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Engaging Africa and the World

Tanya Lyons - ARAS Editor

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The Soccer World Cup is over. Africa can return to normal. Still suffering from the Global Financial Crisis, the rest of the world cannot.

The Australian government's Parliamentary Inquiry into Australia's Relations with the Countries of Africa was progressing nicely earlier this year, with many submissions detailing the multifaceted connections we have to Africa. However, these hearings were put on hold due to the August national elections, the outcome of which was painstakingly long. The change of guard in Canberra may impact upon the reinstatement of these public hearings, and thus the completion of any findings and a report. The 'former' Foreign Affairs Minister, Stephen Smith had rallied to put Africa back on the agenda after years of so-called 'neglect,' facilitating increased business opportunities in African countries. His last announcement in that role, in relation to Africa, was the appointment of Lisa Filipetto to the Australian Embassy in Addis Ababa to be opened later this year. She will among other duties, ensure Australia maintains relations with the African Union. While Prime Minister Julia Gillard has yet to make any uttering on the 'other continent,' newly appointed Foreign Affairs Minister (and former prime minister) Kevin Rudd, has quickly taken up the multilateral mantle and professed concerns for the achievement of the Millenium Development Goals, with particular mention to women's and children's health in African countries. We can only hope that this rhetoric will become reality as we engage with Africa in this restructuring world.

The long awaited 2009 report of the Australian Human Rights Commission, was finally released on 18 June 2010 - *In Our Own Words: African Australians: A Review of Human Rights and Social Inclusion Issues* (<http://www.humanrights.gov.au/africanaus/review/index.html>). However, while writing this editorial (4 October 2010), an African beauty contest held in Adelaide was overshadowed by another violent incident in this city's streets involving some youths from the Sudanese community (from Victoria, Western Australia and South Australia). Still mourning the death last year of one Sudanese teenager in another violent attack, this has again drawn unwanted attention to the issues of integration that the Human Rights report aimed to tackle. What it shows instead is the

miniscule impact such reports can have unless their recommendations are funded and implemented. What this incident also reminds us, is that we have a lot more work to do to engage with Africa and Africans and to understand their issues in Africa and in Australia.

This issue of ARAS will be circulated in time for the 33rd AFSAAP Conference in Melbourne, which is tackling the themes of “Engaging Africa / Engaging Africans: Knowledge, Representation, Politics.” Indeed, as quoted on the 2010 conference website (www.afsaap.org.au), guest speaker Professor Paul Zeleza encapsulates the issues important to AFSAAP and ARAS –

African studies is now a vast international enterprise encompassing Africa itself, the former colonial powers of western Europe, countries with large African diasporas in the Americas, as well as countries in Europe and Asia that have had no overt imperial relations with Africa. As a field with diverse and complex institutional, intellectual, and ideological histories, disciplinary and interdisciplinary dimensions, and national and transnational dynamics, African studies is no longer a singular field, if it ever was. Thus there are multiple knowledges for multiple Africas.

The articles in this issue of ARAS examine a range of issues facing African countries and the world, from multiple perspectives and dimensions. This issue of ARAS clearly demonstrates that African Studies is not particular to one field, and not constrained by Australia’s distance from Africa’s former colonisers. While we may be a small player in the international enterprise of African Studies, ARAS remains the only journal in this region focussing on African concerns, and in this issue, the focus is on poverty, piracy, governance, human rights, and political turmoil. These issues are relevant to Australia, Africa and the world and remind us why we all need to engage with Africa, and Africans.

Jonathan Makuwira’s article “Urbanisation, Urban Poverty Reduction and Non-Governmental Development Organisations’ (NGDOs) Intervention Mechanisms in Malawi”, argues that rising urban poverty is challenging this African state and requires a concerted effort from all sectors to ensure it is managed. Emily Bienvenue’s article “The Safeguarding of International Shipping: A Solution to Somali Piracy?” examines the various international efforts to make the Gulf of Aden secure for

shipping. Bienvenue concludes that any efforts to contain piracy in the region will also require the rebuilding of Somalia as a functioning nation. Basil Ekot's article is not a celebration of the "Fifty Years of Nigerian Independence," but a critique of "Governance in a Multi-Ethnic Nation-State." He argues that the right foundations were never laid for a stable and functioning democracy, but that with some structural changes harmony could be seen in this diversified and tense nation. Rachel Outhred examines the case of the *Trokosi Woman* in Ghana, and in this she provides an analysis of "Human Rights Activism and the Silencing of Women." She argues that international organisations contribute to the silencing of the very women they aim to assist, by not listening to their cultural contexts, but rather to the political agendas of their sponsors. Her article resonates loudly for both feminist and Africanist circles. In the final article for this issue Graeme Counsel provides an engaging account of the recent political turmoil in Guinea, through an analysis of the songs that have accompanied that nation's crises. "Music for a coup – 'Armée Guinéenne: An overview of Guinea's recent political turmoil" is a unique contribution to political analyses in African studies.

All of these articles have in common a passionate engagement with research in Africa. While Bienvenue can be forgiven for not travelling to the Gulf of Aden for data collection, her sophisticated analysis of the international evidence warrants serious consideration of her conclusions. Makuwira draws upon his own research in Malawi, while Ekot, a regular contributor to ARAS, is based in Nigeria and provides in depth and personal knowledge to his historical analysis. Outhred's research is based on her fieldwork to Ghana, and Counsel's is drawn from his recent experience and fieldwork in Guinea. Acknowledging the importance of fieldwork, AFSAAP has continued to support postgraduates wanting to pursue research in African studies. This year in partnership with Monash University, AFSAAP will award a substantial prize to the winner of this year's best postgraduate essay presented at the conference – a trip to Africa including accommodation at Monash South Africa campus, a chance to present their paper there, and of course publication in these pages of ARAS. Before it was postponed, what was evident from the Australian parliamentary inquiry into our relations with African countries, was that there is limited expertise in this country on Africa, and that AFSAAP has an important role to play in increasing and continuing its support for scholars interested in Africa.