New Political Economy
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cnpe20

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Published online: 21 May 2012.

To cite this article: Alison J. Ayers (2013): Beyond Myths, Lies and Stereotypes: The Political Economy of a 'New Scramble for Africa', New Political Economy, 18:2, 227-257

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2012.678821

New Political Economy, 2013
Vol. 18, No. 2, 227–257, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2012.678821

Beyond Myths, Lies and Stereotypes: The Political Economy of a 'New Scramble for Africa'

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Commentators across the political spectrum have increasingly drawn attention to a 'new scramble for Africa'. This 'new scramble' marks the latest chapter of imperialist engagement, with not only Western states and corporations but also those of 'emerging economies' seeking to consolidate their access to African resources and markets. The 'new scramble for Africa' involves therefore significant transformations related to shifts in global politico-economic power. However, as this article elaborates, much of the burgeoning literature on the 'new scramble for Africa' is premised upon problematic substantive, theoretical and ontological claims and debates. In particular, the article seeks to challenge two commonplace and related narratives. Firstly, the highly questionable representations of the scale and perceived threat of emerging powers' (particularly China's) involvement in Africa, in contrast to the silences, hypocrisy and paternalistic representation of the historical role of the West. Second, and relatedly, debate and analysis are framed predominantly within an ahistoric statist framework of analysis, particularly that of inter-state rivalry between China and other 'emerging' states vs. Western powers. Absent or neglected in such accounts are profound changes in the global political economy within which the 'new scramble for Africa' is to be more adequately located.

Keywords: Africa, scramble, China, BRICs, imperialism, neoliberalism

Commentators across the political spectrum have increasingly drawn attention to a 'new scramble for Africa'. This 'new scramble' marks the latest chapter of imperialist engagement, with not only Western states and corporations but also those of 'emerging economies' (such as China, Russia, Brazil, India and Malaysia) seeking to consolidate their access to African resources and markets. The 'new scramble for Africa' involves therefore significant politico-economic transformations related to shifts in global politico-economic power. Accordingly, a burgeoning

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literature has emerged to make sense of the current historical conjuncture. Indeed, as Roger Southall and Henning Melber argue, 'something big is happening' in contemporary Africa and 'there is an urgent need for us as analysts to seek to understand it' (2009: xxiv).

However, as this article elaborates, much of the burgeoning literature on the 'new scramble for Africa' is premised upon problematic substantive, theoretical and ontological claims and debates. In particular, the article seeks to challenge two commonplace and related narratives. Firstly, the highly questionable representations of the scale and perceived threat of emerging powers' (particularly China's) involvement in Africa, in contrast to the silences, hypocrisy and paternalistic representation of the historical role of the West. As such, the West's relations with Africa are construed as essentially beneficent, in contrast to the putatively opportunistic, exploitative and deleterious role of the emerging powers, thereby obfuscating the West's ongoing neocolonial relationship with Africa.

Second, and relatedly, debate and analysis are framed predominantly within an ahistoric statist framework of analysis, particularly that of inter-state rivalry between China and other 'emerging' states vs. Western powers. Absent or neglected in such accounts are profound changes in the global political economy within which the 'new scramble for Africa' is to be more adequately located. Without contextualising the rise of China (and other emerging states) in the neoliberal capitalist global order, 'it is too easy to single out the country without addressing the structural and institutional forces that are driving not only China, but also other emerging powers, to look with covetous eyes at Africa's natural resources and markets' (Luk 2008: 13). This article interjects in such debates through critique of these two commonplace but highly problematic narratives. In so doing, it seeks to contribute to a more adequate analysis of politico-economic transformations in the twenty-first world order, and Africa's place within it.

Yellow peril, dark continent, white man's burden

Much of the discussion and debate around the 'new scramble for Africa' focuses on China's engagement with Africa. Such accounts are characteristic of a wider discourse on the rise of China internationally and the so-called 'China threat' evident in policy-making, social science and mass public discourse (Gertz 2000; Yee and Storey 2002; Bernstein and Munro 1997; Mosher 2000; Mearsheimer 2006; Naím 2007; Curtis 2008). Such representations give 'the impression that the African continent, and much of the rest of the world, is in the process of being "devoured" by China', with descriptors such as 'voracious', 'ravenous' and 'insatiable appetite for natural resources' used to characterise China's new role (Guerrero and Manji 2008: 1; Mohan and Power 2008).

Within the academic literature Robert Rotberg argues, for example, that China is 'opportunistic', 'extractive and exploitive.' 'China's very rapaciousness – its seeming insatiable demand for liquid forms of energy, and for the raw materials that feed its widening industrial maw – responds to sub-Saharan Africa's relatively abundant supplies of unprocessed metals, diamonds, and gold' (Rotberg 2008: viii–ix). Similarly, Peter Navarro, in *The Coming China Wars*, illuminates the so-called dark sides of China's leap into 'globalisation', including China's 'amoral' involvement in Africa, arguing that 'China's tentacles reach throughout Africa' in its quest to access oil and other natural resources. China's Africa strategy, he concludes 'is a threat that will colonise and economically enslave the vast majority of the continent's population that lives outside the elite circles. It is an imperialist marriage manufactured in China and made in hell' (Navarro 2007: 100).

Similar concerns are echoed in Western foreign policy positions, particularly within the United States. The Council on Foreign Relations Report, *More Than Humanitarianism: A Strategic US Approach Toward Africa*, for example, highlights the threat of China on the continent (CFR 2006). Similarly, US Congress officials have voiced concerns 'that the Chinese intend to aid and abet African dictators, gain a stronghold on precious African natural resources, and undo much of the progress that has been made on democracy and governance in the last 15 years in African nations' (Rep. Christopher Smith, quoted in Naidu and Davies 2006: 69). Meanwhile, sensationalistic and Sinophobic accounts in the Western media routinely invoke the specter of Chinese expansion, including Chinese rapacity in Africa (Brown and Sriram 2008). Reviewing the UK print media, Emma Mawdsley reveals that such accounts consistently depict China as 'ruthless', 'unscrupulous', 'amoral, greedy and coldly indifferent' (Mawdsley 2008: 517, 523). While French journalists Serge Michel and Michel Beuret in *China Safari: On the Trail of Beijing's Expansion in Africa*, liken Beijing's role to that of the Godfather: 'Borrow from the Chinese and you are drawn into the bosom of its – highly profitable – family. Beijing is the Godfather, engaged in everything from textiles to infrastructure to uranium and oil. His bids are all interlinked and his motivation is constant' (Michel and Beuret 2009: 108).

By contrast, the operations of Western capital with the same ends are notably absent from such accounts (Mawdsley 2008; Melber 2009), or are 'described with anodyne phrases such as "development", "investment", "employment generation"' (Guerrero and Manji 2008: 1). As such, commonplace accounts claim that Western powers have developed a new 'vision of foreign partnership with Africa' based on 'a shared agenda for change' with the West undertaking 'ameliorative initiatives' across Africa (Alden 2007: 93–94; Rotberg 2008: 18). Both the silences on the role of the West, together with the ahistoric distortions and flawed understanding of the West's ongoing neocolonial relationship with Africa characteristic of such approaches, are highly problematic. Not least, as Kwesi Kwaa Prah (2007) has argued, it is hypocritical of Western states to raise concerns about China's role in Africa, given their long history of exploitative relations with Africa, which continue to the present day. Yet Western powers continue to arrogate to themselves the project of 'spreading "enlightenment" and culture to barbarous natives ... [whilst] seeking to convince us about how bad and evil rapacious Chinese "mercantilists" are for Africa', all the while 'continuing to rampage through Africa in search of markets to conquer and "mad mullahs" to vanquish' (Adebajo 2008: 227). As such, it is necessary

> to shatter the 'Orientalist' myth that often describes China's role as that of a 'yellow peril' seeking to monopolise markets, coddle caudillos and condone human rights' abuses on the continent; while Western powers ... are portrayed in contrast almost as knights in

> shining armour, seeking to assist Africa's economic recovery, spread democracy and contribute to conflict-management efforts (Adebajo 2008: 227)

The engagement of China and that of other so-called 'emerging states' with Africa has undoubtedly undergone significant changes, particularly over the last decade, with notable consequences within and beyond Africa. However, a fuller and more nuanced understanding is required if we are to understand contemporary shifts in the centres of politico-economic power within the twenty-first-century world-order, and Africa's place within it. This necessarily includes analysis of the contemporary history of Western imperialism on the continent and the continuing dominance of Western capital, albeit recognising that a significant spatial reorganisation of global capitalism is occurring with the rise of the BRICs and other 'emerging' states. This spatial reorganisation of global capitalism and its implications for and beyond Africa are addressed in the subsequent section. This section interrogates commonplace Western claims regarding the scale and threat of China and other emerging powers in Africa, and, relatedly, subjects the ongoing role of the West in Africa to critical scrutiny.

The 'China threat'?

As has been well documented, China's role in Africa is complex and multifaceted. However, the principal modes of intervention are through foreign direct investment, finance/aid, and trade. In each of these sectors, China's engagement is surpassed by that of Western states (Guerrero and Manji 2008). In terms of global FDI outflows, Western economies continued to account for three-quarters of FDI in 2009, compared with only one-fifth from 'developing' economies (UNCTAD 2010: 31). With regards the latter, TNCs from developing economies have increasingly been investing in Africa, yet accounted for only 21 per cent of flows to the region over the 2005–2008 period, up from 18 per cent in 1995–1999. Excluding South Africa, investors from China, Malaysia, India, Taiwan, Korea, Chile, Turkey, Brazil and the Gulf Cooperation Council are among the most active 'developing economy' investors, although Africa still makes up only a fraction of their FDI (UNCTAD 2010). Conventional accounts of the 'China threat' habitually neglect the role and extent of these other 'emerging' powers' interaction with Africa, thereby heightening fears about China as a singular ('rogue') actor and specific threat in Africa (Mawdsley and McCann 2011; see also Cheru and Obi 2010).[1] Whilst 'China takes centre stage … other emerging partners together make up a larger share of many of the dealings' (AfDB *et al.* 2011: 93).

As the largest of these investors (excluding South Africa), China's FDI stock in Africa reached \$7.8 billion by the end of 2008 (accounting for 4 per cent of Chinese outward FDI stock), up from \$1.3 billion in 2005 (UNCTAD 2010; Broadman 2008). But, as the UNDP (2007) has highlighted, Asian investment in Africa was dwarfed by FDI stock of the UK (\$30 billion), the US (\$19 billion), and France (\$11.5 billion) (2003 figures). Thus, while 'TNCs from developing economies are making a rapid entry into Africa' and their presence has become 'increasingly significant', Western TNCs still account for the overwhelming stock and flows of FDI on the continent (UNCTAD 2010: 34; Broadman 2008; AfDB *et al.* 2011). In the case of both Western and 'non-Western' countries, outward FDI in Africa remains highly concentrated in a very limited number of countries and sectors.[2] Specifically, between 2000 and 2010, approximately 75 per cent of FDI went to oil-exporting countries. But for 'FDI from OECD-countries this ratio is even higher, at 85 per cent. By implication, FDI from emerging partners is actually less concentrated in oil-exporting countries than that of traditional partners' (AfDB *et al.* 2011: 100).

Similarly, world trade remains dominated by commerce among Western powers and between these powers and the countries of the South, whilst total South-South trade accounts for only 11 per cent of global trade (Broadman 2008). The latter is increasing and since 2000 there has been a significant increase in trade between Africa and Asia, such that Asia now accounts for 27 per cent of Africa's exports, an amount almost equivalent to the EU and US shares of Africa's exports, at 32 and 29 per cent respectively. China accounts for 40 per cent of Africa's exports to Asia, but 'the volume of sub-Saharan exports going to China accounts for only 10 per cent of the continent's total exports worldwide ... a far smaller level of exports than generally believed' (Broadman 2008: 96–7). African imports from Asia are also increasing, albeit less rapidly, yet Africa imports only one-third of its total imports from Asia (Broadman 2007). Thus, 'Africa's trade with traditional partners remains crucial ... at close to 62 per cent' (AfDB *et al.* 2011: 100).

Finally, in terms of financial 'aid', rumours of a huge new China foreign aid program have abounded in the West, and concerns about China's role as a donor have gained prominence within Western agencies and the international financial institutions. Indeed, as Deborah Brautigam has detailed, the hype about Chinese aid in Africa has been intense, with considerable confusion and distortion surrounding reported data. Much of China's economic cooperation which does not constitute official development assistance (ODA) has been repeatedly conflated with 'aid' to generate an inflated figure, whilst simultaneously being deployed to criticise the Chinese for not conforming to OECD 'aid' standards (Brautigam 2009: 164–73). It is also important to be mindful that: 'Just like Western powers, China has used aid strategically to support its commercial and investment interventions in Africa' such that its program of financial investments is 'not dissimilar' to the agreements that Africa has with Europe, the US and other Western economies (Guerrero and Manji 2008: 3). Moreover, in comparison to the size of the official development assistance programs of the West, the evidence available suggests that the magnitude of development finance going to Africa from China 'is still far lower than that from the OECD' (Brautigam 2008: 210). China's annual budget for foreign 'aid' has increased rapidly over the past decade, from approximately $450 million per annum to an estimated $1.4 billion in 2007. Yet in 2005 alone, OECD states committed $30.7 billion in grants to Africa, while public and private bilateral loan commitments from OECD states totalled $11.8 billion (Brautigam 2008)

The empirical evidence suggests therefore, that the needs of China's rapidly developing capitalism are similar to those of its Western counterparts, but the scale of its intervention in Africa remains relatively small, as yet, in comparison to that of the countries of Europe and North America (Guerrero and Manji 2008). Whilst the pace of China's intervention is increasing rapidly, most African countries are still tied politically, economically and culturally more closely to the West than China (Adebajo 2006). As such, commonplace Western Orientalist representations of the rapacity and alleged threat of China and other 'emerging' states in Africa misrepresent the historical record. Indeed, Garth Le Pere (2008) argues that perception of the 'China threat' is 'largely a product of Western-inspired hypocrisy and arrogance' that 'borders on dangerous sophistry.' This raises fundamental questions regarding the purpose of such (mis)representations and prompts further interrogation of the West's neocolonial engagement with Africa.

'(White) knights in shining armour'?

Central to the self-representation of the West in Africa is the claim that its role is essentially altruistic or beneficent, in contrast to the purportedly opportunistic, exploitative and deleterious role of the emerging powers, particularly China. Chris Alden for example, distinguishes between two competing 'visions of foreign partnership with Africa.' China, he argues, 'has entered Africa simply to feed the insatiable hunger of its own infant market economy [but] has little interest in Africa's internal problems or politics.' By contrast, the West has 'a desire to reshape African societies' (Alden 2007: 93). According to this latter vision of foreign partnership, 'there has been a resurgence of the impulse to transform Africa' accompanied by the emergence of 'a new generation of African leaders, influenced by liberal ideas of the power of the market and the importance of democracy.' As such, 'a shared agenda for change' is said to have developed among the West/G8 and Africa's top political and economic states, led by South Africa (Alden 2007: 94). This vision remains premised upon the longstanding imperial assumption that 'Africa's state of perpetual crisis' provides 'little prospect for improvement' without 'substantial intervention ... from the world's leading economies' (Alden 2007: 95).

The Western vision, embodied in initiatives such as the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), continues to herald neoliberal market-led approaches and associated notions of 'good governance', transparency, and so on, as solutions to 'the shortcomings of Africa's unaccountable leadership, persistent corruption and conflict' (Alden 2007: 96; Taylor 2006). The role of China, and an emergent 'Beijing Consensus' predicated on 'non-interference' in domestic affairs, is claimed to be undermining this politico-economic neoliberal agenda (Ramo 2004). *The Economist* (2008), for example, documents a concern that 'China is coddling dictators, despoiling poor countries and undermining Western efforts to spread democracy and prosperity.' Accordingly, it highlights the fear that China's sudden prominence will reduce Western influence:

> China will befriend ostracised regimes and encourage them to defy international norms. Corruption, economic mismanagement, repression and instability will proliferate. If this baleful influence

> spreads too widely, say the critics, the 'Washington consensus' of economic liberalism and democracy will find itself in competition with a 'Beijing consensus' of state-led development and despotism. (*Economist* 2008)

Thus, the World Bank's Paul Collier contends that 'Chinese disregard for standards of governance has become a leitmotif', contra the putative 'decency' and 'socially responsible' behaviour required of major OECD corporations. The result, he argues, has been 'a race back to the bottom' (Collier 2009). Similarly, Rotberg argues that China 'implicitly or explicitly backs the harsh rule of authoritarian governments ... supports odious regimes, propping up some of them, supporting corrupt rents to many, and almost always reinforcing a regime's least participatory instincts' (2008: 11). Others voice similar concerns that 'China's foreign policy foray into Africa has been primarily centred on capturing the elites' including 'pariah regimes' such as Sudan, Zimbabwe (Alden 2007: 59). Indeed, it is claimed that Chinese foreign policy (together with that of Russia) is in the process of developing 'an informal league of dictators' that serves as a counter to Western interests (Kagan 2006). On multiple levels, such perspectives exhibit a limited understanding and highly ideological account of the role of the West in Africa. An exhaustive critique is clearly beyond the scope of this article; nonetheless, certain salient issues pertaining to (neo)liberal imperialism and the much vaunted claims of spreading 'democracy' and 'good governance' are examined below.

Significantly, such perspectives exhibit limited understanding of the Western 'impulse' to 'reshape' or 'transform' Africa, as integral to contemporary informal imperialism. For those who think constantly within the limits of (neo)liberalism, the internationalisation of neoliberal market-led approaches and associated notions of 'good governance' etcetera, may seem to be 'simply an obvious way of making sense of things – "what everybody knows"' – but liberalism belongs to a *highly* particular ideological configuration, albeit its' historical and philosophical roots and conditions have been forgotten or suppressed (Hall 1985: 35; Ayers 2008). As Margaret Canovan (1990) has argued, liberalism has never constituted an account of the world, but rather 'a project to be realised'. As such, liberalism's illicit or contrived universalism has been subjected to stringent critique (Parekh 1992). Historically, when faced with 'difference', liberal thought and practice has 'its own broad conception of the good ... which it is engaged in imposing politically, legally, socially and culturally wherever it has the power to do so' (MacIntyre 1981: 61). And, since its originary violence (not delimited by an originary temporality), liberalism as a philosophical position and ideology has been organically related to policies of slavery, colonialism, genocide, famine, racism, and so on (Bracking and Harrison 2003; Davis 2001; Losurdo 2011).

The current neoliberal politico-economic project, with its particular neoliberal conception of state, society and self, is to be understood therefore as implicated in liberalism's historical project, 'its thrust, its yearnings, its intense desire to dominate people and communities' (Young 1995: 258). This includes not only the widely-critiqued arsenal of World Bank and IMF-led neoliberal economic policies (Bush 2007; Bond 2006; Mkandawire and Soludo 2003), but also the related agenda of 'human rights', 'good governance' and 'democratisation', which have resulted in popular struggles by social and political movements being subverted by powerful (international and domestic) forces committed to neoliberal transformation (Kiely 2007; Ayers 2006, 2009; Tully 2006; Harrison 2004; Evans 2002; Williams 1999; Williams and Young 1994).

Contra the rhetoric of 'good governance', 'democracy', and so on, the history of post-Independence Africa is scarred with Western powers' contempt for and termination of autonomous democratic processes, together with support for pro-Western authoritarian regimes. Western complicity in the assassination of Patrice Lumumba in the Congo and backing of the highly autocratic Mobutu Sese Seko is a well-documented example (Kelly 1993; De Witte 2001; Zeilig 2008), but Lumumba was one of very many anti-imperial leaders to be assassinated by their erstwhile colonial masters (or their agents) and replaced by pro-Western regimes (Brittain 2011; Heller 2006; Blum 1995). Such covert actions are not historical relics of some long-past era but rather continue in the contemporary history of Africa: Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso was overthrown and assassinated in a coup led by the French-backed Blaise Compaoré in 1987 (Benson and Wa Ngũgĩ 2007). Multiple accounts testify to Western involvement in events leading up to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and the assassination of President Habyarimana of Rwanda and President Ntariyamana of Burundi (Edwards 2000; Philpot 2004, 2005; Herman and Peterson 2010). Similar concerns abound pertaining to Western support to Southern separatists in Sudan and the suspected assassination of John Garang de Mabior in 2005, effectively ending the struggle for a united, democratic New Sudan (Deng 2007; Shaoul 2011; Nazemroaya 2011).

Thus, notwithstanding US claims of a policy shift from 'containment' to spreading 'democracy', post-Cold War policy has often resembled that of the Cold War era, 'as strategic rationales were found to justify a failure to support multi-party democracy in various African countries.'

> Despite the efforts of courageous African civil society activists and democrats to replace autocratic regimes in countries such as Benin, Mali, Niger, Zambia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria, 'enlargement' of democracies was soon replaced by American support for a cantankerous warlord's gallery that Clinton … arrogantly dubbed Africa's 'new leaders': Uganda's Yoweri Museveni, Ethiopia's Meles Zenawi, Eritrea's Isais Afwerki and Rwanda's Paul Kagame. (Adebajo 2008: 233)

In addition to massive levels of assistance to these 'thinly disguised autocrats', the US and other Western powers have also provided enormous support to the authoritarian regimes of North Africa experiencing popular uprisings of the 'Arab Spring'. For example, US $2 billion of American aid annually went to the highly autocratic regime of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt.[3] Similarly, Washington disregarded the military's annulment of democratic elections in Algeria; and despite widespread and persistent violations of human rights, and its unlawful occupation of Western Sahara, has consistently supported the historically repressive regime in Morocco – the so-called 'moderate' gatekeeper of the Mediterranean. The US has also collaborated with autocratic regimes, such as those in Mauritania and Chad, as part of the American 'counter-terrorist' Pan-Sahel Initiative, and there remains deep concern that US policy towards Africa may mirror its 'anti-communist' support for autocratic regimes during the Cold War, with 'anti-terrorist' support for comparable regimes in the post-Cold War era (Adebajo 2008: 233–4; Rupiya and Southall 2009).

Similarly, France has acted like a 'pyromaniac fireman', intervening more than 30 times since 1960 as part of France's 'personalised diplomacy with African autocrats.'[4] Indeed, faced with multiple coup attempts across francophone Africa, French intervention has 'often kept despotic dinosaurs such as Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko, Togo's Gnassingbé Eyadéma and Gabon's Omar Bongo in power' (Adebajo 2008: 243–4). By 1990, popular pro-democracy movements resulted in the adoption of multi-party systems in many francophone states and President Mitterand announced a policy shift (later dubbed Paristroika), which imposed political conditionalities on aid: 'But the French applied democracy inconsistently, sanctioning sham elections in Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Gabon, Niger and Togo between 1992 and 1996, and resuming aid to fraudulent, undemocratic regimes.' Meanwhile, Paris assisted Denis Sassou-Nguesso to militarily overthrow the elected government of Pascal Lissouba in Congo-Brazzaville in 1997, provided military support 'to prop up the autocratic regimes of Chad's Idriss Deby and the Central African Republic's François Bozizé as late as 2006, and saved Deby's regime from falling again in 2008' (Adebajo 2008: 245, 251).

Such examples of the role of Western powers in Africa are not intended to diminish the significance of the role of China or that of other 'emerging' states on the continent. As detailed below, the article does not endorse the 'romanticised' accounts of South-South mutual partnerships, nor of China as a 'revisionist' power (cf. Le Pere and Shelton 2007; Campbell 2008; Beeson 2009; Strange 2011; Arrighi 2007). Under the ideological veil of 'non-interference', China is profoundly implicated within the internal politics of African states. Chinese expansion is founded on bilateral engagements through political elites, reinforcing the status quo (Bush 2008; Habib 2008). Engagement with philosophical positions and the historical record is intended, however, to unsettle the ideology and imagined history of a beneficent West, intent on 'spreading democracy and prosperity', that (mis)characterises much of the Western discourse of the 'new scramble for Africa.' Indeed, as Adekeye Adebajo has poignantly observed, the West's self-representation is 'repugnant in its hypocrisy and historical inaccuracy' (2008: 236).

Beyond the state we're in

As the preceding analysis highlights, much of discussion of the 'new scramble' for Africa, and the associated rise of the BRICs, is framed in terms of inter-state rivalry, particularly between China and other 'emerging' states vs. Western powers. This article seeks to critique the problematic statist ontology underpinning such debates. Absent or neglected in the narrative of inter-state rivalry are the profound transformations of key features of the global political economy within which the 'new scramble' for Africa is to be more adequately understood.

As noted above, without contextualising China in the neoliberal capitalist order, 'it is too easy to single out the country without addressing the structural and institutional forces that are driving not only China, but also other emerging powers, to look with covetous eyes at Africa's natural resources and markets' (Luk 2008: 13). As such, commonplace accounts end up concluding that it is China and other emerging states that are in need of regulation. Conversely, it is necessary to identify the forces driving China and other 'emerging powers' in the South (including within Africa) to pursue an aggressive and expansionist quest for resources and markets; and to question whether such strategies are specific to China and other emerging powers, or whether the internal structure and dynamics of neoliberalism, as the current form of capitalism, are shaping contemporary exploitative relations towards Africa. If it is the latter, the political implications are not specific to regulating China and other emerging powers, but rather point to understanding and confronting the historically specific dynamics of capitalist accumulation.

Relatedly, such analysis also challenges the counter-position that the rise of China and other emerging powers is beneficial to 'developing' countries and will overcome the contradictions and dysfunctions of the contemporary US-led capitalist world order (see Hart-Landsberg and Burkett (2006) and Panitch (2010) for elaboration and critique of such claims). This is not to suggest that Chinese imperialism does not differ from US or European imperialism. Eschewing explicit 'conditionalities', for example, is a frequently cited dissimilarity (Habib 2008); as is a distinction between the 'economic' approach adopted by China and other emerging economies, contra the increasingly militaristic practices of the US imperium (Littlejohn 2011; Shivji 2009; Foster 2006). However, as the critical literature on imperialism has consistently underscored, imperialism has constantly 'reinvented' itself as the structure of global capitalism itself changes (Ahmad 2004; Wood 2005). While cognisant that capitalism's logic of accumulation produces diverse forms across time and space, capitalist political-economies are 'capitalist' by dint of a variously shared common logic, 'laws of motion', imperatives, processes, tendencies and counter-tendencies (Wood 2005). 'Capitalism with Chinese characteristics' does not cease to be capitalism; yet largely absent from the voluminous literature on the role of China (and other emerging states) is a consistent theory of capitalism.

The privileging of nation-states as the fundamental units of analysis is characteristic of not only realist and liberal perspectives in IR/IPE but also various critical perspectives that have sought to understand the rise of the BRICs, especially China. These include world-systems theories as well as various accounts of the 'developmental state', 'regulatory state', 'post-Listian state', and so on (cf. Chase-Dunn 2010; Arrighi 2007; Wallerstein 2004; Wade 2003; Bach, Newman and Weber 2006; Pearson 2005; Strange 2011). Such accounts of geopolitical competition as distributive conflicts between rival states are premised on an atomistic social ontology, whereby states are abstracted from the broader context of social relations within which states inhere. Social reality is thus artificially disaggregated into rigid 'domains' between which 'external' linkages are then posited.[5] However, capitalism is a global system and 'it is only at the level of the world economy that all of its dynamics come in to play' (McNally 2011: 37; see also

Selwyn 2009; Radice 2008). As such, it is necessary to explore the internal relations, dynamics and processes of the capitalist global political economy, in order to locate the intensification of geopolitical competition and the specific dynamics of accumulation in Africa.

Neoliberalism and the spatial reorganisation of global capitalism

As has been exhaustively documented, the neoliberal era of capitalism emerged from a 'structural crisis' of capitalist over-accumulation in the 1970s, in order to restore the profitability of capital (Duménil and Lévy 2004; Harvey 2005). Neoliberalism constitutes a 'world-wide strategy of accumulation and social discipline' which has been effected 'by means of social, economic and political transformations imposed by internal forces as well as external pressure' (Saad-Filho and Johnston 2005: 2–3). Integral to this worldwide strategy of accumulation have been profound changes in the social, technical and spatial organisation of capitalist production, encompassing three interconnected processes: firstly, manifold defeats of labour and the emergence of new chasmic levels of inequality; secondly, a shift to lean production and industrial restructuring; and thirdly, the spatial reorganisation of global capitalism and intensified processes of 'primitive accumulation' (McNally 2011). It is in such interconnected processes, particularly the spatial reorganisation of global capitalism and intensified processes of primitive accumulation, the article contends, that the 'new scramble for Africa' is to be more adequately understood.

Neoliberalism entailed a concerted offensive by governments and employers around the world to erode union power, labour rights, and employees' wages, benefits and conditions of work, resulting in dramatically increasing levels of inter- and intra-state inequality (McNally 2011). In 1960 the share of world income received by the richest 20 per cent relative to the share of the poorest 20 per cent, was 30:1. By 2005 it was 103:1 (UNDP 2005). At the same time, as labour resistance was defeated, employers reorganised work processes, introduced new technologies, sped-up production, downsized workforces in the 'advanced' capitalist economies, and relocated production facilities to strategic low-wage sites in the global South, in the quest to restore profitability to capital (McNally 2011; Harvey 2005; Saad-Filho and Johnston 2005).

Relatedly, the neoliberal era has witnessed dramatically intensified processes of 'primitive accumulation' (Harvey 2003; De Angelis 2004; Byres 2005). This has entailed a wide range of processes such as the commodification and privatisation of land; appropriation of natural resources; the conversion of common or collective forms of property rights into exclusive property rights; the expulsion of peasant populations from land, turning them into a 'reserve' of propertyless wage- or unfree- labour; the credit system and financial capital as major levers of predation, evident for example in debt peonage, and the speculative raiding by hedge funds; the WTO sub-regime of intellectual property rights, including the patenting and licensing of genetic resources as practices of biopiracy; the commodification of cultural forms; and so on (Harvey 2003; McMichael 2008).

Significantly, 'primitive accumulation' releases a set of assets (including labour power) at very low cost; over-accumulated capital is then able to exploit such assets, turning them to the generation of profit. The collapse of the Soviet Union and China's restoration of capitalist social property relations, for example, released hitherto unavailable assets into the global circuits of capital accumulation (Harvey 2003; Holmstrom and Smith 2000). Such processes have driven hundreds of millions of people from the land, turning them into propertyless proletarians who comprise an enormous 'labour reserve', available for exploitation by global capital – albeit much of this dispossessed labour reserve remains 'surplus' in relation to its utility for capital (McNally 2011; Li 2009). Prior to the global economic crisis of 2007– these interconnected processes and the organic relation between the two forms of capitalist accumulation resulted in increased profitability and a sustained, albeit highly volatile, expansion in the world economy.

However, as part of the contradictory development of neoliberalism, such expansion has resulted in a 'significant spatial reorganisation of global capitalism', with the rise of the so-called 'emerging states', including the BRICs. Much of this expansion has been centred in East Asia where, through the neoliberal period, major regional economies have grown at three or four times the rate of the 'advanced' capitalist core (McNally 2011: 37). As such, China's new global role cannot be reduced to analysis of state policies post-1978, but rather 'has largely grown out of the changing nature of transnational capitalist production imperatives' (Hart-Landsberg and Burkett 2006: 36). The extent to which the geographic restructuring of global capitalism has created new centres of world accumulation is evident, for example, in the data on capital formation (such as the creation of new factories, mines, mills, and office complexes, along with new machinery and equipment):

> In the space of merely six years, 1990–96, for instance, total capital formation in East Asia (excluding Japan) jumped by nearly 300 per cent. Over the same period, capital formation increased by 40 per cent in the US and Japan and a mere 10 per cent in Europe. A structural shift of immense importance was reshaping the world economy. And China has been its pivot. (McNally 2011: 54)

Relatedly, much of the dramatic expansion over the last several decades in the 'export-weighted' global labour force took place in East Asia, where the working class increased nine-fold, from approximately 100 million to 900 million workers. In China alone, the working class of 750 million is one and a half times the size of the total combined labour force of the thirty richest OECD countries (McNally 2011).

The phenomenal expansion of China's economy and the dramatic shift of investment to China, have been particularly noteworthy in the period following the East Asian economic crisis of 1997. By 2002, China was the world's largest recipient of foreign direct investment which had increased fifty times over in just seventeen years, from $1 billion to $50 billion per year between 1985 and 2002:

> As China pulled in growing shares of global capitalist investment, its real GDP increased by a factor of twelve between 1978 and

> 2005, and annual rates of capital formation – the share of gross domestic product going to business investment – hit 45 per cent, a historically unprecedented level that surpassed even those of Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea during their boom years. All of this has established China as the major new centre of world accumulation, one that is redrawing the very geography of global capitalism. (McNally 2011: 53–55)

Such shifts have continued in the wake of the global economic downturn, with UNCTAD documenting an increased focus and projected share of global FDI inflows to developing and transition economies, especially East, South, and South-East Asia. The UNCTAD ranking of world investment prospects 2010–2012 lists four of the top five priority destinations – China, India, Brazil and the Russian Federation – as 'not developed' economies, with six Asian countries listed in the top fifteen (up from five in 2009). FDI inflows to the BRICs, it argues, 'will be sustained by BRIC's large and fast-growing domestic markets, liberalised industries and vast natural resources which have promoted a shift in global production in their favour' (UNCTAD 2010: 24).

It is in this context of a significant spatial reorganisation of global capitalism, together with intensified processes of primitive accumulation, the article contends, that the 'new scramble for Africa' is to be more adequately located. Capital does not exist as a unitary entity, rather 'it involves the complex, contradictory, and antagonistic interaction of many capitals, and these are organised in relation to specific spaces within the geography of the world system' (McNally 1999: 138). The US-led capitalist world order of the post-war era is now experiencing significant shifts in the centres of politico-economic power, with a decline in the economic strength of North Atlantic states relative to the BRICs and other so-called emerging economies.[6] Dramatic economic growth rates and rapid industrialisation in the latter, particularly China, have led to increased demand for resources and markets, such that 'emerging countries come into competition with Western states and business milieus in their traditional hunting grounds of Africa and certain Latin American countries' (Jaffrelot 2008: 6).[7] At the same time, neoliberal 'globalisation' has systematically opened up Africa (and other regions) to capital flows (Carmody 2011; Kragelund 2009; Padayachee and Hart 2010).

Scrambling for Africa

Reflecting the centrality of the primary commodities sector as the predominant source of capitalist accumulation on the continent, much of the 'new scramble' for Africa is focused on primary commodities. As Michael Watts (2006: 9) argues, the complex trajectories of accumulation on the continent are 'dominated at this moment by the centrality of extraction and a return to primary commodity production.' Thus, for example, over the past decade, 'China's imports in all major primary commodity categories, except ores and minerals, grew significantly more rapidly from Africa that from the world as a whole' (Rocha 2007: 22). This raises the strategic importance of Africa for the global political economy, but intense debates have arisen over the continuities and discontinuities between the 'current plunder and looting' of the continent and that of the formal imperialism of an earlier era (Bush 2008: 361; Southall 2009; Melber 2007; Lee 2006).

Oil, gas and minerals

There is near unanimity that the 'new scramble' for Africa has been galvanised, in large part, by the increased global demand for fossil fuels and the quest for energy security (Southall 2009; Obi 2009). 'With surplus capacity in OPEC at an all-time low and speculation running rampant in the commodity exchanges, Big Oil is awash with money. Corporate profits are historically unprecedented' (Watts 2006: 1): ExxonMobil, for example, posted profits of $30.5 billion in 2010, up $11 billion from 2009; its first-quarter net income in 2011 rose 69 per cent to $10.7 billion. In the context of surging energy demand as well as supply concerns – not least the critical metabolic context of peak oil and peak gas – it is no surprise that alternative sources of hydrocarbons are being aggressively pursued (Littlejohn 2011). As such, Africa is 'the subject of fierce competition by energy companies' (*Financial Times*, March 1, 2006 cited in Watts 2006).

At present, Africa accounts for approximately 10 per cent of world oil output and over 9 per cent of known reserves, located predominantly in Angola, Nigeria, Libya, Algeria and Sudan (Watts, 2006; AfDB/AU, 2009). New oil discoveries have been made in Madagascar, Zambia, Uganda, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Tanzania, South Africa, São Tomé and Príncipe; extensive exploration is also underway in Kenya, Mauritania, Senegal and Sierra Leone; whilst the Gulf of Guinea is estimated to contribute at least one of every five new barrels onto the global market. Africa is therefore 'the centre of a major oil boom' (Watts 2006: 9). The continent also possesses substantial quantities of the world's remaining natural gas reserves. Potential reserves are estimated at approximately 17.65 trillion cubic metres. Three-quarters of proven gas reserves are in Nigeria, with the remainder concentrated in Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Angola, Mozambique, Namibia and Tanzania (Southall 2009). With the projected later peak in gas production, African sources of natural gas will become the object of increasing competition (Littlejohn 2011). As such, the African continent has become 'the final frontier as far as the world's supplies of energy are concerned' (Klare and Volman 2006: 297).

Accordingly, 'Africa has attracted investments from virtually all the major oil companies in Europe and the US' including Shell, BP, and Total in Europe; and ExxonMobil, Chevron/Texaco, ConocoPhillips, Occidental Petroleum, and Unocal in the US (Southall 2009: 13; Lee 2006). Growing US dependence on African oil is particularly noteworthy. Although it consumes approximately one quarter of the world's oil, the US possesses only 3 per cent of proven reserves (Weinstein 2008). While Africa's hydrocarbon reserves are significantly less than those of the Gulf States and production costs relatively more expensive, political unrest in the Middle East, as well as declining imports from Latin America, have increased US dependence on African sources.[8] It is now official US policy to source 25 per cent of its oil from Africa (Littlejohn 2011) and in 2007 US oil imports from Africa surpassed those from the Middle East for the first time

(Weinstein 2008; Fake and Funk 2009). US economic links with Africa are dominated therefore by investment in oil, which accounts for 73 per cent of all US FDI on the continent (Bush 2004). As such, US policy is concerned with securing a lucrative investment climate for US oil corporations, and strengthening the internal 'security' capabilities of host states. But strategic interests also involve keeping at bay aggressive new actors in the African oil business, such as the Chinese, for example in Sudan, and the South Koreans, for example in Nigeria (Watts 2006; Klare and Volman 2006).

Nonetheless, energy companies from the BRICs have become increasingly involved in the intensified global competition for access to and control of vital energy resources. By 2007, 35 per cent of the world's 20 largest energy companies were from the BRICs. Exxon-Mobil (US) remains the largest energy corporation by market capitalisation but it is followed by major companies from emerging economies including PetroChina and Sinopec (China); OAO Gazprom, OAO Rosneft and OAO Lukoil (Russia); Petrobras (Brazil); and Oil & Natural Gas Corp (India) (Lederer 2007). This new generation of energy companies control approximately one-third of the world's oil and gas reserves and production, while the Western majors – ExxonMobil, Chevron, BP, and Royal Dutch Shell – control just one-tenth of production, and only 3 per cent of reserves, although the latter's fully integrated operations (from extraction to production and distribution) return higher profits (Weinstein 2008).

In terms of oil consumption, China is now second only to the US, its oil consumption having doubled in a single decade. By 2020 it is estimated that domestic crude oil production will be able to meet only 34–40 per cent of demand. Indeed, the US Department of Energy estimates that China's total energy consumption will increase by 153 per cent between 2002 and 2025 (cited in Klare and Volman 2006). Mirroring the US, China has defined energy security and the procurement of imported oil as a matter of national security and sought to diversify its dependence on oil supplies, in addition to positioning its energy companies as global players in the international oil market (Taylor 2006). Currently, China derives approximately a third of its oil from Africa through its oil interests in Algeria, Angola, Chad and Sudan, as well as increasing stakes in Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Nigeria. Negotiations for oil deals are proceeding with the Central African Republic and the Congo, and in 2006, the Chinese petroleum company, Zhonguan Petroleum Exploration Bureau, commenced drilling for oil in Ethiopia (Lee 2006; Rocha 2007). Significantly, examination of China's efforts to acquire access to oil assets reveals 'a pattern essentially indistinguishable' from those of the major Western powers, including economic means, diplomacy and provision of arms and military hardware (Klare and Volman 2006: 304).

This scramble for African oil and gas has intensified the trajectory of militarily-fortified enclaves of accumulation, of which the 'oil complex' is the archetypical case: 'The oil complex is a sort of corporate enclave economy but also a centre of political and economic calculation that can only be understood through the operation of a set of local, national and transnational forces that can be dubbed as "imperial oil"' (Watts 2006: 14). The impact of such forces, particularly the alliance between corporate oil, autocratic states and a comprador 'petro-bourgeoisie', has been the characteristic 'oiling of tyranny' (Grovogui and Leonard 2007) and 'dirty politics' of oil (Shaxson 2007), evident in the widespread dispossession of local communities, struggles for resource control, state violence, rentier politics, dismal economic performance and abject poverty, as well as ecological decline and collapse, across Africa's petro-states (Watts 2006; Ferguson 2007; Obi 2008, 2009; Massey and May 2009; Ayers 2010). Contrary to the putative claims of 'socially responsible' behaviour required of major OECD corporations, 'voluntary' regulatory efforts, such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and the IMF's Oil Diagnostic Program, 'provide a veneer of respectability to a rank and turbulent industry' (Watts 2006: 11).

Also characteristic of the intensified trajectory of militarily-fortified enclaves of accumulation is the exploitation of Africa's rich mineral endowments (Bush 2008; Prichard 2009). Africa possesses approximately 30 per cent of the planet's known mineral reserves including near-global monopolies of platinum (90 per cent), diamonds (88 per cent), manganese (82 per cent) and vanadium (95 per cent), a high proportion of the world's gold, bauxite, uranium and cobalt, as well as extensive reserves of coal, copper and nickel (Southall 2009; Bush 2008). Demand for key base metals including aluminium, copper, iron ore, nickel and zinc is also significant (Rocha 2007).

The scramble for minerals has a long and ignominious history in Africa. However, competition has intensified with the US increasingly dependent on foreign sources of most non-fuel minerals (the US war machine, in particular, is heavily dependent on African cobalt, manganese chromium and platinum as essential to the manufacture of key military equipment), together with increased involvement by emerging states, particularly China (Southall 2009). Chinese companies are becoming important consumers of Africa's minerals but also significant investors in mines and mining-related infrastructure, including cobalt from the DRC, titanium from Kenya and copper from Zambia (Southall 2009; Lee 2006). The latter includes one of China's largest mining projects in Africa, the highly controversial Chambishi copper mine (Lungu 2008; Hönke 2009). Demand for uranium is particularly significant, with peak uranium estimated in approximately 20 years. The Central African Republic, Sudan, Algeria, Nigeria, Namibia and South Africa hold significant reserves but exploration is extensive across the continent. In Botswana, for example, 138 prospecting licences have been issued to 12 mining companies for uranium exploration, including in areas of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve where the indigenous First People were forced off their land in 2002 (WISE 2011). With Russia having secured access to uranium from southern Africa, north African sources become especially significant to Western interests, with commentators presaging military as well as economic competition in the region (Littlejohn 2011).

The current unprecedented price of metals (amongst other commodities) is widely attributed to increased demand from 'emerging economies', together with speculative trading activities and supply concerns. However, similar to the 'oil complex', there is little evidence that African mineral producers benefit from the resource scramble. African states, under the current terms of (mal)integration in the global political economy, 'have been unable to access improved value added from the processing of key minerals; rather value remains locked in the industrial centres of *international capital*' – albeit the geographic restructuring of global capitalism has created new centres of capital accumulation (Bush 2008: 361; Amin 2002). This is not a question of the ill-famed 'resource curse'. As with the 'oil complex', the deleterious consequences of mineral-dependency, including widespread rentier politics, result from particular extraverted strategies of capital accumulation on the continent (Bush 2004).

Land, forests, marine and genetic resources

In addition to the resource scramble for oil, gas and minerals, competition for land, forestry and marine resources has also increased dramatically. Although a longstanding object of foreign exploitation, African forests are currently 'under pressure as never before' (Southall 2009: 16). Despite the gradual depletion of prime logging areas, there has been an increase in wood removals from 500 million cubic metres in 1990 to 661 million in 2005. This logging is undertaken by an array of, predominantly European, companies, many of which have secured highly lucrative concessions. Much logging is also conducted illegally, with estimates varying from 30–100 per cent across different countries. Whilst exports to southern Europe currently predominate, China is increasingly a key market, sourcing over 20 per cent of its timber from Africa, largely from DRC, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Liberia and Mozambique. A high proportion of such exports are illegal (Southall 2009; Rocha 2007).

Africa's marine and lacustrine resources are also under increased assault. Ten million people in Africa depend on fishing, and fish provide nearly one-fifth of animal protein consumed on the continent. Yet, recent decades have witnessed profound disruption in fish supplies, in part due to environmental degradation, global warming, population growth, and increased urbanisation. Nonetheless, it is incontrovertible that the greatest impact upon marine resources has been due to over-exploitation. In particular, the expansion of commercial fishing by foreign fleets, as over-fishing in North America, Europe and Asia has led to dramatically increased commercial fishing further afield, including in African territorial waters (Southall 2009; Standing 2009). Much of this fishing is illegal, unregulated and unreported, as most coastal states lack the means to police their jurisdictional waters (Southall 2009). The case of Somalia and the so-called 'pirates' is illustrative here, with illegal fishing by European fleets and the illegal dumping of toxic (including nuclear) waste, devastating Somali coastal resources and livelihoods (Hari 2009). Moreover, whilst some fishing is conducted according to negotiated agreements, the terms of such access to Africa's fishing stocks facilitate their over-exploitation. As André Standing (2009) has documented in the case of trade agreements between African countries and the EU, marine ecosystems are being plundered for short-term profit.

As part of an intensified 'global land grab' governments and corporations of the 'emerging economies', Gulf states and Western powers are also obtaining control of vast tracts of fertile land, including across Africa. Significant differences exist in the legality, structure and outcome of such acquisitions (Hall 2011). Nonetheless, according to the International Food Policy Research Institute, 15–20 million hectares in the global South were the subject of land transfers between 2006 and 2009 (Bush *et al.* 2011). In 2009 alone, nearly 60 million hectares was purchased or leased (Oakland Institute 2011). Much of this 'scramble' for land is driven by increases in worldwide food insecurity. During the 2008 global food crisis, food imports hit the balance of payments of many countries, which sought to shore-up their own food supplies by growing staple food crops abroad. But the land grab is also increasingly speculative, with agribusiness corporations, hedge funds, investment banks and commodity traders increasingly implicated (Oakland Institute 2011).

Saudi Arabia, for example, has redefined its food security policy; as a result, in 2009 a private consortium announced a $1 billion acquisition of land in Africa for rice cultivation (Branford 2009). China's concerns regarding food security are also highly significant. With 40 per cent of the world's farmers but only 9 per cent of the world's farmland, coupled with loss of agricultural land to industrial development, severe water constraints and increasing pollution, Beijing has been outsourcing part of its food production, with approximately thirty agricultural cooperation deals secured to provide Chinese firms with access to 'friendly country' agricultural land (Branford 2009; Gu 2011). South Korea has also acquired half (1.3 million hectares) of Madagascar's total arable land under a 70–90 year lease in which Daewoo Logistics Corporation 'expects to pay nothing for a contract to cultivate maize and palm oil for export' (Petras 2009).

A recent survey in South Sudan reveals that 9 per cent of the country has been sought or acquired by private foreign interests. These large-scale land acquisition projects include that of the Texas-based firm Nile Trading and Development Inc. (NTD), which has acquired a 49-year lease of 600,000 hectares (with an option of an additional 400,000 hectares) for the derisory equivalent of approximately $25,000. This infamously non-transparent deal permits NTD full rights to exploit all natural resources including timber/forestry (not least hardwood species), as well as produce biofuels, and mine for hydrocarbons and minerals. The deal also prohibits any opposition to activities by NTD, and mandates cooperation in obtaining more land concessions (Oakland Institute 2011).

Similarly, Emergent Asset Management (Emergent), a private limited liability company based in the UK (founded by two high-level traders who worked previously for JP Morgan and Goldman Sachs), claims to be managing the largest agricultural fund in Africa. Emergent is estimated to have invested $540 million in land acquisitions in more than 12 African countries, where it develops export-oriented, industrial agriculture with projected annual returns of over 25 per cent. Land in much of Africa is under-valued relative to other continents and is thus habitually invoked as the 'final frontier'. As Emergent CEO Payne notes: 'In South Africa and Sub Saharan Africa the cost of agriland, arable, good agriland that we're buying is $1/7^{\text{th}}$ of the price of similar land in Argentina, Brazil and America' (cited in Oakland Institute 2011). Moreover, the activities of such speculative funds acquiring African agricultural land, results in a new form of vertical integration, whereby control of agricultural production is now combined with the ability to inflate global food prices through food derivative speculation by private equity firms (Oakland Institute 2011).

Increasing biofuel production is also a significant driver for foreign capital to promote land acquisitions in Africa. Global arable land apportioned to agrofuel production is projected to rise from the current level of 2 per cent to 20 per cent by 2050 (Bush *et al.* 2011). Whilst industrialised countries have set 'green' targets for biofuel consumption, these cannot be realised through domestic production. As such, land in the South is increasingly targeted. Africa is central to such processes, being dubbed the 'green OPEC' (Thompson 2008). For example, as the CEO of the UK's Greenergy highlights, 'Southern Africa has the potential to be the Middle East of biofuels' (cited in GRAIN 2007). The scale of such land use for biofuels is staggering: over 2 million hectares in Mozambique, 1–2 million hectares in Ethiopia, 3 million hectares in Benin (Thompson 2008). Moreover, foreign investment in biofuels is concentrated in large-scale plantation agriculture, tightly integrated within transnational corporate networks, including not only those of the US, Canada, Europe and Japan, but also emerging economies (GRAIN 2007).

The UK Corporation, Sun Biofuels, for example, has acquired 18,000 hectares of prime agricultural land in Tanzania for jatropha production – a potentially invasive species that is being introduced on a large-scale with inadequate environmental impact assessment. Canada's MagIndustries has acquired a 68,000-hectare eucalyptus plantation and is constructing a wood-chipping plant in the Republic of Congo, with the wood chips to be shipped to Europe for use as biomass. Amongst the emerging powers, Brazil's Petrobrás has secured deals for ethanol imports from Senegal, Nigeria, Mozambique and Angola; whilst China's Viscount Energy is establishing a US $80million ethanol factory in Nigeria fuelled by cassava and sugar cane (GRAIN 2007). As with other sectors of agribusiness, corporate profits from agrofuels benefit from access to the most fertile land, proximate to major transportation networks, yet millions of already chronically-food insecure small farmers depend on such lands and in many countries pressure on land is already intense (GRAIN 2007). Yet land use for biofuels is overwhelmingly for *foreign use*. As such, it signals the intensification of expatriation of African lands within an inveterate historical trajectory of production of export crops for foreign consumption while Africans go hungry (Thompson 2008).

Land dispossession and commodification are clearly not new. During the formal colonial era, expropriated land was claimed to be uninhabited or unowned. In the neoliberal era, the language, forms and mechanisms of land expropriation are now premised on such land being 'under-utilised'; hence the promotion of 'efficient' commercial agriculture, foreign investment, individual and privatised land tenure, entrepreneurship, liberalised markets, and so on (Shivji 2005; Bush *et al.* 2011). But while not new, contemporary practices of 'land grabbing' suggest that such processes have recently intensified. In addition to the scale of recent dispossession, contemporary struggles over land in Africa are also distinguishable from previous land transfers because 'they now seem to be at the heart of a capitalist crisis of fuel, food and finance.' As such, there is 'a qualitative difference in the ways in which land and land transformation are shaping Africa's political economy' (Bush *et al.* 2011: 187–8).

Closely associated with such dispossession is the intensification of the scramble for genetic resources, including the expropriation of seeds, plants, animals and marine life, and the related destruction of biodiversity. As Carol Thompson (2009) documents, such practices of biopiracy extend accumulation by dispossession into microscopic nature, through changes in law and science that serve the interests of capital. Bioresources are thus undervalued economically, culturally, nutritionally and spiritually. Indeed, Thompson argues that enclosures of the twenty-first century 'will refer more to privatisation of the gene pool than to land.' What is new about the twenty-first-century scramble therefore is its 'all-embracing reach' and catastrophic implications:

> The most comprehensive enclosure, one that invokes futuristic calamities, is the increasing enclosure of the planet's gene pool, both animal and plant. This enclosure involves privatisation not just of the means of production, but of life itself. (Thompson 2009: 299, 308)

Market-seeking activities

Whilst the primary commodities sector predominates, the scramble for African markets has also intensified. The European Union and the US are currently involved in 'a trade war over access to markets in Africa for their subsidised exports' (Lee 2006: 311), whilst 'the new offensive pursued by Chinese agencies, expanding aggressively into African markets . . . adds to the rivalry' (Melber 2009: 62). Intensified efforts to access African markets were evident in the US African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). Enacted in 2000, AGOA underscored the significance of Africa for US external trade relations. However, the breakdown of the AGOA trade volume shows that with the exception of a few smaller niches, 'the trade volume mainly comprises exports to Africa of US-manufactured high technology goods and machinery in return for the import of oil, strategic minerals and other natural resources', non-oil exports accounting for less than 10 per cent of the total. As such, AGOA reproduces and reinforces 'the earlier patterns of a classic trade imbalance, exchanging value-added goods for raw materials' (Melber, 2009: 61, 64–5). Shortly after AGOA was enacted, the EU launched its own trade policy offensive, seeking to renegotiate trade relations with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. This post-Lomé convention, enshrined in the Cotonou Agreement 2000-2020, seeks to secure four 'free trade agreements', or ideally, customs unions, through regional Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). However critics contend that the EU is 'seeking to impose a one-sided trade regime in its own interests by redrawing the map of regional configurations in Africa in line with EU interests' (Melber 2009: 62) in an attempt to recolonise Africa economically: 'in essence, the EU proposes a new partition of the continent reminiscent of the nineteenth-century scramble' (Lee 2009: 84).

Both AGOA and the EPA initiative reflect less the professed concern with demands for WTO-compatibility and aiding development, than securing greater market access (Melber 2009; Lee 2009). Indeed both initiatives will likely result in further dumping of subsidised products into Africa (Lee 2006). Despite putative Western commitment to trade liberalisation, 'in practice many African commodities and goods are effectively rendered uncompetitive in Western markets by a variety of unfair practices and regulations, ranging from high tariffs and quotas to a variety of non-tariff barriers' (Melber 2009: 61). In particular, massive agricultural subsidies paid to agricultural interests in the US, Europe and Japan, undermine production in Africa, thereby threatening the livelihoods of millions of poor farmers across the continent (Lee 2006).

The aggressive expansion of China and other 'emerging' powers adds to such rivalries, intensifying pressure on limited markets. As noted above, trade between China and Africa has increased dramatically over the last two decades, but as Henning Melber (2009: 71) details, the bulk of Sino-African trade reproduces the classic skewed pattern: 'raw materials on the one side (from Africa), and value-added manufactured products on the other (from China).' Moreover, Asian capital has been able to take advantage of temporary opportunities created for export by Africa-*based* textile industry, with preferential access to the US market under AGOA (for countries with least developed status). As substantial empirical evidence from Madagascar, Lesotho and Namibia shows, exploiting such opportunities 'has doubtful benefits for the host countries in terms of employment, revenue and development potential' (Melber, 2009: 63). Elsewhere, it has been argued that Africa has experienced 'an Asian "textile tsunami"' in the last decade, with trade unionists estimating, for example, that over 100,000 jobs were lost in the Nigerian textile industry as a result of Chinese import competition. Similarly, in Zambia unemployed textile workers have protested the displacement of local enterprises unable to compete with cheap Chinese imports (Carmody and Hampwaye 2011: 158, 165).

The 'new militarisation'

This context of intensified competition for vital resources and markets has resulted in a 'new militarisation' of the continent. China's increased economic presence has been matched by its increasing military profile, including engagement with African countries as military and strategic partners and as markets for the sale of arms (Rupiya and Southall 2009). Such relations focus in large part on efforts to secure supplies of energy and other primary commodities; as such, China has developed close military relations with a number of countries, particularly Sudan, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and Nigeria (Klare and Volman 2006). But its military strategy is not confined to countries that provide strategic resources. China's 2006 official 'Africa Policy' heralded high-level military exchanges, technological cooperation and training of African military personnel. As such, the PLA has established military-to-military links in at least 43 countries, although the sum total of these military relations remains relatively modest (Rupiya and Southall 2009). However, China's arms sales to the continent are increasing. Globally, compared to the US, Russia and Germany, China is a relatively small-scale arms supplier; but it is a significant supplier to Africa, providing 15 per cent of all arms to 'sub-Saharan Africa' from 1998-2001 and 18 per cent from 2002–2005 (Shinn 2008). In part, arms sales have buttressed access to African resources, but at other times, China's arms sales have been less discriminate, 'apparently guided by profit rather than strategy' (Rupiya and Southall 2009: 182).

Concerned by threats to its hegemony in the region, as well as a determination to secure access to African oil, gas, other energy sources and minerals, the US has also been rapidly expanding its military presence in Africa over the last decade (Abramovici 2004; Satgar 2009). As a cornerstone of the 'new US Imperial Grand Strategy', US militarism is intended to take advantage of

> its present short-term economic and military primacy to secure strategic assets that will provide long-term guarantees of global supremacy. The goal is to extend US power directly while depriving potential competitors of those vital strategic assets that might allow them eventually to challenge it globally or even within particular regions. (Foster 2006: 4–5)

Significantly, this is not simply a strategy of military power; rather, it 'integrates military power with the struggle to control capital, trade, the value of the dollar, and strategic raw materials.' The 'imperial grand strategy' is 'less a product of policies generated in Washington by this or that wing of the ruling class, than an inevitable result of the power position that US capitalism finds itself in at the commencement of the twenty-first century' (Foster 2006: 5, 11). As elsewhere, the defense of US capitalism involves military intervention, routinely justified under the rubric of fighting 'the war on terror' (Weinstein 2008; Abramovici 2004; Fake and Funk 2009; Watts 2006). The strategy has led to the extension of a formidable apparatus of political and military alliances with strategically placed countries in Africa, including dramatically increased sales of weapons and military equipment, military training programmes, expanded naval operations, the establishment of bases and forward-operating locations across the continent, and the establishment, in 2007, of a new unified African command (AFRICOM)[9], buttressed by collective regional agreements (Klare and Volman 2006; Rupiya and Southall 2009; Hunt 2007; Rozoff 2009, 2010). Like the 'old scramble' for Africa, this new one unleashes an intensified war against the peoples of the 'periphery', for the expansion of world capitalism (Foster 2006; Shivji 2009).

Concluding remarks

The 'new scramble' for Africa marks the latest chapter in the exploitation of the continent. The chapter may be new, but the tome is not. Rather, imperialism constantly 'reinvents' itself as the structure of global capitalism itself changes. As such, the 'new scramble for Africa' is to be understood more adequately within global politico-economic processes of capitalist accumulation, rather than Orientalist tropes and Western sophistry, or the highly circumscribed accounts of global relations and exchanges reduced to inter-state rivalry. Focusing on the rise of China and other 'emerging' states abstracted from the structural and institutional forces that are driving strategies of accumulation is to do violence to explanation and analysis. Neoliberalism as a worldwide strategy of accumulation has effected profound changes in the social, technical and spatial organisation of capitalist production. It is within such processes, most notably the spatial organisation of global capitalism and intensified processes of 'primitive accumulation', the article contends, that the 'new scramble' for Africa is to be more adequately understood.

Prior to the onset of global economic crisis in 2007, neoliberalism restored profitability to the capitalist class and delivered a sustained, but highly volatile, expansion in the global economy. Much of this expansion has been centred in East Asia, particularly China (with its own brutal social and ecological contradictions and crises, cf. Hart-Landsberg and Burkett 2005). However, the exhaustion of that cycle of growth, heralded by the 2007– global economic crisis, now portends a prolonged slump. Indeed, as David McNally has argued, the events of 2007– represent the ending of one period and the opening of another: 'It is a ruptural development, a qualitative break from the previous quarter-century', manifest in the 'tendencies towards over-accumulation and declining profitability that have become central features of China's market-driven development. These tendencies are not unique to China; instead, they shape the very trajectory of global capitalism today' (McNally 2011: 57, 60; Hart-Landsberg 2010).

Within the 'African periphery', the role of China and other 'emerging' powers is complex and contested. Demand from 'emerging economies' has contributed to an increased price for key raw materials and generated increased export-earnings; China's investment in Africa has been accompanied by the sorely-needed provision of infrastructure; Africa's political leaders' have a new found leverage a propos Western conditionalities; there have been examples (albeit very limited) of sectors moving up the value chain, and of possible opportunities for some citizens, consumers and workers (AfDB *et al.* 2011). But, significant as such issues are, none of the oft-cited 'advantages' of the rise of BRIC are theoretically or historically antithetical to imperial practice on the continent.[10] More significantly, the article argues, Africa's terms of (mal)integration in the global political economy have not been fundamentally restructured with the rise of China and other 'emerging economies', or their increasing footprint within Africa. Overwhelmingly, Africa continues to be incorporated within the global economy and international division of labour on a subordinate neocolonial basis, coerced for the most part into primary commodity production. Indeed, as Watts (2006) argues, the current historical conjuncture is dominated by the centrality of extraction and a return to primary commodity production. As such, the BRICs' burgeoning neocolonialism in Africa reproduces, and arguably intensifies, Africa's inveterate and deleterious terms of (mal)integration within the global political economy – terms which continue to be characterised by 'external dominance and socially-damaging and extraverted forms of accumulation' (Bracking and Harrison 2003: 9; Amin 2002).[11]

Central to such forms of accumulation are intensified, continent-wide processes of primitive accumulation, in particular the commodification and privatisation of land, the expulsion of peasant populations from land, the appropriation of natural resources, and the patenting and licensing of genetic resources as practices of biopiracy. Such processes constitute a new round of dispossession, entrenching highly uneven dynamics of accumulation: the production or reproduction of (often fortified) enclaves – enclosed areas of capital-intensive extraction, predominantly in mining and commercial agriculture – alongside high-surplus labour environments marked by dispossession, displacement, destitution and 'disposability'. As such, the 'new enclosures' herald the intensification of primitive accumulation, deepening

Africa's integration into global extractive circuits (Satgar 2009). Effected through the state apparatus and comprador elites, such expropriation or alienation of the commons furnishes handsome political *rents* to the domestic political-bureaucratic class (Shivji 2009). Indeed, increased global demand for Africa's resources 'has been based upon a reinforcement of alliances between international capital and political elites in resource rich territories, entrenching patterns of patronage, corruption and informalised economy' (Southall and Comninos 2009: 380).

Underpinned by persistent violence and repression, this new round of enclosures has dispossessed large numbers of people from access to land and other natural resources as means to sustain their own lives, at the same time that neoliberal policies have curtailed programs that once provided a degree of social protection (Li 2009). Much of Africa has witnessed only 'the partial transformation of peasantries into workers or proletarians divorced from their means of rural existence. Many workers continue to access land which may be of poor quality and size, but that very access has been crucial in sustaining livelihoods at times of crisis. Retaining that access is threatened by the scramble for Africa's land' (Bush *et al*. 2011: 191). Yet, where processes of capitalist accumulation create dispossession and displacement, there is limited possibility to obtain alternative means of existence. Whilst the dispossessed constitute a potential 'labour reserve' for capital, sectors of capitalist growth have not delivered meaningful job creation (cf. Freund 2010).[12] Rather, Africa's much-heralded, commodity-driven economic growth has been virtually jobless: 'throughout the last decade of commodity-driven growth recovery, Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) as a whole reduced unemployment by a meagre 0.8 per cent and paid employment remains below 20 per cent in most African countries.' As such, the continent has the highest and most alarmingly vulnerable employment rate (77 per cent in SSA) among 'developing regions' (UNECA/AU 2010: 5). The low absorption of labour suggests the dispossessed are 'surplus' to the needs of capital and are, consequently, 'let die'. That more than half the population of Africa currently attempts to survive on less than 1.25 dollars a day, together with an abysmal life expectancy, below 55 years in much of the continent, 'is sad testament to the fact that letting die is here' (Li 2009: 66; IPS 2010).

In sum, the article contends that the 'new scramble for Africa', together with the rise of the BRIC countries themselves, are 'linked and collectively shaped by broader *transnational* capitalist dynamics, in particular by the establishment and intensification of transnational corporate-controlled cross-border production networks.' Far from benefiting the continent, these dynamics are further impoverishing subaltern people across Africa. By focusing on the nature and logic of new transnational accumulation dynamics that are shaping politico-economic activity in Africa (and elsewhere) 'it becomes easier to see the destructive nature of capitalism itself, and the need to build international solidarity and nationally complementary strategies to oppose and overcome it' (Hart-Landsberg and Burkett 2006: 4).

Notes

Very many thanks to Sasha Askarian, Branwen Gruffydd Jones, Shahrouz Hafez, Maureen Kihika, Genevieve LeBaron, Raul Mangrau, Andrew Gavin Marshall, Alfredo Saad-Filho, Vanesa Tomasino and Mustafa Uruyar for the many inputs, comments and discussions; and to the anonymous reviewers for detailed, insightful and constructive comments. The usual disclaimers apply.

1. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for emphasising this important point.
2. As has been widely noted within African political economy, both Western and ‘non-Western’ flows of investment, trade and finance have been extremely uneven within the continent. For example, new investment is overwhelmingly in mineral-extracting industries, particularly in Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria and Sudan, as well as in deep-water oil fields off the West African coast: ‘Such investment is not occurring (as World Bank doctrine would suggest) where what they call ‘governance’ is good and the rule of law is strong. Rather, the countries that (in the terms of the World Bank and IMF reformers) are the biggest ‘failures’ have been the *most* successful at attracting foreign capital investment’ (Ferguson 2007: 194–6).
3. While 48 sub-Saharan African countries, comprising some of the poorest countries in the world, together received less than US$1 billion of US aid (Adebajo 2008).
4. This included intervention in Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, Côte d’Ivoire, Djibouti, Gabon, Mauritania, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Togo and Zaire.
5. By contrast, the article understands the modern or political state as the political form of existence of capitalist class relations. As such, the modern state is not capitalist in the sense that it has been ‘captured’ by the bourgeoisie, but rather ‘because its very form of existence, as the locus of the abstractly political relations of domination, marks it out as part and parcel of a society in which exploitative powers have been separated from the political sphere’ (Lacher 2002: 151). For stringent critiques of the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of statist perspectives, including notions of the ‘autonomy’ of the state, see Selwyn (2009), Radice (2008), Fine (2006), Breslin (2005), Burnham (2002) and Cammack (1989)
6. This is not to suggest that China is capable of serving as an anchor for an alternative global economy; rather, ‘its accumulation dynamics actually contribute to the strengthening of existing structures of power and global imbalances and tensions they generate’ (Hart-Landsberg 2010).
7. Such Kiplingesque language is explicit in Western policy documents. The US Council on Foreign Relations Task-Force Report, *More Than Humanitarianism: A Strategic US Approach Toward Africa*, for example, notes the ‘new realities’ of ‘intensifying competition with China and other countries for both access to African resources and influence’, such that ‘the United States and Europe cannot consider Africa their *chasse gardé*’ [private hunting ground] (CFR 2006: 52).
8. As Littlejohn (2011: 139) details, output from traditional Latin American sources, such as Mexico, have been declining rapidly, whilst countries such as Venezuela have been establishing oil supply contracts with the BRIC countries.
9. As Issa Shivji (2009) details, the original proposal for AFRICOM was developed by James Jay Carafano and Nile Gardiner of the neo-conservative Heritage Foundation.
10. Extensive debates continue on the putative ‘advantages’ of modern European colonialism (cf. Boahen’s (1987) account of African perspectives on colonialism contra Rodney’s (1973) characterisation of colonialism as a ‘one-armed bandit’). Similarly, the Cold War provided for increased leverage in African relations with the West, but inter-imperialist rivalry led to widespread destabilisation of the continent.
11. Cheru and Obi’s characterisation of such processes as ‘neocolonialism by invitation’ is pertinent here (2010: 2).
12. As Bill Freund highlights, ‘the availability of plentiful labour can lead to intensified productivity and be made use of by entrepreneurs. Increasingly one can argue *Africa’s biggest single problem* is that the current mix of global trends and local social and economic forces is doing this very little (2010: 45; emphasis added).

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