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Journal Item

How to cite:

Brown, William (2009). Reconsidering the aid relationship: International relations and social development. The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs, 98(402) pp. 285–299.

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Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:
<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1080/00358530902895386>

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Reconsidering the aid relationship: international relations and social development

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Paper submitted for special issue of Round Table

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Abstract

Recent rhetoric surrounding the contemporary aid relationship between donors and African states is couched in terms of a high level consensus between western and African political leaderships, a central pillar of which is adherence to liberal principles of governance and economic management. The paper argues that an analysis of the nature of this consensus and its prospects requires that we need to understand it as (i) encompassing specifically international-geopolitical dimensions (including state interests, bargaining and power); and (ii) social-developmental purposes and content. The paper uses Rosenberg's considerations on 'international sociology' and uneven and combined development to provide a framework for analysing the aid relationship. In doing this, the paper speaks to two related theoretical issues: conceptualisations of the relationship between the 'social developmental' and the 'geopolitical/international' within International Relations (IR); and the contemporary relevance or otherwise of the discipline of IR to analyses of Africa's place in the international system.

Keywords:

Aid, Africa, States, Development, International Relations

1. Introduction

In recent years, foreign aid to Africa has received an enormous amount of media and academic attention focussing on a succession of new initiatives designed to redefine relations between western aid donors and African states (the UN's Millennium development goals, the Paris Declaration, the British Government's Commission for Africa) as well as among African states (the formation of the AU and the launch of NEPAD). This has resulted in a series of declarations of a new basis for cooperation and a shared commitment to promote liberal governance and development in Africa: a 'liberal bargain' between donors and African states (Brown 2006a).

This article sets out a framework from which to analyse this aid relationship drawing on the discipline of International Relations (IR). In this introduction I briefly set out the theoretical concerns that arise when considering Africa's aid relations. Then, I outline the idea of 'uneven and combined development' as a framework with which to analyse the role of aid in relations between African states and western donors. In the subsequent sections I outline some basic definitional issues relating to aid, before presenting an interpretation of aid as a form of 'combined development'. The key analytical questions I address are: does the consensus around the liberal aid bargain mean that the aid relationship has moved beyond the attempt by donors to exercise power through the kind of bargaining that conditionality represented? But secondly, is the liberal consensus genuine: does it represent a triumph of donor aims by recasting development in Africa in a liberal form?

In developing a framework to analyse aid relations, there are two main challenges that need to be overcome. The first, curiously, is the paucity of work on aid relations as a specific form of international relations. While aid to Africa has been the subject of a voluminous literature, and much of the substance of the aid agenda entails two sets of states (donors and African) enacting policies towards and deals with one another, little of this literature addresses the aid relationship by drawing on core ideas of the discipline of IR. Instead, much of the aid literature is concerned with whether aid 'works', with the economic, social or political impact it has within Africa, with the problems donors face in

ensuring that their desired outcomes are realised or with the nature of, and changes in, donor aid policies. And while there is much work within the canon of IR dealing with developing countries¹, in the main this only partially touches on the aid relationship.

However, in addressing this 'gap' we immediately come across the second challenge to be faced – the assertion that IR as a discipline misrepresents African realities (see for example, Dunn 2001; Dunn and Shaw 2001; Lemke 2003; and contributions to Gruffydd Jones 2006). Two arguments in particular need to be addressed. The first is a claim that, when studying Africa's international relations, theoretical frameworks need to address social actors other than states, whether they be rebel groups, transnational corporations, ethnic associations or other actors in civil society (see for example Clapham 1998a). Second, it is argued that theoretical frameworks need to be able to capture what is 'different' about African politics and states. While I would suggest that the generalised critique of IR and Africa is mistaken in various ways (see Brown 2006b), these two points are worthy of more consideration. Indeed, they relate to a broader set of concerns about the relationship between the discipline of IR and the subject area of development studies, covering questions such as whether 'western' models and concepts misrepresent or exercise a hegemonic hold over the non-western world and how IR as a discipline handles or ignores issues of poverty and social development (see for example the contributions to Gruffydd Jones 2006 and Gruffydd Jones 2005).

If we reformulate some of these thoughts in a more general way, they amount at least to an argument that, first, an effective explanatory theory of Africa's aid relations must be able to integrate societal actors and broad processes of social development into our understanding of international relations; and second, that we must be able theoretically to accommodate historical and geographical variability in the international system in terms of forms of state and state-society relationships. This article explores how a study of the aid relationship might be constructed which speaks to these agendas and debates. In part that means characterising the aid relationship as a particular kind of geopolitical relationship between states – as I will go on to argue, aid involves western and African states in processes of cooperative bargaining and conflict over the delivery of financial resources that are in turn enmeshed in foreign and domestic policy agendas on both sides. However the paper will also try

to situate this geopolitical relationship within an understanding of international relations that combines the study of the international with the study of the social developmental; and which is theoretically open to heterogeneity in state and social form. To explore how this might be done, I turn to an emerging set of ideas which recast international relations as a process of uneven and combined development. This work has developed aside from the specific debates I have outlined above (in fact it arises in the context of work on international historical sociology) but nevertheless it shares, I argue, some related concerns. I begin by outlining the notions of uneven and combined development as developed by Justin Rosenberg before turning to see how these ideas might provide a basis for analysis of the aid relationship.

2. The framework of uneven and combined development

In recent work addressing the issue of the relationship between social development and international relations and between social and international theory, Justin Rosenberg has promoted the utility of the Marxian concept of uneven and combined development (Rosenberg 2005; 2006; 2007; 2008 Bromley and Rosenberg 2006). In this section of the paper, there is space only for a very brief and schematic outline of this complex and evolving set of ideas.

Rosenberg's basic contention is that while IR as a discipline has struggled to incorporate social development into the heart of its conceptualisation of the international, instead bringing in societal actors as agents which are 'external' to the basic (anarchic) structure of the international system, social theory in turn inverts the error, only bringing in 'international factors' as contingent external influences on discrete (national) processes of social development. I proceed on the basis that the problematic relationship between development studies and IR alluded to above stems from much the same source. The concept of uneven and combined development attempts to overcome this by, on the one hand, inscribing social development as the central dynamic of the international system and on the other by defining 'the international' as an internally ever-present feature of any particular instance of social development.

Rosenberg begins with three transhistorical claims. First, he notes, the human world has always been composed of multiple co-existing societies: ‘...at any given historical point, the human world has comprised a variety of societies...’ (Rosenberg 2006: 313). It is this multiplicity which makes and defines the international as a distinct terrain – ‘the international’ (and by implication the subject matter of IR) is therefore defined as ‘that dimension of social reality which arises specifically from the coexistence within it of more than one society’ (2006: 308). He notes that despite this permanent feature of human existence, ‘none of the classic social theorists systematically integrated the fact of inter-societal coexistence and interaction into their theoretical conception[s]’ (2006: 311). Secondly, however, social development has always been uneven, societies have always been ‘...of differing sizes, cultural forms and levels of material development’ (Rosenberg 2006: 313). Thirdly, unevenness and coexistence has meant that inter-societal interaction has been a permanent feature of, and determinant influence on, each individual society at any point in time. Following Numelin, he argues ‘[it] is not just that societies coexist in some passive way, but rather that diplomacy – in the broadest sense of the negotiated management of inter-societal relations – has been an institutionalised feature of just about every known type (or case) of society’ (Rosenberg 2006: 320)ⁱⁱ. As a result, ‘...the conditions of reproduction which define the concrete existence of any given society...always include, by virtue of the bare fact of inter-societal coexistence, those external conditions which are the object of diplomatic management’ (Rosenberg 2006: 320).

The consequence of these features – multiplicity, unevenness and interaction – by virtue of how they shape the conditions for social reproduction in any one society, mean that social development anywhere is always a process of ‘combined development’ operating through a number of different mechanisms. The first is geopolitical: how individual societies stand in relation to other societies and the impact of the one on the other. What Rosenberg refers to as ‘geopolitical pressure’ is both stimulus and constraint, prompting action and reaction between unevenly developed societies, whether in the form of military or economic competition, emulation, political and ideological change and so on. A second mechanism of combined development stems from the ‘asynchronicities of development among uneven societies’ and the linkages of inter-societal interdependence this

produces over the entire range of activities through which societies are reproduced: political, economic, social, even personal (Rosenberg 2008: 9-10; Bromley and Rosenberg 2006). Unevenness here confers both advantages and curses on less developed societies as they come into contact with the technological, financial, organisational and ideological products of others. Both developmental leapsⁱⁱⁱ and curses (stemming from the potentially perverse social, economic and political effects of such 'external' influences) are thus made possible. Finally, combined development results in the production of 'social amalgams'. Following Eric Wolf, Rosenberg argues that because development is always combined, all societies are therefore some kind of hybrid; every particular instance of social development is in part a product of the causal effects of coexistence and interaction with others (Rosenberg citing Wolf 2006: 325). In summary:

'Whether through conscious imitation (or aversion), by forcible imposition, or via more diffuse processes of interpenetration, the historical development of any society always includes – both causally and compositionally – elements deriving outside any 'original' or 'indigenous' socio-cultural identity' (Bromley and Rosenberg 2006: 4).

However, while unevenness and combination mean every individual society is therefore some form of hybrid, and combined development allows through imitation or imposition, innovations in technology, economic activity and organisation, or political and social institutions (or ideas about these) to be transplanted from one society to another, such a process does not produce homogeneity of social form but in fact creates changing patterns of heterogeneity. The reason for this, Bromley and Rosenberg maintain, is:

'...on the one hand, the very act of importing artefacts (whether mental or material) pre-empts the need to repeat the developmental sequence through which they were originally produced; and on the other hand, this same act transfers them out of their original socio-cultural setting and 'combines' them with a different one to produce a new developmental configuration' (2006: 5).

Limitations on space mean that some of the broader implications that these ideas create for rethinking the relationship between international relations and social development, and for analysing Africa's international relations, will have to be left to one side. However, in the remainder of this article I explore the idea that the aid relationship can be interpreted as one form of combined development,

encompassing geopolitical and social interdependencies that produce heterogeneous developmental outcomes in recipient states.

3. Analysing aid

I want to begin by delineating the field of study (what is aid?), outlining some very brief contours of the evolution of aid policies, and by identifying two key analytical questions which arise from the contemporary 'liberal consensus' between aid donors and African states.

Foreign aid in general terms has been defined as 'all resources – physical goods, skills and technical know-how, financial grants (gifts), or loans (at concessional rates) – transferred by donors to recipients' (Riddell 2007: 17). As such foreign aid encompasses a wide range of assistance for a wide range of purposes including military and strategic ones. Here I focus on *development* aid (that is foreign aid that is concerned with development and improving human welfare in poorer countries) and within that, only on official development assistance (ODA). ODA is defined by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) as aid which is provided by official agencies (states and multilateral institutions) for the promotion of economic development and welfare of developing countries and that is concessional in character (cited in Riddell 2007: 19). We are concerned, therefore, with the set of policies and agreements between states and those mediated by international institutions through which the provision and use of ODA takes place and is governed.

As such, the aid relationship can be seen as one element of a broader arena of development cooperation, other significant elements being trade preferences and debt reduction/cancellation with which this obviously overlaps in important (and sometimes controversial) ways^{iv}. That said, aid is an important international relationship in itself. As Riddell notes, every country in the world either gives or receives aid and total aid from rich countries exceeded US\$100bn for the first time in 2005 (Riddell 2007: 2). For the developed countries aid has become a staple issue at the top of international

political agendas and is 'part of the architecture of international relations' (Riddell 2007: 22). Indeed, for poorer countries, the relationship with aid donors is sometimes their single most important external relationship.

For purposes of brevity, I make some fairly sweeping generalisations about aid here. Thus I refer throughout to '(western) aid donors' as a whole, by which I mean the leading western donor states and the multilateral institutions through which some of their ODA is mediated.^v Similarly, I make generalised references to 'African states'. In what follows I also outline a very schematic view of how the aid relationship has developed over the last 30 years or so. A lot of important detail is lost by such generalisations: questions such as the institutional and political differences between aid donors; the way mediation of aid policy through international institutions affects the relationship; and the quite significant differences within sub-Saharan Africa, among them. That said, such generalisations are not entirely inappropriate. Commentators have drawn out some significant commonalities on both sides of this relationship: general patterns in the shifts in aid policies (and overt co-ordination of these) between western states, and general patterns in post-colonial state formation and political trajectories in Africa.

Aid policy is commonly periodised into at least three main eras.^{vi} First, a period from independence up until the late 1970s of fairly large disbursements of project aid on relatively generous terms, focussed primarily on capital investment and infrastructure alongside, in the 1970s, a focus on poverty reduction and rural development. The whole was overlain by a fairly overt rhetorical acknowledgement of sovereign independence and allocations were shaped above all by cold war allegiances and remaining (albeit slowly waning) links with former colonies. Second, a period from late 1970s up until mid-1990s often referred to as the 'adjustment era', involving a shift from project to programme aid and the rise of conditionality making aid dependent on agreements with the Washington institutions over programmes of macroeconomic liberalisation and latterly internal political, institutional and governance reform. The package of reform policies demanded were most famously labelled the 'Washington Consensus' by John Williamson (1993). Finally, a period from the mid-1990s until the present day variously characterised as the 'post-Washington consensus', or

'partnership' era (Whitfield and Fraser 2009). This latter is widely seen to comprise a continuation of fairly orthodox macroeconomic constraints on recipient countries combined with a much wider arena of policy intervention stretching to all corners of governance within recipient states: political systems, development strategy, legal systems, governmental and institutional make up, even strictures as to how development strategy should be arrived at, as well as the modalities through which aid is delivered (sector wide approaches, budget support and so forth). The origins of this latest phase of aid policy were underpinned by ideological shifts in western states. The 'Third Way' doctrines of the Clinton and Blair governments in the USA and UK led to a greater focus on social justice alongside, though by no means replacing, the prevailing liberalisation agenda. However, the shifts in aid policy were also tactical: donors were increasingly aware that conditionality wasn't delivering the outcomes they hoped for, leading to a greater focus on recipient 'ownership' of reforms and on their governance processes.

As such, this latter period came to contain a fundamentally 'liberal bargain': an exchange of aid, debt relief and policy changes on trade and other issues by the industrialised countries on the one hand, for radical liberal reform of the way in which African states govern and pursue economic development, on the other (Brown 2006a). The existence of this bargain and especially the claim that this is a consensus based on partnership around shared values is proclaimed through rhetorical commitments from both sides. The Commission for Africa defined the desired outcome:

'...the right economic, social and legal framework which will encourage economic growth and allow poor people to participate in it...establish[ing] an economic environment that encourages investment...security, setting sound economic policies under the law, collecting taxes and delivering adequate public services...legal systems to protect basic property rights, human rights, and respect for contracts...an independent judiciary, an effective impartial police and prison system, and a wide range of financial and regulatory systems...' (Commission for Africa 2005: 24).

Such a view is widely shared among donors. The G8, at its summit in Gleneagles in 2005 repeated these broad aims and African governments have committed to them, most notably in the NEPAD founding statement and in subsequent dialogue with the G8 (OAU 2001). Indeed, the claim by donors

that the aid relationship today rests on 'partnership' rather than conditionality is only made possible by the commitment to these principles by Africa governments. The consensus is thus a high level and rhetorical one, established through declarations within and around continental and international forums like the UN and G8.

A number of questions are raised by this narrative of aid policy, and particularly by the current emphasis on a liberal partnership. The two that I want to explore are these: do current statements of aid policy mean that the aid relationship has moved beyond the attempt by donors to exercise power through the kind of bargaining that conditionality represented? And secondly is the liberal consensus genuine: does it represent a triumph of donor aims and power in achieving a liberal context for development in Africa? My answer to both these questions is a qualified 'no'. In what follows I suggest that conceptualising aid as a particular instance of combined development helps to illustrate why.

4. Aid as combined development

In the outline of uneven and combined development given above I noted that for Rosenberg combined developed exists in (at least) three registers: in geopolitical interaction; in societal interaction as a mechanism of social reproduction and change; and in amalgamation and hybridisation of social forms.

On one level – and perhaps the most obvious one – aid is a particular form of geopolitical interaction, with states as central actors but in which broad social and political forces shape the content and outcomes of interaction. Indeed, aid is founded on an inter-state relationship, one in which legal equality rather than imperial or colonial subordination define the formal relationship between the giver and the receiver. Even with institutions as powerful as the World Bank and IMF, or bilateral donors such as the USA, the relationship with recipient states is conducted with formally equal sovereign entities. While African policy autonomy may indeed be severely compromised by the aid relationship, the recognition of the *right* of African states to make their own (limited) policy choices is not seriously questioned. Whatever other powers donors have, a socially-recognised right to rule African societies

is not one of them: this is fundamentally a non-colonial relationship. Much else that is important in the aid relationship flows from this. Secondly, states are absolutely central to the relationship in authorising the allocation, receipt and use of aid. Thirdly, the political content of this relationship – decisions about who is given aid, on what terms and with what effects – are interpretable as processes of bargaining and the exercise of power. However, the analysis of bargaining and power requires an identification of the purposes of states and these in turn are grounded in wider social forces.

Thus for example, foremost in the explanation for the advent of adjustment conditionality – what Toyé (1987) termed the ‘counter-revolution in development thinking’ – was the much commented on shift in western states from a broadly Keynesian and social democratic policy framework to a more forthright promotion of the market as the prime allocation mechanism and smaller but stronger regulative role for the state. In part this occurred, in countries such as the UK and the USA, via the declining influence of organised labour and the rising electoral importance of more right wing social interests (see for example, Gamble 1988). If the impact domestically was dramatic, in the aid field it was equally so. US Secretary of State George Schultz told his aid officials in 1985:

‘Policy dialogue should be used to encourage LDCs to follow free market principles for sustained economic growth and to move away from government intervention in the economy...To the maximum extent practical governments should rely on the market mechanisms – on private enterprise and market forces – as the principal determinants of economic decisions’ (cited in Adams 1997: 169).

However, the nature of geopolitical interaction was also fundamentally shaped by the African context. There is broad agreement that in the era from independence up to (at least) the 1980s African polities were characterised by forms of political representation revolving around clientilism, and a political economy based on interventionist practices (for different versions see: Young 2004; Mamdani 1996; Allen 1995). Lofchie (1994) describes the typical set of policies that this created: import substitution industrialisation, protectionism, fixed exchange rates, rationing of foreign exchange, mandatory sectoral policies, state owned enterprises, and control of agricultural prices (Lofchie 1994: 146-151).

In the context of these political structures, international trade and aid played a crucial role lubricating the patrimonial channels (Young 2004: 31-5). Even if such political formations were coming under increasing pressure by the end of the 1970s, under the weight of their own internal shortcomings and a vastly worsening international economic context, the longstanding African aim of getting international aid on terms which did not seriously compromise policy autonomy lasted well into the 1980s and beyond.

Conditionality, from this perspective, reflected the way in which aid became a focus for contested political aims about the nature and direction of development in Africa. Certainly the bargaining this involved required some degree of cooperation: donors' desire to support economic and social development in African countries and African states' ongoing desire to attract inward flows of finance. Without this there was no reason for African states to seek aid, nor for western states to provide it. However, once implementation of programmes of structural adjustment had become the *sine qua non* of much development finance, these shared aims were overlain by conflict over the terms by which aid would be granted. The result was in many instances a cooperative (albeit highly unequal) bargaining situation whereby many African states traded a defence of policy autonomy and with it the then typical patterns of interventionist economic regulation, for a continuation of inflows of foreign aid^{vii}. Thus, for all the rhetoric which conditionality generated, including many public denunciations of western aid donors and the Bretton Woods institutions, the relationship which ensued often ended up in a process of bargaining over the terms of co-operation. While such a characterisation may seem a rather abstract way of putting things, accounts of the process by which African states accepted conditionality show there was often a very real weighing up of policy options^{viii}.

However, there is reason to qualify this assessment. First, the adoption of liberal reforms was not solely externally-driven. While many African countries adopted adjustment conditionality under considerable external pressure, such radical changes of direction were instead at least in part encouraged by social and political shifts within those states (see Harrison 2004; Fraser and Whitfield 2009: 99). The exhaustion of previous development models, failing legitimacy of some of the longstanding 'bureaucratic-authoritarian' regimes (Allen 1995) and worsening economic problems, all

undermined attempts to fashion tougher bargaining stances with respect of donors resulting in what Clapham (speaking of the demands for governance reform) described as 'a pincer movement which allied Western-dominated international institutions on the one hand, with excluded and dissenting Africans on the other' (1993: 431). Secondly, however, the progress of the donors' adjustment agenda, particularly where this expanded into a broad political reform of recipient countries, in fact met (and continues to meet) with considerable obstacles. As reflected in the 1990s in World Bank assessments of conditionality, donor power was considerably more constrained than it seemed at first glance. Not only was conditionality an imperfect tool^{ix} but it was much more effective at achieving agreements to policy reform than it was at getting those reforms implemented. When we consider donors' aims, and the extensiveness of the agenda that donors took on, what is revealed is that their ability to achieve their desired outcomes was much more limited than their ability to get African governments to sign aid agreements. The shifts in aid policies through the 1990s up to the present day may simply show that donors' aims over-reached themselves: that this kind of social change is not easily engineered from outside. As Callaghy put it: 'Everybody knows what kind of state he or she would like to have, but nobody knows how to obtain it.' (1995: 54).

Indeed, this is a theme which has been picked up in more recent writing on aid and development (see for example Porteous 2005, Cooper 2006) as well as in recent pronouncements on aid and new initiatives in aid policy. But it also demonstrates that the limited instrument of aid conditionality could only achieve limited aims. The problem, as Lockwood acknowledges, is that achieving the kind of liberal outcomes donors wanted represented a fundamental political (and we might add societal) change, not some mere technocratic policy tinkering (2005). Indeed, in the wake of the 2005 Commission for Africa, Richard Sandbrook argued that donors were calling for 'nothing less than a Great Transformation' in African countries; 'in reality, the triumph of economic and political liberalism in many countries represents, not mere reform, but revolutionary change...' (2005: 1120-1123).

These comments should alert us to the second dimension of aid as combined development. That is, while it exists as a geopolitical arena of interaction, the significance of bargaining around aid goes deep into recipient countries because it is directed at, and is often important in, reshaping the wider

processes of social reproduction in those societies. This is clear in the case of macroeconomic policy and the effects that liberalisation has on production and trade. But it is also evident in the importation of different forms of political rule (multi-partyism) institutional governance (governance accountability and anti-corruption initiatives) and political activity and representation (participatory forms of consultation around poverty reduction). Thus in both its economic contribution to national accounts and its broader impact on development and politics, the interdependence of the aid relationship registers its role in the social reproduction of African societies. Indeed, this is apparent not just in the obvious sense of supplying finance for investment in physical infrastructure, human capital and production but also in the much commented upon way in which aid inflows help or hinder African regimes to reproduce the means of their own survival. One reading of the aid policy agenda of donors is an ever-more expansive programme of reshaping the very functioning of recipient societies across multiple social, economic and political spheres. [Aid policy revisions](#) from the mid 1990s reflect a growing awareness of this expansive agenda as well as the difficulties of achieving it. Part of what is unique about the aid relationship as a geopolitical relationship therefore is precisely that it is overtly presented as a cooperative endeavour between different societies but aimed explicitly at the transformation of social development in the recipient country. Our analysis of it as a particular form of international relationship must therefore be guided by an understanding of the complexity of the processes that are thus set in train. While geopolitical manoeuvring is an identifiable element of this relationship its character and importance can only be grasped within a broader conception of the nature of the societal interaction it entails.

Third and finally, combined development is registered in the contribution aid makes to the production of hybridised social forms: the importation from outside through geopolitical and social interaction of material and technique into new settings, and in the wider, but arguably even more fundamental sense of importation of new forms of institutions of governance and political rule. Indeed, as we have seen already in the previous section, the aim of much recent western aid policy is a fairly deliberate attempt to consciously change the composition of social development in Africa. But such imports happen in social contexts with their own history. The introduction of liberalised and marketised

economic relationships, and of changes to political processes and institutions, happen in a novel social context and what they produce is therefore novel.

The examples of privatisation and multi-partyism – both of which have long been actively encouraged by donors – serve to illustrate these heterogeneous effects. The privatisation of state-owned enterprises has been a pervasive element of economic reform programmes, enacted with the explicit aim of introducing market competition into previously state-regulated areas of the economy. In practice, however, state elites (whether outgoing, or as in the case of Zambia in the 1990s, incoming) have been adept at securing control over privatised assets and preserving their hold over the patronage that these assets allow (Craig 2000). Similarly, the introduction or re-introduction of electoral processes has profoundly changed the political systems of many African states. However, in several instances the electoral process is itself shaped by the ‘adhesion’ of clientilism to liberalisation (Szeftel 2000) as existing clientilist relationships come to shape the electoral connections between politicians, political parties and their rural constituencies (Mamdani 1996). Where this is given a particularly ethnic character, as in the 2008 elections in Kenya, the results can be volatile. Both privatisation and multi-partyism demonstrate the impact of liberalisation in disrupting long-standing state organisations and political structures. Yet in neither case do the results match the intention: both are shaped by the social circumstances in which the reform programmes are enacted, producing unexpected results and new political formations and processes.

There is one further point that arises from these considerations. First, the historical perspective I have followed, alerts us to the fact that the context within which aid operates in these ways, is itself structured by the prior historical products of uneven and combined development. Thus the mixes of conflict and cooperation between donors and African states outlined above can now also be situated within a broader characterisation of social development across the international system. In Africa, the product of uneven and combined development through the incorporation of the continent into the world economy during colonisation and after, and the typical patterns of state creation and associated forms of political rule which this produced as African political actors reacted to new ‘external necessities’, are states which do not conform in any simple fashion to liberal capitalist ideal models. In

particular, and as has been outlined by many commentators, in Africa we have states in which directly political relations still play an important role in the production and distribution of wealth. However, the point is not just that African states do not conform to some ideal-type, it is more that *nowhere conforms*: a certain level of heterogeneity is an expected outcome of inter-societal interaction.

5. Conclusions

The foregoing discussion now allows at least a preliminary answer to the two questions I posed. Taking them in reverse order we can see that any donor policy based on an expectation of African political and institutional conformity to a simplistic liberal ideal is likely to face considerable obstacles. The framework presented above would also suggest that those donors or analysts who describe us a world consisting of unproblematic uniform processes, whether they be the spread of liberal governance, the dominance of neoliberalism or the spread of capitalist social relations, are somewhat wide of the mark. Instead we have a much more complex agenda for future research, not least of which is the issue of unevenness of change within Africa. Harrison, for one, has pointed to the variability with which different African states have adhered to the World Bank's governance agenda (2004; see also Whitfield 2009). He is also surely right to point out that the long histories of interaction between African societies and the wider world have produced differing configurations of liberal and illiberal social forces within Africa (Harrison 2004: 44-49)^x. Yet, by specifying political variation and combined development as general, rather than specifically *African*, features of the world, it also allows us to bring into question the self-image of donors themselves. Policy rhetoric might well portray an easy adherence to liberal ideals of law bound states existing in a world of liberalised markets but the inability of donors to carry out their side of the liberal bargain itself demonstrates the absence of any simple homogeneity among even the developed states.

While the liberal consensus continues to have political force within and outside of Africa there is also clearly a significant gap between rhetoric and reality. As a consequence we can expect continuing tension in the aid relationship as a mechanism by which donors and recipients struggle over the content of this particular international relationship. Such tension turns ultimately on the differences

between the character of state-society relationships in Africa on the one hand and the kind of liberal capitalist social development donors – and some African leaders – say they want to see created on the other. Even if high-level politics presents us with a new consensus on aid, deep issues of social development need to be addressed for us to produce a rounded account of this aspect of international relations.

The disciplinary and theoretical context outlined at the start of this article was a twin challenge to analysts of Africa's international relations: to situate understandings of the geopolitics of Africa's international relations in a broader conception of processes of social development; and to incorporate within theoretical frameworks the variation in social and state forms and, indeed, historical experience. Although in many only a preliminary investigation, the analysis presented above suggests that these challenges can be met, and moreover, that serious attention to these aspects of international relations opens up useful ways to reframe research into other aspects of Africa's international relations.

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Footnotes

ⁱ See for example, Krasner's early work on north-south relations and work associated with the English School (Krasner 1985; Bull and Watson 1984; Mayall 1990; Jackson 1990; Clapham 1996; Buzan 1998, Ayoob 1998).

ⁱⁱ To illustrate this point, see for example Hedley Bull's little-referenced description of pre-colonial African political systems (Bull 1984)

ⁱⁱⁱ Here Rosenberg (2008) draws on Gershenkron.

^{iv} Key controversies in recent years have included debates over whether debt relief in the wake of the G8 summit in Gleneagles in 2005 should be counted as an increase in aid; and the ways in which donor pressure (exerted via the aid relationship) for developing countries to pursue export-oriented development strategies is then negated by the continuation of protectionist trade practices by industrialised countries.

^v Consideration of the rising importance of non-western donors, particularly China and India, cannot be dealt with in the space available. Nevertheless, I would suggest that the approach developed here would provide some interesting insights into the impact of these new donors on Africa's relationship with western donors.

^{vi} There are alternative attempts to define these periods. Harrison, for example, divides the first period into two: one of growth up to about 1973 and recession to 1979 before the adjustment era from then onwards, as does Mkandawire (Harrison 2004: 57-67; Mkandawire 2001). Others such as Naim (2000: 506) point to the shifts and evolution of policies within the adjustment era itself. Fraser (2006, 2009) uses a five-fold periodisation, and Riddell (2007) a different four-fold division.

^{vii} It is important to remember in this context that African states have often refused the terms on offer, or reneged on them afterwards. The nature of bargaining, how successful African states have been in gaining concessions from donors and how ready donors have been to refuse aid varies considerably as Whitfield's recent study ably demonstrates (Whitfield 2009).

^{viii} See for example Wangwe's account of Tanzania's IMF deal in 1985. Outright denunciation of the IMF by Nyrere was superseded by a policy debate among government insiders, academics and wider society of the different options open to Tanzania (Wangwe 2004). As Wangwe shows, the constrained choice ended with acceptance of the IMF's conditions.

^{ix} As Mosley, Harrigan and Toye note it was most useful against the weakest states, not necessarily those states which were most in need of policy reform (1991: 41).

^x In this Harrison is somewhat nearer the mark than those he is criticising (Williams 1996; 1999; Williams and Young 1994; Young 1994), notwithstanding the usefulness of the idea of a 'liberal project' Williams and Young identified.