

Imperialism in the Post-cold War Era

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The inaugural editorial of this journal committed its editors to address 'those issues concerned with the actions needed if Africa is to develop its potential'. This engagement demands an analysis of the structural obstacles to autonomous development, and the realisation of Africa's full potential. If there is a common thread linking the various articles in this journal, it is identifying the central role which imperialism continues to play in stultifying African development. In the past we have had cause to remind our readers that the term, '... has certainly not dropped out of popular discussion of the present state of Africa' (ROAPE No. 38) 'even though the topic has virtually disappeared from the pages of marxist journals ...'. In focusing on imperialism in this way, we are not suggesting that imperialism is monolithic in complexion, or that it is always external to Africa. In our first editorial (1974), attention was drawn to the role of domestic class actors in sustaining imperialism; whilst Issue No. 2 (1975) pointed to the role of multinational corporations in reshaping Africa. Imperialism as a representation of the monopoly stage of capitalist development is in a constant state of flux, reflecting the current state of the globalisation of capital.

Despite this need to theorise imperialism in its metamorphic form, 'hardly anybody talks about imperialism any more'. As Panaik observed, 'this deafening silence over imperialism' in marxist discourse is not because the concept has been 'theorised against' after a contested debate; 'nor can it be held that the world has so changed in the last decade and a half that to talk of imperialism has become an obvious anachronism'. Powered by the steam of a 'growing global hegemony of the language of neo-classical economics' (Swatuck, 1995), marxist discourse has now shifted towards globalisation, thus masking growing inequalities in favour of the advanced capitalist countries. It is not enough to describe and analyse how *les damnés de la terre* are coping with the destructive effects of IMF and World Bank sponsored structural adjustment programmes which established the 1980s as Africa's lost decade, and the 1990s as the decade of Africa's marginalisation. We must also locate and theorise the processes within the context of contemporary imperialism.

Imperialism continues to redefine itself. Modern imperialism has thrown up new contradictions as the political-hegemonic imperialist centre (the United States) continues on its economic decline, whilst maintaining its superiority in military hardware and technology. Within a short period of time there was a shift from a 'unipolar world' (as witnessed by the demise of 'state socialism' in the Soviet Union) to a 'tripolar world' as the decline in US economic power and that of the almighty dollar is increasingly challenged by that of Japan and Germany. This divide between military and economic power has a number of potential dangers for other nations: that of being inadvertently drawn into other people's conflicts. First, as Tom Mayer has argued, the rising powers usually champion *laissezfaire* and unfettered economic processes, hoping that this will work to their advantage in the international markets. By contrast, the declining powers tend to be more pessimistic about uncontrolled

laissez faire, and are more willing to protect economic interests via political intervention. This is borne out in the recent phoney trade wars between the United States and Japan, as well as the United States and the European Union. Second, this divide could trigger off rapid interventionist response to political upheaval by the military hegemonic power, with the hope that the cost for such adventurous projects will be met by the other imperialist powers.

Today through the debt crisis, capital is drained from the periphery to the centre through 'the international non-oppressive state apparatuses', the IMF and World Bank. Indebtedness continues to foster *defacto* dependency and poverty by imposing major constraints on development efforts, as precious export earnings are used to finance debt repayment. Capital export continues to be a major feature of imperialism, but whilst a small number of third world countries have benefited from capital export, for the vast majority of third world countries, and African countries in particular, direct foreign investment has declined significantly in relation to accumulation in the advanced capitalist countries. In 1967 the figures for the latter were 69 per cent and this rose to over 80 per cent in 1989; the figures for the third world as a whole were 30 per cent and 19 per cent over the same time period. The crisis of Fordism within the centre has witnessed the triumph of finance capital over productive capital as investment even in the periphery tend to be dominated by money dealing capital in banking, finance and insurance (what Susan Strange has called 'casino capitalism'). Thus modern globalisation is characterised by the internationalisation of finance capital.

This issue of the Review explores these themes in a variety of ways. While consideration of the role of the US is central to this Issue, it is clear that the US has not been alone in reconsidering its 'interests' in Africa. French imperialism, for example, has been particularly active in West Africa where it has contested territories with Nigeria and Libya in Cameroon and Chad respectively. The articles we have brought together first address the questions of whether we have any 'new' forms of imperialism and, if so, in what ways do they differ from previous phases? Second, the articles consider the responses to imperial restructuring in Africa. By examining the possibilities for indigenous regional initiatives in both economic and political matters and debates around 'civil society' and the state.

Old Imperialisms and South African Exceptionalism

The first of the theme concerns the ways in which imperial interests are being reshaped in the post-cold war period. This restructuring is complex and cannot be captured in a single trend. Kevin Watkins' contribution on UK aid shows that this trend is not confined to the US although Peter Lawrence's Briefing suggests that seemingly benevolent aid agencies are filling an imperial vacuum left by national states. Lucy Walker's discussion of the GATT Agreement and the new World Trade Organisation affirms these findings that global economic and political power is still weighted against Africa in spite of the apparent democratising of trade negotiations in favour of developing countries.

As much of Africa moves into the throes of adjustments, it is interesting, though perhaps not surprising, to note the overwhelming emphasis on South Africa. For example, Anthony Lake, US National Security Adviser, berates 'Afro-pessimists' and calls for them to 'come to southern Africa'. His analysis of the problems is instructive since he fails to mention the role of apartheid in creating an economy of 'plate-glass

skyscrapers' and he makes it clear that economically South Africa is far more important for US investors than the rest of the continent where adjustment has failed to transform these economies. Seddon's contribution points out that this exceptionalism towards South Africa is not confined to the US, since the European Union is also clamouring to ensure increased investment flow into that country.

The Security Vacuum

While the cold war had a perverse logic of confrontation there is no such single factor operating in conflict situations today. The motive for US intervention in Somalia is not quite clear, though it can be argued from the 'right' that it was simply an attempt on the part of the Bush administration to commit the US to the United Nations and the preservation of the international state system. From the 'left' the Somali debacle could be seen as an attempt by an unfettered US to bring peace to a region of vital economic and strategic interests, by ensuring the territorial integrity of a disintegrating Somalia. This last point overlaps with the US' commitment to SAPs which are also premised on a maintenance of the state despite paradoxical efforts to discredit it. However, as Rwanda and Liberia showed, not to mention the deafening silence of most countries on the Nigerian crisis, prior to Ken Saro-Wiwa's death, the major powers are not interested in intervening in conflicts which lack immediate economic or political gains.

On the reverse side of this coin is the issue of African-centred conflict resolution. Gerry Cleaver and Roy May outline the support that major powers are giving for some form of indigenous conflict resolution and peace-keeping organisation in Africa. Cynically, this support can be viewed as a hypocritical move by the imperial powers who are, as noted above, unwilling to muddy their hands in complex and unprofitable conflict situations yet claim sensitivity for giving back ownership of conflict resolution. Which ever way we view this emphasis on indigenous means of peacekeeping, Cleaver and May demonstrate that neither militarily nor politically is there an imminent likelihood of any organisation emerging to fill the post-cold war security vacuum. This leaves some rather worrying scenarios that sub-imperialisms will emerge or that the major powers will sell or loan their expertise and hardware in a *de jure* mercenary role.

African Solutions and State Responses

This brings us onto the issue of African responses to this complex imperial terrain. Ray Bush shows how SAPs can reconfigure class relations. The commentary by Nyangabyaki Bazaara who, in responding to Himbara and Sultan's piece in *ROAPE* No. 63, calls into question this notion of the bourgeoisie as a necessary condition for development. Bazaara argues against the analysis of the bourgeoisie based upon the English experience. This he argues is not relevant for the Ugandan case where a more complex analysis of the role of the state is required. This is not only important for understanding the immediate post-colonial failure but also the more recent SAP period. Daniel Green's brief analysis of Ghana raises similar questions in terms of the ways in which the Rawlings' government reconfigured urban-rural relations and seemingly empowered rural producers involved in the export sector although he concludes that these efforts were largely to secure electoral victory in the early 1990s.

These questions around leadership and the state are eloquently picked up in the interview with Babu. He urges us to look to Eritrea as a country which he hopes will

show the way for all African states. The crucial difference he argues is that the leadership were actively involved in the war of independence rather than winning via proxy imperialist armies. This type of leadership, which emerged from the struggles for national liberation, it can be argued is 'rooted' in the people, thus providing the basis for social transformation. Mark Orkin's article provides a more empirical analysis of how 'civil society' in South Africa might contribute to strengthening and consolidating recently independent polities. He shows that despite recent donor fascination with civil society there have been active political organisations outside the state for many years. He concludes that this legacy may well ensure that the fledgling post-apartheid political system will be more open and capable of achieving genuine participatory development. It is for this reason, rather than that of Anthony Lake, that we should be going to South Africa.

At a supra-national level Asante calls for renewed interest in regional economic blocs which will counter the divisive competitive statism of SAPs and effect a more democratic form of international trade policy than GATT permits. This chimes with the peacekeeping functions which could be formalised alongside these economic arrangements. This collection of articles confirms the original assertion of the changing character of imperialism and the need for continuous analysis of imperialism in order to overcome it.

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