

Oiling the Wheels of Imperialism

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It is instructive, but not surprising, that more and more issues of the journal contain imperialism in the title. The theme of this issue is the interaction between what we might term material imperialism – the securing of resources – and cultural imperialism in which insidious disciplinary practices are levered in to Africa under the guise of ‘philanthropy’, which amount to little more than the ‘social engineering’ of a continent, its institutions and peoples. The latter have become the leitmotif of 2005 as western leaders and celebrities scramble to express their commitment to ‘saving’ Africa. However, the journal has never treated imperialism as a *deus ex machina*, but a complex process in which African political elites use state structures as a means of perpetuating power and control. All these themes come to bear on the articles gathered here.

In their analysis of empire Hardt and Negri conjured up a networked form of empire in which corporations and multilateral organisations organise capitalist exploitation on a global scale. Where their analysis was so fundamentally flawed was in downplaying the role of states in managing these structures of control. As such their analysis is in danger of obscuring the glaring realities of modern imperialism. Such matters are laid bare in Barnes’s contribution, previously published in the *African Studies Review*, where she distinguishes between resource imperialism and the forms of philanthropy used to legitimise this form of empire. In the latter regard she anticipates Jacoby’s article in seeing militarisation as a means of controlling access to resources rather than its publicly stated aim of protecting human rights and democracy under the spurious ‘war on terror’; something we come back to in the next issue.

In terms of resources Barnes focuses on oil and how security is framed in terms of anti-terrorism, but is largely about control of sea-lanes and military bases. Chris Alden shows that China’s interests in Africa are not that dissimilar. As China rapidly takes a major role in the global political economy, Africa serves as a key provider of resources and a site for industrial investment, as well as political arena in which to exercise diplomatic muscle. This goes against the earlier rhetoric of anti-imperialist solidarity that China espoused, although its current interests are couched in terms of beneficial ‘partnerships’. But China assumes even greater importance for development in Africa than these dimensions of bilateral links that Alden explores. Its massive role as supplier of manufactured goods to the West means that it stands in the way of any African initiatives to develop export-oriented industrial production, even if the developed countries did open up trade. Kyle picks up on the resource issue, but argues that the impact of their exploitation on the space economy of Angola must be situated in longer-term patterns. Although debates around the so-called Dutch Disease are useful, it is unhelpful to see the discovery and exploitation of minerals as somehow working from a clean slate. As he shows, the impacts are conditioned by and reinforce existing patterns of inequality. At the international scale Goodison examines European Union trade negotiations and

whether the current round offers the possibility for incremental change in Africa's favour.

As Jacoby argues, underlying these actions is an ideology of delinquency and discipline. Africa's underdevelopment has for long been blamed on local culture and the lack of 'proper' values. Such discourses designed to let imperialism off the hook have reared their ugly head again in various guises, which Jacoby lays bare. With a reductionist 'clash of civilizations' logic, all those regions and peoples beyond the pale can either be threatened with violence or controlled through means which generally fall below the radar. Where force fails or is deemed unwise, the imperialists deploy a range of Trojan horses to transform societies and political structures. Of growing importance are humanitarian interventions in the form of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), which Barnes shows can be tied to significant funding through 'corporate social responsibility' arrangements, on top of more conventional support for coercive elites. Timamy reveals how corruption can be analysed and focuses on budgets, which will be a key site for spoils politics as donors move towards direct budget support.

From this spurious ideology of security we see other forms of recolonization, which in different ways, seek to discipline society and produce liberal subjects. Buur's discussion of the blurred line between community self-government and vigilantism in South Africa contrasts with Mugabe's ongoing blitzkrieg on Harare's poorer citizens and the conspicuous silence of African leaders, pace the peer review process of the African Union. Buur's study of 'participatory' policing demonstrates how evocations of 'the people' are translated into practice, which can be reactionary or more progressive. Moore's thought provoking review of Stephen Chan's book *Citizen of Africa: Conversations with Morgan Tsvangirai*, draws attention to the complexity of the democratic struggles in Africa and in the case of Zimbabwe, the futility of the 'peoples' power, which had been so powerful in the Philippines and the Ukraine. Moore draws attention to the complexity and accommodation, which imperialist powers are now prepared achieve with African despots in the war against terrorism, post 9/11. Moore warns that the pariah Mugabe, may still have a more useful role to play in the war against terrorism, which might render Morgan Tsvangirai the sacrificial lamb.

After all this doom and gloom we are left asking what can the left do? For Barnes, writing from the United States, the worrying thing is that the scramble for resources and the architecture of control that accompanies it is rarely reported. The critical media has wholeheartedly failed to expose these covert operations so it is up to other intellectuals to break this silence since any complicity in this silence further legitimises these acts. Another route is revealed in Saul's analysis of Eduardo Mondlane's legacy. He shows how Mondlane struggled with a socialist ideal and the realities of organisations on the ground. At one level the Mozambican socialist project was hampered by regional and geopolitical interests, but he also reveals a very candid admission of the failings of the state in the post-independent period. The challenge is to build political organisations that encompass the most exploited in ways that transform the formal democratic structures being established as part of the new imperialist philanthropy.