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INTRODUCTION



## Colonial legacies, postcolonial 'selfhood' and the (un)doing of Africa

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### ABSTRACT

The debate triggered by recent publications and research justifying colonialism demands an intellectual engagement with the histories of colonialism, and their impact on postcolonial trajectories of development, peace and conflict. The argument that colonialism inspired development in societies that embraced its modernity project, enlightened governance and efficient administration – which in turn inspired national consciousness embedded in anti-colonial struggles – has been extensively critiqued. However, less attention has been paid to colonialism's enduring everyday impact and visible continuities. We argue that the present political moment defined by right-wing, conservative and insular nationalisms and racisms – particularly in Western polities – requires deeper critique. It demands an intensive re-engagement with colonialism's legacies, the politics of race and racism and the postcolonial (un)making of 'selfhood' and 'nation-statehood' evidenced in many parts of the world. This collection revisits the impact of colonialism on the postcolonial politics and decolonial developments in Africa; its focus is to reinvestigate the endurance and efficacy of the power relations devised and propagated by the European colonial projects and their continued presence in African states and societies.

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### On retelling 'old' stories

In 2020, a year marked by one of the most catastrophic pandemics of the modern era, which has exacerbated global inequalities, the 'Black Lives Matter' (BLM) movement took the world by storm. Since 2013, the BLM movement has highlighted how coloniality and racism continue to determine social relations, political exchanges, cultural hierarchies, epistemic erasures and strategic silences in normalising a predominantly white, Euro-American world order. The BLM movement itself built on other activist calls including the 'Rhodes Must Fall' protests in Cape Town, South Africa, in 2015, to bring down the statue of Cecil Rhodes, a well-known and celebrated imperialist. The original protests escalated into a wider movement in South Africa, the UK and the US to bring down statues of institutionally exalted former colonialists and imperialists.

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The activist outrage and decolonial cries pouring into the streets during the last decade have encountered a severe backlash from white supremacist political parties, worldviews and peoples' networks in different parts of the world. The academic community also responded – with support, but most notoriously with their own version of backlash framed as 'debate'. In the last few years, several revisionist publications in various outlets have underplayed the disastrous impact of colonial histories, and attempted to justify colonialism and its violence. Research projects were also announced, to interrogate the 'ethical' contributions of colonialism and empire, along with setting up centres to study the contributions of Western Civilisation.<sup>1</sup> These are not isolated developments and remind us that the academy has a very high stake in this revisionist political moment. That is where we find the entry point for this collection of essays, an attempt to 'retell' the old stories that are being alarmingly repackaged, and to reassert the significance of acknowledging the violence of those colonial encounters that continue to shape everyday life and high politics globally – especially, and for the purposes of this collection, in many parts of Africa. We took our cue from many conversations that have found a willing home in the pages of this journal and others. We were particularly inspired by the special issue 'Empire to Globalisation: Violence and the Making of the Third World' (Persaud and Kumarakulasingam 2019). The essays in this collection explore coloniality and violence further, in the vast geographical context of Africa.

This collection aims to revisit the impact of colonialism on the postcolonial politics and development in Africa; our focus is to investigate the endurance and efficacy of the power relations devised and propagated by the European colonial project in Africa. Indeed, the colonial encounters in Africa imposed a very different set of power relations, initially administered through political, economic, cultural and, ultimately, psychological domination. Ideally, one would like to study this vast continent before the advent of European colonisation, and then trace the influences of the precolonial societal, cultural and economic legacies on contemporary Africa. However, it is virtually untenable to link contemporary Africa with its precolonial configurations without referring to the legacies of the modes, practices and norms inherited from the colonial period. In a way, to study Africa without invoking the colonial-era legacies remains one of the major epistemological challenges.

The debate triggered by Bruce Gilley's 'Case for Colonialism' in *Third World Quarterly* (later withdrawn), and other similar publications and research justifying colonialism, demand an intellectual engagement with the histories of colonialism, and their impact on postcolonial trajectories of development, peace and conflict. Although the argument that colonialism inspired development in societies that embraced its modernity project, enlightened governance, efficient administration and also national consciousness embedded in anti-colonial struggles has been extensively critiqued, less attention has been paid to colonialism's enduring everyday impact and continuities that are visible. We argue that the focus on the 'good' of colonialism in this present political moment, defined by the visible presence of right-wing, conservative, insular nationalisms and racisms particularly in Western polities, requires a deeper critique that recentres colonial histories and epistemic barriers to decolonial knowledge production (Robinson 2017; Young 2016; Bhambra 2014; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). This collection is our attempt to revisit the impact of colonialism on the postcolonial politics and decolonial developments in Africa; our focus is to reinvestigate the endurance and efficacy of the power relations devised and propagated by the European colonial project and their continued presence in African states and societies.

## On unsettling the 'postcolonial'

It is not only our ideological foundations, conceptual frameworks and methodological orientations – which are deeply embedded within the Eurocentric knowledge systems – that determine our approaches to knowledge acquisition. Rather, the inquiries on contemporary Africa are informed by the fundamental, structural, enduring and normative transformations impelled by the colonial era practices, which continue to shape the ideas of 'self', 'modernity', 'rationality' and even 'indigeneity' and 'traditional' within formerly colonised societies. In that spirit, it is vital that to understand contemporary postcolonial societies we invoke postcolonialism as 'a counter-discourse that seeks to disrupt the cultural hegemony of the modern West with all its imperial structures of feeling and knowledge' (Ahluwalia 2000, 6). How does this counter-discourse fare in unpacking colonial legacies without drawing too much attention to itself? Is there a need to critique the 'critical'?

Postcolonialism is critiqued for superimposing the limited colonial interactions over the much longer precolonial existence of these societies; as Anthony Chennells posits, 'post-colonialism privileges the colonial episode over the other multiple movements of indigenous histories and thus, colonialism becomes the central issue of most of the world's history' (Chennells 1999, 109). Makarand Paranjape makes a similar argument in India's context, which may well be extended to Africa, that postcolonialism 'as a concept is mostly incapable of coping with the totality of the Indian civilisation' (Paranjape 2018, 203). Given the short span of around 500 years of colonial interactions with the indigenous communities when compared to their own histories spanning over millennia, one might argue that this obsession with colonial experiences obliterates the precolonial modes of exchanges among the indigenous communities (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018, 3).

The argument is valid in terms of the relative lengths of the two different epochs of pre-colonial social and cultural formations vis-à-vis the postcolonial reconstitutions. However, instead of epitomising a rupture, the colonial interventions in these societies turned into a continuity embedded into the new power structures that continue to govern their political configuration, political economy, and social and cultural identity. Modernity, as we know, has piggybacked on the colonial enterprise of 'the civilising mission'; more than the political, material and technological superiority, it is the normative power of the civilising mission that tends to shape the discourses of being progressive, modern and scientific in these formerly colonised societies. In his iconic book *Beyond a Boundary*, C. L. R. James provides the most succinct description of this normative power as the 'limitation on spirit, vision and self-respect' that assumed 'Britain was the source of all light and learning' (James 2013, 29–30). As James describes, the colonised people were 'to admire, wonder, imitate, learn; our criterion of success was to have succeeded in approaching that distant ideal – to attain it was, of course, impossible (James 2013, 30)'.

Indeed, this normative power represents the final frontier of transcending the epistemological order or the knowledge–power dyad, which has entrenched the Eurocentric conception of the world order as the fundamental assumption ingrained into all our inquiries. The displacement of the Eurocentric normative order had always been, and continues to be, one of the core aspirations of the 'postcolonial project', which 'entails a recognition that change of economic and political structures of domination and inequality requires a parallel and profound change of their epistemological and psychological underpinnings and effects' (Abrahamsen 2003, 209). In order to achieve 'epistemological decolonisation',

Ndlovu-Gatsheni has proposed an action plan comprising two simultaneous campaigns of 'provincialising Europe' and 'deprovincialising Africa' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018, 4–5). According to him, 'to provincialise Europe is fundamentally to de-Europeanise the world', while 'deprovincialising Africa' represents 'an intellectual and academic process of centering Africa as a legitimate historical unit of analysis and epistemic site from which to interpret the world while at the same time globalising knowledge from Africa' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018, 4). Elsewhere, Eriksson-Baaz and Parashar have also reflected on the dangers of over-emphasising the impact of European colonialism, proposing that 'the risk of reproducing Eurocentrism by overstating the power of the Global North in postcolonial studies is particularly imminent and already in progress' (Eriksson-Baaz and Parashar 2021).

However, any attempts to decolonise the postcolonial discourses from their Eurocentric roots must withstand/displace the prevalent discourses of reasserting indigeneity and uniqueness through constructing identity, seeking validity and claiming sovereignty over temporal and spiritual matters in postcolonial societies. This self-assertion of identity is generally based on reclaiming the precolonial order or constructing a pure, pristine or unadulterated social and cultural form before the colonial interruption. However, such unadulterated social or cultural orders have never existed, and even the imagined versions of such orders can only be constructed through colonial discourses (Bhabha 1994, 86). In pushing for a critique of the 'postcolonial', we also remain very cognisant of the politics of invoking the 'precolonial', as well as the 'neo-colonial', as the defining characteristic of the political economy of our times.

### From 'postcolonial' to 'neo-colonial'

The essence of neo-colonialism is that the state which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside. (Nkrumah 1965, ix)

We could gain important insights from the African continent with its historical and contemporary experiences, if we recall Graham Huggan's words in his cautionary note, 'We live in neocolonial, not postcolonial, times' (Huggan 1997, 19). Apart from the quest to construct the 'authentic' self, the desire to assert sovereignty over the past has acquired greater significance for the African postcolonial societies and states. Postcolonial states in Africa, like most other places, are nothing more than a replica of the colonial states; the first and most apparent legacy of colonialism is how state apparatus and state power are imagined and exercised. The statist approach mandates that the state emerges as the sole representative of the people's aspirations and thereby oppresses any counter-narratives that challenge its absolute sovereignty over its subjects. Like other postcolonial states around the world, many African states tend to suffer from 'postcolonial anxiety', a society suspended forever in the space between the 'former colony' and 'not-yet-nation' (Samaddar 1999, 108). To overcome this legacy left behind by the 'civilising mission' discourse of the colonial enterprise, postcolonial states endeavour somehow to catch up with their former masters in the developmental metrics (Parashar 2019).

Inadvertently, all these developmental metrics are constructed so that they tend to perpetuate the racialised hierarchies of the colonial era. The ideals such as 'the rule of law', 'democracy', 'secularism', 'modernity', 'scientific temper' and 'development', along with

different sets of socio-economic indicators, are nothing less than the discursive practices of Eurocentric power relations. One may add the other highly worthy notions of human security, gender equality, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and Millennium Development Goals (MDG) also as impositions of Eurocentric discourses on postcolonial societies. Evidently, to be recognised as a worthy member of the international society of states, a postcolonial state is obliged to achieve the global (actually Eurocentric) yardsticks of modernisation, development and socio-economic parameters. The top-down, state-led approach to development, then, compels the postcolonial state to behave like a hegemon and often adopt violent measures to suppress any dissent from this developmental model (Nandy 2003). Eventually, to the ordinary people, the postcolonial state represents nothing more than an agency bent on deploying all the extractive and oppressive tactics of the erstwhile colonial state.

It would seem that to address the 'postcolonial anxiety', these states are caught up in a 'postcolonial dilemma'. A state that fails to achieve adequate progress against the modern developmental index risks being categorised as a fragile/failing/failed state. At the same time, should a state adopt harsh measures and potentially trigger larger unrest among its population to achieve the requisite developmental metrics, it also risks falling into the category of a fragile/failing/failed state (Bajpai and Parashar 2020). The whole discourse of development and regime legitimacy is constructed to uphold the racialised and hierarchical global order. These state-led developmental approaches need to be understood from post-colonial perspectives of examining the interactions among actors in global politics. Consider that most 'ranking systems for measuring country progress, and Afro-pessimists[,] represent Africa as a failure'; moreover, most of the 'African states are described as 'irremediably corrupt'; 'hopeless'; 'criminal'; 'ungovernable' or generally in 'chaos' (Nkomo 2011, 366).

The rise of the neo-liberal agenda and the escalation of globalisation have witnessed diminishing support for the state-led developmental approach from the major powers and consequently the international institutions. Neoliberalism mandates the state to discard its social welfare programmes, and labour and trade regulations, and become an enabler for the transnational corporations to take over the state's primary duties and responsibilities to its citizens (Sauke-Collins 2020, this issue). The alternative developmental approach based on the market-oriented governance model rejects state-led development and instead proposes development led by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and multi-national institutions.

The proponents of this developmental model argue that by its fundamental nature and constitution no state can deliver adequate and fairly distributed development to its citizens, while the NGOs can accomplish such developmental goals without the statist agenda and its attendant violence. These non-state actors are often heralded as the beacon of the 'bottom-up' development model while working within the community. However, in reality, most of 'the African NGO sector is characterised by external financial dependence and an external orientation' (Hearn 2007, 1103). Thus, instead of supporting decolonisation, these NGOs end up being 'the new compradors', resembling 'their precursors, the missionaries and voluntary organisations that co-operated in Europe's colonisation and control of Africa' (Hearn 2007, 1100). Critiquing the new hegemonic order of the NGOs, Issa Shivji argues that 'Africa is at the crossroads of the defeat of the national project and the reassertion of the imperial project', and claims that the 'NGOs were born in the womb of neoliberalism and knowingly or otherwise are participating in the imperial project' (Shivji 2007, 43). Indeed, the ever-increasing expansion of NGOs in the development sector has meant that most African states have

forfeited their sovereignty to the international aid agencies; as Yimovie Sauke-Collins (2020) argues in this collection, 'international aid' and NGOs practise as a disciplinary tool of the West's transmuted mission of 'civilising' Africa.

Along with the nearly ubiquitous and virtually irreversible processes set off by the neoliberal economic policies, the global order is witnessing a transformation with the emergence of some of the erstwhile developing economies as major financial and strategic powers. In their unprecedented rise, China, India and some of the other nations beyond the pale of the Eurocentric world order have emerged as a credible challenger to the American-led hegemonic order (Moyo 2016, 59). Indeed, this new bloc, notionally headed by China, is often perceived as an alternative source for developmental support, financial aid, investments, trade and capacity building. Given the history of the People's Republic of China claiming to represent anti-imperial nationalism and supporting socialist revolutionary ideals, and India's claim to embody the spirit of anti-colonial nationalism and solidarity with the developing world, it would be imperative for these two to offer the African states a more equitable and mutually enriching partnership.

Indeed, the flux in the global order has afforded the bloc of developing economies like Brazil, China, India, Russia and South Africa (referred to as BRICS) to challenge the prevalent hegemonic Eurocentric order. However, it is vital to examine whether the challengers wish to merely usurp the hegemonic order while perpetuating the existing system's inherent inequalities or endeavour to change the unjust system's fundamental nature. It is important to remember that beyond their lofty political narratives, China and India's rise in the world order is enabled by globalisation, which thrives on the neoliberal agenda. Thus, it should not be a surprise that the emerging economies like China and India have internalised the market-based approach to domestic development and international relations. The market-driven economic growth model has obliged China, India and others to look for cheap and abundant raw materials and newer markets for trade and investment opportunities.

Undoubtedly, with its vast reserves of natural resources and potentially large markets, Africa appears to have taken the fancy of the new emerging economies (Alden and Large 2019). On the face of it, this quest for deeper engagement with Africa by the developing economies is portrayed as the epitome of 'South-South cooperation'. However, in practice these exchanges raise the spectre of neo-colonialism and seem to reinforce the 'old dependency' in a new form. As Lisimba and Parashar (2020, this issue) argue, given the history of the 'continuous plunder and exploitation by the European powers, any major economic activity by foreign powers in Africa is always suspected as economic invasion or another instance of colonisation'. It is indeed extraordinary that the non-Eurocentric power bloc represented by the BRICS tends to follow neoliberalism. They appear more like the 'sub-imperial forces rushing to join the scramble for African resources, only as a tributary component of Euro-American hegemony' (Moyo 2016, 59). Through this unsettling of the postcolonial, and this move towards developmental statism and contemporary neo-colonialism, a running theme is the prevalence of violence both as an epistemic erasure (of experiences and knowledge systems) and as reflected in actual body counts.

## Violent ruptures and continuities

Our point of reflection is that if colonialism was a violent project, postcolonial and decolonial encounters also unleash multiple forms of violence. We have indicated that the Western-style,

modern nation-state formula remains aspirational for many counter-hegemonic groups, and for regimes that want to consolidate power (Parashar 2019). The process of 'becoming' has unleashed its own structures of violence. Bina D'Costa and John Braithwaite (2018) have shown how both violent actions and violent imaginaries cascade in many postcolonial societies. Crime cascades to war, war cascades to more war and to crime, and crime and war both cascade to state violence such as torture, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial execution. Gerlach (2010) argues that extremely violent societies are not violent in some cultural or essential way. Instead, societies transition in and out of extremely violent periods of their histories as a result of crises.

Violence is not the defining characteristic of any society; violence is the result of the socialisation and exchanges embedded in the very nature of colonial encounters and subsequently in their various legacies, as we explore here. However, we continue to erase the histories of people and societies, especially colonialism and imperialism, to justify violence as a contemporary affliction devoid of context. In much of the Global South, former colonies and now post colonies, it is not possible to understand contemporary violence without its antecedents, without accounting for colonial continuities and historical legacies. We do not mean history here in the ordinary, official, disciplinary sense but histories as the past that lives and the past with which most people still live, at least in societies not dominated by historical consciousness, which is often dependent on shared and private memories, cultures, myths, legends and epics that bypass the historical mode of reasoning (Nandy 1995). Violence is not a product but a process in these societies, where the violent histories of colonialism are gradually being erased out of the analysis of the contemporary 'political'. What we get are poorly articulated justifications of colonialism, often vile expressions of white fragility and emasculation that masquerade as informed 'viewpoints' and research about a textured and multi-layered past.

The erasure of violence on the Global South was attended to in one of the recent special issues in *Third World Quarterly* on 'Violence and Ordering of the Third World' (Persaud and Kumarakulasingam 2019). The editors made a powerful case to centre the violence (especially body counts) that has been a definitive and structurally constitutive factor in the contact between the West and the Third World, through colonisation and occupation, and through mimicry practices of postcolonial states invested in Western modernity and the nation-state system. States had to be willed into homogeneous, masculine, geographical entities, denying difference and diversity. As the editors, Persaud and Kumarakulasingam, postulated in their introduction,

Violence in such colonial contexts has taken multiple forms, ranging from the everyday rituals of extracting submission for labour exploitation, to outright, total war. These regimes of violence include but are not limited to everyday disciplinary punishment to maintain 'order' (especially in slavery and indentureship), massacres, saturation bombing of peoples and landscapes, genocide and near extermination. (2019, 199)

The silences around these issues were discussed by the various authors as an act of active forgetting that privileged theoretical abstraction. We take these conversations further, revisiting the impact of colonialism's violence on postcolonial politics and development in Africa. The discussions in this volume draw insights from postcolonial developments and discourses in Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, South Sudan, Togo and Uganda.

We focus on African communities that have experienced the violence of colonialism and multiple 'postcolonial anxieties' that have resulted in some of the most devastating conflicts and the need for transitional justice and community building. African societies, as repositories of rich cultural exchanges and traditional wisdom, have demonstrated tenacity and political will (sometimes unsuccessfully) to shape their destinies and to establish enduring relationships among communities, individuals and the state. We believe that the key to understanding colonialism's legacies and postcolonial 'selfhood'/'nation-statehood' is to engage with the multiple ways of (un)doing development. We offer, through the various contributions in this collection, innovative research, using a variety of methodologies and epistemological positions, to demonstrate the contested terrain of development, its different dimensions and its relationship to colonial and postcolonial politics and society. The individual contributions address one or more of the following questions:

- Which legacies of colonialism have shaped the various development discourses and practices in different parts of Africa?
- How are discourses and practices of colonialism embedded in contemporary everyday life and official development policies in African states?
- How does the postcolonial/decolonial lens enable the particular framing of the empirical/material/case study?
- What role do the local elites play in sustaining colonial tropes and discriminations? What critiques and resistance are enabled and how is dissent practised in the postcolonial states of the region?
- How do 'development', foreign aid and investments continue to fail this region in their inability to grasp the complex realities of the societies and states in transition?
- What new methodological and epistemological tools can help us unpack these continuing colonial legacies?

## Insights from Africa: themes and contributions

### *The politics of discourse and knowledge*

In this first section, the contributors work with ideas about coloniality, epistemes and postcolonial knowledge production. Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020) discusses the contribution of the many ignored African intellectuals to postcolonial and decolonial scholarship. He raises critical questions about 'diasporic scholars' placed in the West, mostly originating from the Middle East, South Asia and South America, and the absence of African scholars in the postcolonial/decolonial canon that has thus been normalised. As a strong advocate of 'epistemic freedom' in Africa, in this piece Ndlovu-Gatsheni shows how epistemology frames ontology and how the 'cognitive empire' conquered what he calls 'the mental universe of Africans'. Hence, he reiterates the 'quest for epistemic freedom' in Africa as part of the 'resurgent and insurgent decolonisation of the twenty-first century'.

Akinbode Fasakin (2021) touches upon the issue of how the colonial past plays into the postcolonial present in Africa. With the focus on Nigeria, Fasakin argues that the 'coloniality of power' underpins the continuity of colonial policies and situations, and that policies and governance models of postcolonial states uphold the current neoliberal world order,

perpetuating the 'coloniality of power'. The Nigerian (neo)liberal structure of governance thereby contributes to a continuity of colonialism despite its 'formal' end a long time ago. Fasakin also underlines the risks of focussing on pro-colonial perspectives, since that takes attention away from 'post-, anti- and de-colonial writing.

From 'coloniality of power' we move to 'coloniality of knowledge', as explored by Lisa Åkesson (2020) in her essay that portrays encounters between Portuguese migrants and Mozambican locals in the capital city of Maputo. This 'reverse migration' produces everyday dynamics that impact the transfer of knowledge taking place between the two sides. An absolute fundamental in these processes is the coloniality of knowledge or the epistemic dimension of (post)colonial domination, which implies that Portuguese migrants tend to see it as their inherent and natural right and duty to lecture and train the Mozambicans they work with. This coloniality of knowledge goes hand in hand with the coloniality of being, or the existential dimension of (post)colonial domination. This ethnographic piece ends with a representation of Mozambican discursive attempts to unsettle Portuguese dominant positions and thereby resist the coloniality of being.

### *The local, global contestations*

After contested epistemes and ways of 'knowing' Africa and its encounters with the West, the next section explores the local and global dynamics from African perspectives. Paul Omach (2020) gives an insight into how human rights norms are contested by Acholi traditional authorities in Uganda as they challenge norms brought by international peacebuilding actors. Omach focuses on women's and children's rights, and how external actors' human rights programmes clash with local norms perceived to be violating human rights. Acholi authorities and international peacebuilding actors therefore ended up in interactions filled with friction. The perceived 'assaults' on Acholi cultural values resulted in alternative presentations by the local authorities where they argued that, on the contrary, there is an overlap of Acholi traditional norms and global human rights that is not taken into consideration.

Mohamed Sesay (2020) analyses the relationship between legal aspects of colonisation and globalisation. He argues that rule-of-law promotion as 'social domination over local economies, politics and societies has been, historically, core to international efforts'. Dealing with the war-torn societies of Liberia and Sierra Leone, he further shows that much of the intended restorations of post-conflict rule and stability in those states rather implicitly serve 'conditions associated with settler-colonial rule', placing domestic elites and global actors, such as the UK and USA, in dominant positions. These new rule-of-law promotions further foster neoliberal growth and thereby subordinate indigenous legal systems and strengthen colonial legacies.

The disastrous consequences of the NGOisation of Africa have been discussed by several African scholars, and Yimovie Sauke-Collins' (2020) essay is situated within that critique as he shows how Kenyan NGOs follow a Western-dictated development path resulting only in increased underdevelopment. Sauke-Collins argues that the NGOs play an ideological role in perpetuating imperialism and consolidating dependency relations. Kenya's NGOs serve as neoliberal actors cementing structures of underdevelopment. Further, these NGOs do not engage in fundamental structural change, but serve at best as problem solvers within the existing orthodox liberal system.

Johannes Theodor Aalders (2020) focuses on large-scale infrastructure projects, and shows how the colonial (dis-)continuities play out between the planned Lamu Port–South Sudan–Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) development corridor and the Uganda Railway (UR). Applying relational theories, Aalders highlights that large-scale infrastructural projects connect places, enhancing the flow of capital and commodities; however, they also block and prevent mobility in places which have been connected for centuries, such as the movement of nomadic and semi-nomadic people. While the UR connected the empire with the colony, producing a scalar hierarchy, the LAPSSET ‘dissolves hard boundaries between scalar instances’.

### *Revisiting colonial legacies and impact*

In this third section, we highlight specific colonial legacies that impact the agrarian and education sectors in Uganda, Cameroon and Rwanda. Kassim Mwanika and his co-authors (2020) explore how cash-crop farming during the colonial nineteenth-century period transformed into capitalist commercial farming. This transformation resulted in long-term post-colonial development paths that focussed on the paybacks from commercial farming at the expense of the welfare of the local population in Uganda. The article builds on a historical analysis and shows how colonial legacies of the agrarian structure transformed the sugarcane farming towards a capitalist structure in Uganda. One of the implications is that land seizure for crop cultivation results in less production of food crops, thereby increasing food insecurity. In addition, the indigenous population, who have faced dispossession of their lands, are forced to take exploitative jobs in the sugarcane industry and consequently are increasing their own vulnerability.

Roland Ndille (2020) reassesses the commonly held view of the British education system during the colonial period with reference to Cameroon. Ndille challenges the popular wisdom that the British had no intention to ‘dominate, subvert or control the minds of Africans’. On the contrary, the education tools served the purposes of cultural imperialism and had a Eurocentric point of departure. They fulfilled the imperial goal of educating the people of the colonies without emic perspectives.

Michael Schulz and Ezechiel Sentama (2020) analyse the challenges with the decolonisation of higher education despite clearly articulated ambitions of transforming the educational agenda. They study two MA programmes in peace education in Rwanda, concluding that colonial legacies are deeply rooted in the existing educational structures and thus are arduous to transform. Previous divisions along lines of ethnic identity are retained, thus promoting unequal access to the education system; alternative narratives are restricted and the conceptualisation and construction of ethnic identity in peace education itself is limited and short-sighted.

### *Postcolonial agency, negotiations and new dependencies*

In this final section we look at ways in which agency is negotiated, and sometimes even recovered, by the African states and societies in their postcolonial encounters and state building. Africa’s inherited colonial borders have been central in debates on decolonisation for reasons that include challenges posed to African mobilities and identities, suggesting that there is a crisis of ideas about the border. Edem Adotey’s essay (2020) draws on critical

border studies (CBS) to examine the agency and negotiating capabilities of border residents, using Leklebi and Wli, on the Ghana–Togo border, as case studies. He shows that these ‘borderlands, borderscapes and bordering’ are contextually envisaged and articulated through both postcolonial territorial borders and migration histories, as well as precolonial understandings of political space. He studies the case of the border between Ghana and Togo and its challenges for the local residents, to demonstrate how historical and cultural factors are important in understanding these challenges with bordering and borderscapes.

Rirhandu Mageza-Barthel (2020) analyses how women within the liberation movements in South Africa played a historical role in the country’s relations with China. She argues that there remains a need for the considerable decolonisation of many injustices from the past despite a formal declaration to do so, and that this includes the ‘contested South African–Chinese relations’. Mageza-Barthel complicates the narratives of China–South Africa cooperation, applies what she calls an ‘inclusive transregional political history of gendered liberation politics’ and describes a period of anti-colonial resistance, which is extended to include exchanges with China in various transnational choices that were made.

Alpha Lisimba and Swati Parashar (2020) investigate the impact of China’s aid, trade and investments on the development trajectories in postcolonial Africa, with a focus on Rwanda. The study deploys dependency theory and world systems theory to examine how the global economic configuration operates through the hierarchy of core, semi-periphery and periphery among the states. Lisimba and Parashar argue that Rwanda – as a small, landlocked, natural resource-deficient, aid-dependent country – is an atypical destination for Chinese patronage and investments. As a non-resource-rich country, Rwanda presents an anomaly, thus underlining the gap in the existing knowledge on China–Africa engagements. The authors present a case for using dependency theory to understand and explain the contemporary globalised economy and emerging South–South cooperation.

## Conclusion

We are very pleased to have been able to curate this special collection, with intergenerational African scholars from the region and beyond. This is a very small contribution to the many urgent conversations happening in different spaces, relying on our impulse to challenge the backlash against anti-racism and anti-colonialism in the academy. In a world where power dynamics have changed rapidly in the last few years (the West is a weakened entity; multilateral hegemonies now include many former colonies; anti-racist, anti-colonial voices are amplified against an orchestrated backlash to present the altruistic nature of colonialism), this volume is our collective endeavour to highlight how restorative and reparative justice and equality have eluded a vast number of people and societies where colonialism wreaked havoc for centuries. Most importantly, it has been our endeavour to challenge the dominant ideas that colonialism is old history in Africa and that the states and societies of Africa have had opportunities to find their own path and chart their own destinies. The contemporary problems of Africa, including the ongoing conflicts, governance challenges and entrenched inequalities, can be traced to colonial practices and legacies that have been sustained through neo-liberal, neo-colonial networks and global institutions dominated by the Global North and through the local elites who are supported by Western powers.

The bigger questions for most contributors in this volume are not whether colonial legacies exist, but how might we interpret them, resist impulses to overwrite these histories and experiences, and continuously decolonise our minds. We need to take Ndlovu-Gatsheni's words seriously, that the cognitive empire is very much alive and that epistemological freedom is a prerequisite for decolonisation. We must also heed the caution about decoloniality that Stephen Chan (2021) presents to us in his thoughtful and provocative afterword. What must the decolonisation process contain and what must it set free; what are its fine nuances? The decolonial project must be shaped by understandings of the 'self' even as we imagine that the 'self' will be remade, reshaped through decolonisation. There is work to be done and a lot of messiness to be tapped into. The recentring of coloniality, postcolonial encounters and decolonial efforts has ontological and epistemological significance in these times of vulnerabilities, violence and backlash. We hope other willing scholars will take this conversation in the directions necessary, with due diligence, empathy and care.

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## Note

1. Please see "'Moral Evil, Economic Good': Whitewashing the Sins of Colonialism" by Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni in *Al Jazeera*, February 26, 2021 (<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/2/26/colonialism-in-africa-empire-was-not-ethical>). Ndlovu-Gatsheni discusses the 'unethical' intensions of such ill-conceived projects as that announced by Oxford University in 2017, which simply 'whitewash' the violence and extractive nature of colonialism and slave trade. The Ramsay Centre for the study of Western Civilisation (<https://www.ramsaycentre.org/>) is another such initiative. It was set up by a philanthropic endowment in Sydney, Australia, and works with a network of Australian universities to conduct research and award degrees. This centre has been mired in controversies, especially about its patronage by conservative and racist elements in Australian public life. The aim as stated on their website is to 'promote the study of the "great conversation" of Western Civilisation'.

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