

THE CHINESE ARE COMING!

Empire 2.0 and the New African Agenda

A very common question asked by younger Africans, and more so by all generations of the First African Diaspora (descendants of the enslavement), is how on earth our ancestors managed first to get mixed up in the business of selling each other to foreigners, and then bamboozled into wholesale colonial enclosure.

Many explanations are offered, but the one theme that runs through all of them is that whatever the actual cause, Africans, knowing what they now know, can never be that stupid again.

Enter China, who seem to know something we don't. And she is not alone.

Writing elsewhere [at the time of the United Kingdom's referendum vote to leave the European Union](#), I predicted that there would be an attempt to re-heat the leftovers of the old Empire relationship. Indeed, not long after, one began to hear UK Foreign Office officials talking of "Empire 2.0" when describing their looking anew at the Commonwealth. We should not take the recent visits to Africa by the UK Prime Minister, as well as the younger, [more photogenic members of the British royal family](#), as accidental.

France is determined to rebrand the image of its [essentially imperialist relationship with the CFA](#) (Communauté Financière Africaine) zone or the African Financial Community (read "French Commonwealth") countries of West Africa. This explains why Theresa May was [seen dancing](#) in South Africa and Kenya, while [Emmanuel Macron danced at Fela Kuti's shrine](#) during a visit to West Africa.

Germany's leaders have not deployed any African dance moves yet, but Germany - which essentially is the European Union's economy - has also [been cranking its foreign policy machinery into gear](#). There are even [attempts](#) to finally resolve the century-plus dancing around the issue of reparations for Germany's 1904-1908 Namibia genocide.

Between 2015 and 2017, the United States' military footprint in Africa has expanded from 36 to 46 bases. America aside, the UK, France, Turkey, China, and the Russian Federation all also have [permanent military bases somewhere on our continent](#) (in contrast, no African country, or the African Union as a whole, has an independent military presence anywhere outside the continent).

Africa remains a prize.

This state of affairs presents our desperate, venal governing class with opportunities to be even more, well, venal. Having long exhausted whatever political legitimacy the “attainment of independence” gave them, they have continued looking for a new gig.

However, the intensified interest in Africa may be the final nail in the coffin for African communities and societies nearly broken by 30 years of war, austerity, repression, and dysfunctional service provision.



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An obituary of the African
Independence Project

The opportunities are now blinding our leaders to the very real dangers of the unprincipled relationships they are rapidly building with the People’s Republic of China. At worst, they could end up facilitating a Chinese colonial-settler project; at best, they could leave our grandchildren in perennial debt bondage.

As a cover-up, our leaders scrape up the last of the anti-colonial phraseology they can remember, and rationalise that China could never exploit or occupy Africa in the way the European powers did because the Chinese and Africans [share a common history](#) of colonial occupation, humiliation and liberation. “The Chinese”, they defensively declare, “are not racist.”

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This is the worst possible kind of group to have in charge of making the key decisions at this very momentous point in African history.

Imperialism is not a colour and capitalism is not a race

China is not the China of the period just after her national liberation struggle that brought the Communist party to power in 1947, and that [provided much-needed support](#) to other Third World liberation movements.

To understand what is really going on, one must ignore the propaganda of both our own and the current Chinese leaders, and instead study and understand the dynamics of the Chinese liberation struggle.

China has actually had a home-grown manufacturing and trading bourgeois class for centuries. This is a social strata of indigenous nationals who establish and run trade and manufacturing enterprises using local resources and locally-acquired capital. This is the China of Marco Polo's time.

This is why certain Oriental words are associated with commodities long in global circulation; "China", to denote a certain type of crockery, is the most obvious one. There is also "char" (as in "charlady") to denote tea in older English, which of course we call "chai" here. "Kikoyi" is actually a Japanese word for a type of clothing first brought to the East African coast by Chinese trading fleets. These capitalists were very different from the more visible "businessmen" seen today trading and representing [imperially protected capital and goods](#).

China's many decades of instability did not kill off the country's capitalists. The existence of present-day Chinese imperialism is rooted in the history of how this indigenous Chinese bourgeoisie weathered the storms of the 1911 overthrow of the Qing monarchy and the emergence of warlordism, the 1842-1948 period of forced multi-sided colonial economic trade zones, the 1930s rise of the peasant revolution, the 1937 Japanese invasion, the 1946-1949 Chinese civil war ending in the communist takeover of power, and finally the [succession politics](#) that

bracketed the 1976 death of Mao Zedong, the leader of the national liberation struggle.

“Maoism” is a practice of Marxism adapted to Third World situations, as opposed to the independent, industrialised countries where Marxist ideology was born. It advocates the building of a strategic alliance among all those social classes objectively oppressed by imperial domination to form an armed national liberation struggle. These are workers (as the class in leadership using a communist party), poor and middle peasants, patriotic middle-class people, and also a “national capitalist” class.

As part of the strategy, [the national capitalist class was supposed to be slowly phased out](#) through a series of “sunset” measures over decades once state power was acquired. The epic battles that rocked the government and the country as an ageing Chairman Mao sought to maintain his grip on power, and that peaked in the “Gang of Four” trials after his death, can also be understood to be the process of political interests of this class within the party facing down the “sunset” and further communist measures, and citing the dire economic crisis facing the country, re-orienting the party and state towards economic “reform”, all the while appropriating the language of the revolution and using it against the other groups.



Read Also: AFTER THE END:
Welcome to the age of ‘post-post-colonialism’

This development came with a short-term advantage and a long-term disadvantage. In the first, by inheriting a nuclear-armed absolute dictatorship led by a party that the masses in their many millions still revered, the capitalist tendency acquired a vantage point that capitalists in the West could only dream of. Not even the big German industrial families (such as the Quandts, later owners

of BMW and the Bayers, owners of IG Farben, now Bayer Chemicals, Ltd) behind Adolf Hitler ever found themselves so well-positioned. In the second, they placed themselves in the exact same quandary in which Western capitalism of the 1880s had found itself: from where will you acquire the ever cheaper raw materials to feed your expanding economy to serve a growing population demanding an ever higher standard of living? This was the situation the empire-builder Cecil Rhodes was warning of in 1895. Following a visit to London's East End where he observed a meeting of the unemployed making "wild speeches" that boiled down to demands for "Bread! Bread!" he opined, "If you want to avoid civil war, you must become imperialists."

When African leaders claim to be dealing with a "progressive" China, what they are actually dealing with is the national capitalist faction of the ruling party, which has asserted its hegemony over the rest of the groups of the former alliance and turned China into a capitalist country, but hiding behind "socialist" imagery so as to continue enjoying the command-and-control machinery provided by the Communist Party.

Most critically, for our analysis, they inherited the excellent diplomatic relations that the Peoples' Republic of China enjoyed with a wealth of Third World countries. This was because of the Communist Party's above-mentioned revolutionary support to numerous struggles against colonialism. Over the next thirty or so years, the new regime, dressed in the clothes of the old revolution, would systematically exploit that goodwill so as to repurpose these relations to become the predatory relationship we see today.

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In 1999, I once found myself playing the most incongruous role of a member of a Uganda government official delegation to China in my capacity as then Director of the Uganda National Cultural Centre. The country buzzed with a commercial energy. We were taken to see a large number of officials and installations. All the

officials we sat down with had very diplomatically correct things to say about the emerging New China. That is, until we got to the office of a lady representing the All-China Women's Federation. To the consternation of the interpreter they had provided for us (who was so flustered that at one point he went quite pale, dropped his pen, and was scrabbling under his seat to find it, but who, to his credit, did not try to interfere), this lady (who had her own interpreter present) embarked on a very frank denunciation of the whole economic liberalisation programme, emphasising how it was hitting ordinary Chinese women the most and the hardest. She did not have a single kind thing to say about the New China.

In subverting the "sunset clause" idea, China, starting with [Deng Xiao Ping](#), ignored the old Marxist-[Leninist](#) axiom that large-scale domestic capitalism, if not heavily curtailed or done away with in good time, will find itself in need of an empire to exploit so as to ease self-created domestic socio-economic pressures. If no such empire exists, the economy may collapse, and the country could degenerate into an open dictatorship, and possibly embark on wars of conquest. This is the story of Germany after the 1918 loss of its African colonies. Colonialism, as even Rhodes explained, is a capitalist need: "We colonial statesmen must acquire new lands to settle the surplus population, to provide new markets for the goods produced in the factories and mines. The Empire, as I have always said, is a bread and butter question."

History followed. And may be coming back.

The *New York Times* cites a [daily demand for fish from 30 million Chinese citizens](#) as the source of the growing collapse of fish stocks off the West African coast. The fact is that China now needs Africa, much more than Africa needs China. The food crisis has turned China into an imperialist power.

How much do our current leaders know of what the Chinese authorities have told their project-worker-settler citizens migrating to Africa? Just as the Berlin Conference-inspired treaties of the 1890s [often had a European-language version somewhat different from the local language one](#) left with the Africans, we cannot rule out the possibility that what we understand to be trade and infrastructure agreements are in fact understood to be land and settlement agreements at the Chinese end. Only this could possibly explain why one [Chinese railway worker felt so much at home as to defecate in the open](#) right beside the Nairobi-Mombasa railway line he came with.

So, those wondering about how enslavement and colonialism happened the first time now have their answer: it happened like this, one tolerated outrage at a time, under our very noses. And only the “man-eating” lions of Tsavo will ever know how many such “developmental” dumps were taken along the route of the original Lunatic Express.

Racism and Africa’s redemption

Just as with Rhodes, racism may be a handy excuse for conquest; the difference will be in how it is deployed. To understand this, one must reach further back into the history of not just the Chinese, but all Asian people regarding their own [indigenous black populations whose presence in Asia pre-dates the southwards expansion of the Asian race](#).

So, those wondering about how enslavement and colonialism happened the first time now have their answer: it happened like this, one tolerated outrage at a time, under our very noses. And only the “man-eating” lions of Tsavo will ever know how many such “developmental” dumps were taken along the route of the original Lunatic Express.

Remnants of these black African indigenes can be found in isolated pockets all along a broad southern band of Asia, from India to the Philippines. Their genetic memory is also visible in the Negroid features present in Asian imagery, such as the Sudanese-blue [Krishna](#) (whose name actually means “black” in Sanskrit), [Buddha’s African hair](#), the facial carvings on the [ancient Cambodian temples](#), and even in President Duterte’s typically [Filipino Bantu nose](#). This [genetic “yellowing” of Asia continues](#) in the anti-black ethnic cleansing being carried out on East Timorese blacks by the Asian labourers destroying the rainforests for Indonesian corporations.

So there is nothing new or surprising to be found in the Chinese attitude towards black Africans. If you really want to know the core thinking of all mainstream Asian cultures – be they overlaid with Buddhism, Islam, Shinto, Hinduism or Sikhism – in regard to Negro peoples, just [listen to the experiences](#) of the indigenous African peoples of the South Asian and Polynesian hinterlands and forests.

China has not “taken over Africa”; she has merely joined with earlier groups of

imperialists in grabbing a part of the African bounty. As a newcomer, her presence is more visible, but not yet as substantially deep-rooted as the long-standing European imprint.

She comes with two key differences: first, China does not yet have the [military and diplomatic capacity](#) to replace any of those Western powers in physically securing and enforcing the various trade routes and treaties needed to keep the global trade machine, upon which they all depend, running. Second, therefore, this venture cannot be implemented remotely, but by human displacement. Even a settler-overlord project may not work. What could work is one where millions of Chinese people are steadily shipped over to [“yellow” Africa](#) as a continuation of the anti-black ethnic cleansing and encroachment the Asians began centuries ago in South Asia.

The Africa of the ordinary people must assert itself and force its concerns on to all public agendas. The struggle now is to hold a public conversation independent of these various imperialists and their allies.

What shall we do?

First, we need an audit: what actually happened since “independence”? Why, on the whole, did the very individuals that swore allegiance to the new states and constitutions proceed almost immediately to violate and abrogate them?

How much money did the European powers make from the colonial project, and when are they going to pay it back?

How can the various one-sided European Union trade treaties, known as [Economic Partnership Agreements](#) (EPAs) - rooted in the earlier Lome I (1975), Lome II (1979) and Cotonou (2000) trade agreements - be renegotiated or abandoned?

There is a need for an independent peoples’ study of China, unfettered by Chinese propaganda and the apologies of our handicapped governing class. We must demand a more principled relationship with both our current Chinese “partners” and the earlier European ones. The encroachment and destruction of African public assets (be they natural or human-made) by these new “development partners” must be documented and [physically resisted](#).

Africa must design and demand a New Economic Agenda for the continent, which would, amongst other things, put in place Africa-wide terms and conditions for the activities of all these training “partners”.

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Part of the work we try to do at the Marcus Garvey Pan-Afrikan Institute is to develop a new framework for the study of these developments and trends, in terms of what effects they have on ordinary people, and the culture they use to survive or resist them. I would encourage all young Africans to begin organising themselves into study groups, as a first step, to map out and monitor the nature of these incursions in their localities. This is where the New African Agenda will be built.

Africa does not have much time left. We face environmental collapse, ethnic cleansing and [debt bondage](#). Decades of cultural propaganda have desensitised many of the youth to the dangers inherent in losing cultural sovereignty. This, coupled with the cynical and inept example set by the older generation in power, has created societies very vulnerable to any passing idea that could lead to a takeover.

At one level, these are not new issues. As far back as 1969, the leadership of the [Biafran movement](#), in attempting to break away from the Nigerian state, warned in its Ahiara Declaration that “in this jungle game for world domination, a black man’s life, let alone his well-being, counts for nothing.”

ALL the powers of the world wish to grab a piece of Africa. It is up to the indigenous African people to map out a strategy to safeguard their birthright.