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Foreword

I'm pleased to introduce *Development as a Battlefield*: an innovative exploration of the multidimensional meanings of—and interactions between—conflict and development. The two phenomena are all too often regarded as ostensibly antagonistic. This was exemplified again in the context of the Arab Spring that erupted in December 2010 and was eventually short-lived in several countries of the Middle-East and North-Africa (MENA) region. This volume—the 8th thematic issue of *International Development Policy*—is an invitation to reconsider and renew the way social scientists usually seek to make sense of socio-political and economic developments in the MENA region and beyond.

To achieve this, the guest editors bring together a set of contributions that collectively bridge anthropology, history, political sociology and political economy. The volume draws on the expertise of a dozen authors who present and discuss research carried out in countries spanning a region strictly larger than 'MENA': it includes a geographical area ranging from Afghanistan in the East to Morocco in the West, and from Turkey in the North to Sudan in the South. The multiplicity of this volume's compilation also mirrors a central premise of *International Development Policy*, which is to address critical issue domains from interdisciplinary, multi-level angles to account for the complexity of the social dynamics at work. I wish to commend the guest editors, Béatrice Hibou and Irene Bono, for bringing together such a wealth of perspectives by inviting selected scholars—all of them women—who share a deep understanding of past-present, local-global interactions that infuse power relations. Many of the authors originate from the region under study.

Overall, this special issue makes a convincing case for reconsidering widely-held assumptions about past and ongoing conflicts as well as development trajectories in 'MENA countries' and neighbouring Sudan and Afghanistan. Through an in-depth examination of the evolving social reality anchored in specific institutional and historic circumstances, the authors demonstrate the need to stay clear of homogeneous approaches that neglect the pluralistic socio-political landscapes of a region too easily subsumed under one group referred to as the Arab or MENA countries. The contributions in this volume challenge the widely-shared belief that these countries represent an exception in the developing world, a supposed space of 'ungovernability' characterised by 'extraneous' states ruling over an undisciplined population that inevitably leads to submission-revolt cycles. The chapters further challenge the assumption that Islam, or a deep sense of clan or ethnic identity, act as an obstacle to development, due to beliefs and values that prevent the advent of

a techno-rational order associated with modernity. Violence associated with power asymmetries is part and parcel of political relations and could be considered analytically relevant from a development viewpoint, rather than a defining characteristic of a homogenous cultural and geopolitical 'MENA region'.

That said, the authors acknowledge that development shortfalls may partly account for the uprisings and conflicts witnessed in the countries under review. However, they question the idea of an inverse linear relationship between development and conflict. The notion of development itself, often defined as a process of profound social transformation, is contested and understood differently depending on the scale of analysis, discipline and prevailing narratives. In their introductory chapter, Irene Bono and Béatrice Hibou note that development appears not only as a practice and central paradigm in international relations, but also as a narrative and an ideology embedded in power relations. They define development as 'a set of complex social relations and a balance of power oscillating constantly between consensus and conflict'.

This compilation of chapters offers novel insights on regional, national and local dynamics involving developmental concerns such as justice, equity, governmentality and citizens' role in society. Through an in-depth examination of development cycles linked to defining historic events and by distinguishing between incremental change and disruption, the authors factor in local and global dynamics to analyse the conflicts and tensions associated with globalisation. Their insights are pertinent from both an academic and policy viewpoint. These insights on the conflict-development nexus will be of interest for all those who care about a region whose fate matters a great deal not only for the people who live there, but for all of us.

The guest editors have led this ambitious project to successful fruition, resulting in a compelling collection of articles under the title of *Development as a Battlefield*. A workshop, organized on 7–8 September 2015 in Geneva, brought together all the authors and selected experts to review each draft paper and make suggestions for improvements. I join the guest editors in thanking Jean-François Bayart, Yvan Droz and Didier Péclard for insightful remarks and suggestions at this workshop. My thanks go also to the authors, who revised their articles in two successive rounds: first after the Geneva workshop and then in response to the remarks raised by an anonymous reviewer who carefully examined the draft volume as a whole and raised critical comments on individual contributions. I wish to extend our gratitude to the anonymous reviewer. Marie Thorndahl initiated this special issue as former managing editor of our journal. Frances Rice took over by end-2015, and was supported by Emmanuel Dalle Mulle and several other colleagues. My thanks go to all of them for their efficient editorial support.

This volume is an invitation to ‘think again’. It is indeed high time to reconsider the development-conflict nexus in a region whose population has been facing violence and insecurity for many decades and whose fate will determine global security, migration, development and humanitarian agendas in the years to come. This special issue makes the convincing case of dismissing sweeping statements and simple policy recipes. It calls for localising or grounding interventions in specific polities where the driving force lies above all in the citizenry—youth, women and men who wish to improve livelihoods and have a say in their own development trajectories.

Gilles Carbonnier
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