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Special Issue on
Exploring African Potentials: The Dynamics of Action, Living Strategy,
and Social Order in Southern Africa

Edited by Akira Takada, Isaac K. Nyamongo and Koki Teshirogi

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**Exploring African Potentials:
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Foreword

Changes happening in the Southern African region from the end of the 1980s remind me of a 'reverse domino theory'. The domino theory, proclaimed before the Vietnam War, warned of a menacing communist expansion towards South East Asia. Following the 1989 breakdown of the Berlin Wall, events in Southern Africa appear to follow a chain reaction resembling the process assumed in the domino theory, although in the opposite political direction.

The Berlin Wall's breakdown signaled the beginning of drastic economic and political change in Southern Africa. The end of bilateral confrontation opened the way for an extension of capitalism, encouraging neo-liberal politicians to push political democratization upon African nations. These countries, which had previously received Communist support, were exposed to the zealous and triumphal Western neo-liberal movement. This movement urged African nations to move towards market liberalization, economic deregulation and political democratization.

The neo-liberal globalization movement has flooded Africa with tidal waves of change since the 1980s. Structural Adjustment Programs represent the first wave of economic reform. This was rapidly followed by political democratization, such as the introduction of multi-party systems and the abolition of apartheid in the Republic of South Africa. Concurrently, economic systems transformed and political regimes evolved and changed.

South Africa's democratization, apartheid's repeal and Nelson Mandela's release, changed this country's relations with other Southern African nations. The South African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), an anti-South African economic and political alliance, transformed in 1992 into the South African Development Community (SADC), which South Africa immediately joined.

Global shifts in politics have brought substantial economic change to Southern Africa. Trade between South Africa and the former SADCC countries has soared. Prior to 1991, there was little trade between South Africa and the former SADCC countries, yet by the late 1990s, South Africa had become these nations' most important trading partner. South African goods account for more than 90% of Angola's and the Democratic Republic of the Congo's imports, more than 75% of Mozambique's, Tanzania's and Zambia's imports, and more than 70% of Malawi's imports.

South Africa's economy, the strongest in the region, faces competition from developed economies and the rising

economies of China and India. The removal of trade barriers in Southern Africa means South Africa's economy is now globally exposed. South Africa's economic liberalization has had two key impacts: a number of top-ranking companies have transferred head offices out of the country, and during the late 1990s, several industries experienced severe economic depression. Increasing unemployment and inflows of migrant workers from surrounding countries have provoked xenophobia. South Africa now faces a dilemma regarding her international standing; she is expected to be a representative of Africa, while she still wants to be recognized as a newly developed economy.

Market liberalization was surprisingly quick for other SADC countries and was characterized by rapid inflows of goods and capital. South Africa dominated the goods trade while China, India and other Western countries increased their investments in SADC nations. Deregulation and an upsurge in mineral prices facilitated increasing investment. The agricultural sectors of SADC countries also received some investment. This may assist the development agricultural production, but some alarm has been raised about future land issues in a number of areas.

The changes caused by economic globalization and political democratization since 1990 reflect 'waves of impact' across different countries. We need to be careful asserting that international political and economic changes are the only factors characterizing the dynamic socio-political change in Southern Africa. Each wave of change reflects different geo-political settings. It is superficial to explain the impact of international economic and political change on the region within the context of the dependence paradigm. I think the Southern African region provides us with a good example of core-periphery relations. This suggests connections between leading capitalist and African countries should be recomposed and understood within their local settings, which form multilayered structures. We need to examine how the initial impact of globalization is localized, or 'distorted' by South Africa, the regional economic giant. This exploration should be pursued in other countries and in smaller scale local settings. Finally, we should consider the repercussions of the 'waves of impact' across smaller and larger environments. Of utmost importance is the unraveling of the tangled web of relations and associated impacts at regional, national and local levels.

Today, events in Africa cannot be explained from just a local or international political viewpoint. We need to shift our

focus towards different perspectives. The articles in this book argue that globalization has localized impacts at different levels across Southern Africa. Some authors focus on the historical and political background essential for understanding the local impact of globalization in the region. Other articles discuss people's reactions to globalization at a local and micro-level. Using primary data collected in the field, these studies show us, vividly, the diverse features of social and economic change at local levels. To fully assess and understand the impact of globalization on the daily lives of people, primary field studies are indispensable. From this point of view, I offer my congratulations on this special issue.

Many of the authors are, or have been, students of the Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, at Kyoto University in Japan. This Graduate School was founded in 1998. Beginning in the 1950s, Kyoto University has a long history of African area studies. The Centre for African Area Studies, founded in 1986, became the foundation for the Graduate School. Kyoto University's African area studies have a positive approach based upon extensive fieldwork requiring persistent effort. I think the papers in this issue are an excellent example of this approach.

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