Neoliberal initiatives most often take the form of deregulation and privatization initiatives, as conditional loans in response to financial crises, as 'corrective' austerity measures or as a domestic political determination that formerly state-owned, directed or subsidized sectors will perform more efficiently and to the greater good if obliged to operate in a competitive market.

Much like the wider, enabling dynamics propelling globalization, there is no directing power for neoliberalism writ large, no grand strategic, unified purpose beyond a loosening of restraints on the largely private accumulation of wealth. One needs no recourse to conspiratorial or mono-causal imaginings: the dynamics involved are generated from common (and increasingly networked) interests in re-framing state-market relationships and exploiting opportunities for wealth transference and/or accumulation. In addition to the familiar instruments of neoliberalism – capital controls, the opening up of domestic markets and the shrinking of the state, particularly through curbs on fiscal deficits and the accumulation of debt – there are also politico-financial arrangements such as tax competition, offshore tax havens, forms of inward investment, complex investment vehicles and the ease and speed with which capital can be moved around the world, all of which facilitate neoliberal initiatives, even in the absence of philosophically explicit neoliberalist ideals.

Over decades, the accretion and institutionalization of neoliberal values has been pervasive, both nationally and internationally, constraining and shaping socio-political expectation as much as the institutions of governance. Throughout much of the developed world – and in the US and UK most notably – political differences over the role of the state and the governance of finance mostly turn on the particulars of policy implementation rather than on the issues fundamental to the organization of political community, such as ownership, equity, justice, and the accrual and expression of power and accountability. Neoliberalism has not only shed its once-radical profile; neoliberal arrangements are now unexceptional throughout much of the world, the default setting for a significant portion of the organization of political community, with the result that opposing views struggle to find purchase:

Once upon a time, antineoliberal theory posited an opposition between the state and the free market, arguing that the antidote to the latter lay in the active intervention of the former. But the opposition is false, just another piece of the detritus of the modern history of capital. As states become mega-corporations ... they become inextricably part of the workings of the market and, hence, no longer 'outside', an antidote, or an antithesis from which to rethink or reconstruct the 'neoliberal paradigm'. This, in part, is why government is increasingly reduced to an exercise in the technical management of capital, why ideologically founded politics appear dead, replaced by the politics of interest and entitlement and identity – three counterpoints of a single triangle. And this is why the capillaries of neoliberal governance seem so firmly entrenched in the cartography of our everyday lives.

*(Comaroff 2011, 146; Mudge 2011)*

But for all of the pervasiveness of neoliberalism, there is a certain sleight of hand at work in the contention that the state should be reduced to something akin to an ‘emergency services’ role, allowing dynamic entrepreneurship to flourish, since it does not stand up to the empirical evidence of high-risk state investments (especially in science and engineering) facilitating private gains (Mazzucato 2013). This socialization of risk/privatization of gains suddenly became highly visible and reached its apogee with the worldwide banking crisis. The subsequent financial turbulence brought with it predictions of the imminent death, demise or tempering of neoliberalism (Cahill 2011; Grugel and Ruggirozzi 2012). Yet once the banking crisis had subsided (in large measure through public bail-outs), there was little corrective/preventive legislation to prevent a recurrence, nor a holding to account of the individuals and corporations responsible (Garrett 2014), nor, most remarkably, a serious and sustained challenge to the neoliberal paradigm (Mirowski 2013). This is despite the fact that the limitations of neoliberalism as a panacea have long been evident, recently to the point that a 2016 paper produced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF)’s own research department argued that ‘no fixed agenda delivers good outcomes for all countries for all times. Policymakers, and institutions like the IMF that advise them, must be guided not by faith, but by evidence of what has worked’ (Ostry *et al.* 2016, 41). However, the IMF’s Chief Economist, Maurice Obstfeld, was quick to state that ‘the article has been widely misinterpreted’ – ‘it [did] not signify a major change in the Fund’s approach’ and that the Fund had

not fundamentally changed the core of our approach, which is based on open and competitive markets, robust macro policy frameworks, financial stability, and strong institutions. But it has added important insights about how best to achieve those results in a sustainable way.

*(International Monetary Fund, 2016)*

More broadly, although neoliberal logic informed the regulatory arrangements which ‘contributed to the financial crisis of 2008 by putting in place a set of opportunities and constraints that led to rapid growth in the market for asset-backed securities’ (Major 2012, 536), neoliberalist principles remain the predominant ideological, institutional and technical governance instruments for configuring global, international and national socio-economic orders – and indeed, for addressing the financial turbulence for which they were partly responsible. The ongoing Greek debt crisis (Souliotis and Alexandri 2017; Konstantinidis 2016) is dramatic, but viewed against the history of neoliberal interventions, it is essentially an unexceptional case:

[C]rises manifest themselves in specific ‘domestic’ contexts, each with their own history and internal logic, albeit the origins of such crises are rooted in the general dynamics of the global capitalist system and in the relations among its constituent national entities. [...] In cases where individual states, each with their own history, internal logic, needs, pressures and coercive powers,