

Editorial

It has been an enormously rewarding experience to edit *The Journal of Modern African Studies* for the past fifteen years, and I hand over to Paul Nugent and Leo Villalón with a great sense of gratitude for the opportunities that it has given me, both to promote interesting and important research on Africa, and to maintain contacts with fellow Africanists in the continent and across the world. In doing so, my first concern has been to remain loyal to the conviction with which our first editor, David Kimble, founded the journal and edited it for the first thirty-five years of its existence: that Africa could only benefit from the application of scholarship to the complex and often controversial challenges that faced it at the time of independence when *JMAS* was founded, and continue to face it through to the present day; and that there was therefore a very important place for a journal that sought to make such scholarship available, not only to academics but to participants, policy-makers, and interested observers throughout the world, in a broad-ranging and accessible way. The research that I have sought to encourage has not always been dispassionate – it is very difficult to be dispassionate about Africa, and questionable whether one can or even should be – but I have tried to ensure that it steered clear of overt polemic, while helping readers to understand issues affecting the continent, beyond the particular cases that it addresses.

The Journal of Modern African Studies has the rare status of not being the publication of any organisation, or committed to any particular viewpoint, and this gives its editor an exceptional freedom to determine where to place its emphasis. I have chosen to select – from the very large number of interesting papers coming in from prospective contributors – those that derived from original research, and especially from extensive fieldwork within the continent itself. This has obliged me to turn down, often with great regret, general overviews and surveys drawn from secondary material, as well as essentially conceptual analyses, but has – I hope – illuminated the discussion of current issues with the insights that only immersion in the day-to-day realities of life in Africa can provide. The journal has never sought to commission papers on particular topics, but has depended instead on whatever research its contributors have wished to send in. This has enabled it to reflect

changes in fashion or interest in the ways in which scholars have chosen to look at Africa, as well as changes in actual developments – it has been a pleasure, for example, to publish studies of elections, in response to growing democratic practice in the continent. At the same time, I remain puzzled by important issues that have somehow failed to attract the attention of researchers: while the activities of the large diaspora outside Africa are beyond the scope of the journal, for instance, I am disappointed by never having received a single prospective article on their impact back in their countries of origin.

My first debt of gratitude is to all those scholars who have sent in papers for consideration by the journal, including not only those whose work it has published, but also the very large number whom I have had to turn down. Given the massive discrepancy between the number of papers submitted, and the number that space allows to be published, much of an editor's job consists in writing regretful letters of rejection, and I have been struck by the way in which the vast majority of unsuccessful authors have responded to disappointment. My second debt, and it is a massive one, is to all the journal's referees. Their contributions have had an enormous impact, not simply on deciding which papers should be published, but in making extremely helpful suggestions for strengthening the original drafts sent in by authors. Given that referees are anonymous, and gain no personal benefit from their invariably conscientious and constructive comments, their efforts reflect very positively indeed, not only on themselves, but on the existence throughout the world of an academic community of Africanists, brought together by their common concern for the welfare of the continent, and the work of those who study it. It has been a joy to work with them.

Finally, *The Journal of Modern African Studies* depends on the unstinting support offered by Cambridge University Press, which has provided unrivalled editorial back-up, without at any time seeking to influence the content or general direction of the journal. My counterpart at the Press, Kathy Stanford, has stayed with me throughout the fifteen years at the journal, and to her and all her colleagues I can only offer my profound thanks.

Christopher Clapham,
Centre of African Studies, Cambridge University.

December 2012