Editorial

Dear readers,

We are very pleased to present to you this new issue of *Afrika Focus*, issue 34: 1. This is, without any doubts, a historical issue.

The story of *Afrika Focus* started back in 1972, with the publication of the *News Bulletin of the Africa Association of Ghent University* (*Nieuwsbulletin van de Afrika-Vereniging van de Rijksuniversiteit Gent*), which was succeeded by the *AVRUG Bulletin* in 1978. The name *AVRUG Bulletin* was replaced with *Afrika Focus* in 1985 and from then onwards *Afrika Focus* was published by the association Afrika Brug, consisting of Ghent University academics, but also scholars from other Belgian universities and non-academics with an affiliation with the university and an interest in Africa. From January 2008 onwards the Africa Platform of Ghent University Association (GAP) co-published *Afrika Focus*, together with Afrika Brug.

In the course of these years, the editing and publishing of *Afrika Focus* was mostly in the hands of volunteers. The journal did professionalise gradually, though, by redesigning its lay-out in June 2008; by becoming one of the first Ghent University open access journals in December 2008; by starting to collaborate with the University Library, as a result of which the journal was integrated into the Open Journal Systems platform in 2015. The language policy also changed, abandoning Dutch and embracing English and French as the sole languages of publication.

Sustaining an academic journal became more and more difficult, though, despite the huge investment from people like Dominique Godfroid, Filip Erkens, Johan De Smedt, Patrick Van Damme, Karel Arnaut, Marga Peters, David Chan, Paul Bastijns ... to name but a few. *Afrika Focus* did survive, but from 2019 onwards it became clear that (a) the workload had increased to such an extent that we would need to find an academic publisher if we wanted to continue publishing the journal; (b) we needed professional support to

develop a branding strategy; and (c) the fact that *Afrika Focus* was a journal on Africa, but without including Africans and without a solid link with the African continent, had become very problematic.

We considered the possibilities, and *Afrika Focus* underwent yet another transformation. The issue you are witnessing today is the first one published by the renowned academic publishing house Brill Publishers, with whom we signed a contract in the second half of 2020. Professionalism and increased international visibility will therefore be guaranteed for many more years. The Africa Platform of Ghent University Association still has editorial responsibility, but from this year onwards in close collaboration with colleagues from the University of the Western Cape in South Africa (UWC). *Afrika Focus*'s Editorial and Advisory Boards have been reassembled and four chief editors (two from Ghent University and two from UWC) will drive and coordinate the editorial process. The main aim of *Afrika Focus* is still to offer a unique, high-quality and multilingual publication channel to (emerging) scholars, by promoting critical and worldly debates with Africa at the centre.

As coordinator of the Africa Platform of Ghent University Association I have been closely involved with the publication of *Afrika Focus* since 2007 and my dominant feeling today is one of pride. I am delighted that we have managed to overcome various obstacles over the last couple of years, that we have persevered, and that *Afrika Focus* now truly is a journal on Africa, from Africa and with Africans. I am also very excited about the partnership with the University of the Western Cape – not only because UWC is one of Ghent University's strategic institutional partners, but also because this collaboration with committed South African academics will undoubtedly change the vision of the journal.

I am proud today because this transition to Brill is a new milestone for *Afrika Focus*; I am proud to assure you that our entire 1985–2020 online archive can be consulted freely at <https://ojs.ugent.be/AF> or brill.com/view/journals/afoc/afoc-overview.xml; and I am proud to present this new issue to you with six scholarly articles and three reports. Faithful to the multidisciplinary and multilingual nature of *Afrika Focus*, this issue includes one French and five English articles, with contributions from academic domains as diverse as reproductive health, law, agriculture, political sciences, education and business. The articles are based on original research and deal with current developments in different parts of Africa: why Senegal is not considered a consolidated democracy, in comparison with other (Western) nations; how to explain the effectiveness of certain West African agricultural programmes in addressing the challenges faced by smallholder farmers; how to assess the use of traditional birth services in Nigeria and Ghana; in what ways small-scale financial services for the

poor in Tanzania can be sustainable; how to legally interpret the attempt of Mauritius to gain sovereignty over the Chagos Islands; and how learning techniques are acquired and skills co-constructed in non-formal learning settings in Kinshasa. All of the reports in this issue are summaries of PhDs on Africa defended at Ghent University. Our aspiration for the future is to also include articles in any of the African languages and to keep publishing a variety of reports where young scholars present fieldwork, visits to conferences and their PhD research.

Publishing an academic journal is very demanding, in particular since *Afrika Focus* has committed itself to assisting authors in their publication process – not only by offering them a publication channel, but also by giving concrete and personalised advice on how to improve their writing. We try to be accessible as a high-quality academic journal, being very conscious of how determining publications have become for any scholar's academic career.

We hope you will enjoy this new edition of *Afrika Focus*, and please feel free to join the *Afrika Focus* community by promoting the journal, referring to its articles and sharing our feelings of joy.

Annelies Verdoolaege
Chief editor