

## [Review] Roger Southall and Henning Melber, ed. (2009) A new scramble for Africa? Imperialism, investment and development

Article (Unspecified)

Rajak, Dinah (2012) [Review] Roger Southall and Henning Melber, ed. (2009) A new scramble for Africa? Imperialism, investment and development. *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 50 (1). pp. 171-173. ISSN 0022-278X

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political camps is also provided and offers a rare glimpse into the events leading to the formation of a unified position against the settlers.

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**A New Scramble for Africa: imperialism, investment and development** edited by R. SOUTHALL and H. MELBER  
Scottsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009. Pp. 439, £33.95 (pbk).

doi:10.1017/S0022278X11000747

The opening statement of *A New Scramble for Africa* informs us that at the start of this millennium, ‘something big was happening in Africa’. Yet this book looks as much to the past, to a history of extraction, exploitation and empire on the continent, as it does to the present, or future. Through every chapter, the enduring phrase of Max Gluckman and the Rhodes-Livingstone anthropologists resonates strongly: *continuity and change*. Taking this temporal framework as a heuristic device, the book as a whole provides an important theoretical and historical overview to current processes of investment and resource extraction in Africa. Chapters by Margaret Lee, Wilson Prichard and Henning Melber emphasise continuity over and above change. Prichard argues that the *new* scramble should rather be viewed as part of a set of cycles of capital investment and mineral extraction in Africa that have been in motion since early colonial exploration. Lee makes the case for continuity more strongly. She argues that European Partnership Agreements, heralded by their architects as a progressive shift in EU–Africa trade relations towards reciprocity, equality, and a focus on poverty reduction, in fact perpetuate the ties of dependency, domination, and underdevelopment through ‘a new partition of the continent reminiscent of the nineteenth century scramble’ (p. 84).

A rather more ambiguous picture of costs, benefits and contradictory agendas emerges from Naidu’s examination of India’s dual role as development partner and ‘new scrambler’. While the common history of colonialism and self-determination inspires the optimistic promise of a mutually beneficial South–South partnership, Naidu warns against such a rose-tinted view. Indian investment in Africa, he reminds us, is driven primarily by the ‘hunt to satisfy resource needs that are vital to its industrialisation’ (p. 134).

However, the binary scheme of ‘continuity and disjuncture’ (p. 240) is in some respects restrictive, privileging the discussion of continuity to the neglect of the dynamic social forces that both shape and are shaped by these multiple and diverse encounters. Crucially, of course, the ‘scramble’ is neither wholly new, nor a replay of the past. It is neither the dawn of a bold new era of business-led development for the continent, superseding state impotence and the failure of the aid industry, nor merely ‘old wine in new bottles’ (Melber p. 12), as new players in the extractive landscape reinvigorate century-old forms of imperial domination, comprador co-option, and ultimately the dispossession of the poorest. At the same time, the current orthodoxies of good governance and economic empowerment (the latest in the guise of progressive development discourse) should not be seen merely as smokescreens for the imperial

endeavours and mercenary pursuit of resources. Rather, as Southall points out, 'the two faces of the scramble co-exist' (p. 22). Just as with its colonial forerunner—and the battle cry of Commerce, Christianity and Civilisation—benevolent intent and brutal imperialism have long coexisted, a marriage made all the more powerful by the mutual dependency of its two dimensions.

Where 'change' enters the analysis, it tends to be at the more abstract level, emphasising that the 'new scramble' is the product of a neo-liberal order, as distinct from the colonial capitalism of the earlier scramble. This is certainly a valid starting point, but without greater empirical grounding as to what this means in context, it becomes difficult to see beyond the headline narrative: the rapacious logic of capital which penetrates green-field territories, extracts resources and compels consent across the continent. This makes it hard to get a handle on *how*, as Satgar puts it in his chapter, neo-liberal capitalism manages to 'insert itself into the common sense of most African citizens through various cultural, political and social idioms' (p. 45), or put another way, how the neo-liberal project is 'indigenised' (p. 36), normalised and embedded in local realities and everyday practice.

The danger here lies in presenting a somewhat agentless picture of economic investment, political negotiation and resource extraction. The reader is left asking who are the powerful actors driving and enabling this new scramble, what relationships are being forged, what novel forms of elite-pacting, collaboration or co-option are being harnessed to facilitate these processes, and what diverse constellation of actors, agendas and interests constitute these 'partnerships'. The chapters that present a narrower focus on particular case studies—such as Tangri's chapter on investment and bribery in Uganda, or Massey and May's chapter on oil and war in Chad—do more to illuminate the interactions and power-plays at work in pursuit of extraction and enrichment. In her study of the waxing and waning of investment in the central African copperbelt, Jana Hönke shifts the focus from classic readings of the 'resource curse'—and from the role played by extractive companies in exacerbating conflict in fragile states—to their role in establishing extractive orders as they take on (or usurp) functions of the state. From colonial companies, to newly formed parastatals, to London-based global multinationals, and now their Chinese competitors, each brought with it techniques of government that extend far beyond industrial management, to the political and spatial order of the territories they dominate.

While 'the scramble' conjures immediate images of gold, uranium, platinum and, of course, oil, Carol Thompson examines another dimension of this rush for African resources: the pursuit and plunder of Africa's animal and plant life. Like her co-contributors, she is quick to point out that this is not new. What is new, is the sophisticated legal and scientific apparatus that is being deployed to normalise and institutionalise this extension of the scramble into the most microscopic domains of nature, or, as Thompson puts it, the attempt to 'patent life' (p. 318).

The overriding consensus that emerges from the book is that 'ordinary African people', and especially 'the needy ones', have not been the winners in this latest scramble—and in most cases have been adversely affected by it

(p. 56). Overall, however, we hear more about the scramble from the perspective of the ‘scramblers’ than we do about local reactions to and engagement with these external extractive ambitions that appear simultaneously developmental and neo-colonial. Persistent US hegemony – and the entangled workings of bilateral aid, the machinery of counter-terrorism, and the pursuit of oil security – looms large throughout the book, and is seen as having generated what is described as a new phase of militarisation in resource extraction (see chapters by Obi, and Rupiya and Southall). Yet how these processes are enabled and resisted by local elites and wider populations, and the situated social and political transformations they bring to the lives and strategies of those caught in their wake, remain largely unexplored here.

*The New Scramble for Africa* is a timely collection offering a theoretical challenge to the mainstream economic analyses of the ‘resource curse’ that have come to dominate scholarship in this field. Most importantly, in its broad perspective it provides a much-needed interdisciplinary guide for undergraduate and postgraduates, and scholars interested in this new phase of ‘imperialism, investment and development’. Of course, as with any collection that attempts to capture a continent-wide phenomenon, it raises more questions than it answers – as the editors themselves recognise. Yet, in doing so, it contributes an invaluable foundation for future empirical research into the effects and outcomes of this new scramble, or scrambles, and the multi-faceted ways in which they are reconfiguring the socio-political and ecological landscape of the continent.

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**Making History in Mugabe’s Zimbabwe: politics, intellectuals and the media** by  
B. M. TENDI

Bern: Peter Lang, 2010. Pp. 286, \$64.95 (pbk).

doi:10.1017/S0022278X11000759

When Zimbabwe’s government began the large-scale seizure of commercial farms in 2000, domestic and international audiences were presented with two competing narratives of Zimbabwe’s national history, promulgated by the ruling ZANU-PF party and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) respectively. ZANU-PF in particular has sought to reframe national history in order to support its immediate political objectives. From this fray, in which fundamental claims over nationalism and political legitimacy were at stake, emerged a din of vociferous, heated and intensely polarised political rhetoric.

Blessing-Miles Tendi has sought to bring coherence to this debate by examining what he calls ‘Patriotic History’, the ruling party’s ‘sustained attempt to propagate a repackaged, authoritarian version of Zimbabwe’s liberation history’. Tendi’s central thesis is that Patriotic History was developed as part of a carefully orchestrated effort to interpret Zimbabwe’s past in order to promote ZANU-PF’s militant nationalist agenda. In this reframing of history, Tendi identifies four key themes: the land issue (primarily relating to the public redistribution of land seized during the colonial era), race, the ‘sell-outs’ vs ‘patriots’ debate, and the rejection of Western influence. His research then