

***Who Owns Africa? Neocolonialism, Investment, and the New Scramble.*
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Recent literature in the context of the ‘new scramble’ for Africa often emerges from a Western hegemonic perspective, fixated on the role of the US and China as the biggest external players. Other external economies contributing to this phenomenon include Russia, the EU, South Korea, Malaysia, and developing nations such as India and Brazil. While including these external forces in its analysis, *Who Owns Africa? Neocolonialism, Investment, and the New Scramble* grounds itself in the continental African experience, history, and possibilities. As anthology editor Bekeh Utietiang Ukelina notes in his introduction, the work collected here explores the importance of recognizing the exploitative nature of current power arrangements and the lack of inclusive engagement within the continent. In the backdrop of this work lies pressing questions, like how Russia can continue to plan for the 2023 summit in good faith while invading Ukraine. This unfolding trauma is echoed in articles that highlight existing contradictions in how external actors can expect to attend international sessions promoting partnership and unity.

From my position as a Canadian living in Germany, two outsider states that have held significant power in international development, Ukelina’s introduction led me to think about ways in which gatekeeper states are changing and how this change is happening. Can states such as China and Russia still be considered ‘developing nations’ within the traditional definition? It seems unlikely that they can bond with African nations or even the notion of a truly Pan-African coalition when so much of their regional work is about manipulating relations with other traditional powers: their presence in Africa serving as a kind of proxy for broader global interactions. As Ukelina notes, and this anthology explores, even the current political systems across Africa, call for close questioning: do all the political leaders even have their respective nations’ communal interests in mind? Or are their own engagements with external powers more individualistic, focusing on short-term profit and power at cost to the Pan-African ideal? I find it particularly striking that the language used in these international economic forums on the future of continental development is always veiled as ‘friendship’ or ‘collaboration’, yet continues to favour the

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gatekeepers, even when they themselves are coming from and representing fractured states.

This raises deeper questions about the future role of language in the “New Scramble” because how local constituents are able to express their ideas, and how these will be understood by outsider states, is crucial to building meaningful partnerships. This anthology’s exploration of regional challenges leaves me curious as to how these ‘partnerships’ will, if at all, benefit locals through educational opportunities in rural communities. For instance, the work discussed at length in Kudakwashe Chirambwi’s “Governmentality of China in Africa: A New Scramble through Road and Belt Initiatives” will supposedly improve infrastructure networks, but with how much collaboration that will place power and agency in local hands?

Creating schools so that learning can begin for children and finding solutions to obstacles that particularly affect girls in rural communities (with broader impacts for women in West Africa, as explored by Tokie Laotan-Brown in her chapter) can continue going to school past a certain age can help create agency in these communities, instead of keeping them reliant on external ‘investments’ or ‘aid’.

While reading this anthology, this rift between intentions and outcomes recalled a recent visual exhibit I experienced in Berlin. It showcased a group of migrant women leaving their homes with their essential belongings in a suitcase. They had 30kg of space. An object one of the women contributed to the exhibit was her tea set. She was from Turkey, and she said there, you could call a friend or stop over at someone’s house and have a nice cup of tea, but in Berlin, the culture was so different, so lacking in the same familiarity, that her tea-set stood alone and empty. This empty and still tea-set can easily serve as an analogy for the exploitation of Africa, which has a wealth of human resources and goods that new relationships with the West are putting to one side, marginalizing even within African homes and local communities. This anthology speaks to the need for all the strengths of local customs, wisdom, and people to be recognized and centered in any project that external states want to support, supposedly for the benefit of Africa’s own citizens.

This anthology is a welcome contribution to its field, because it also offers smooth transitions between different themes and perspectives from each of the ten authors represented in nine expansive and ambitious chapters. As an outsider to the subdiscipline, I found whenever I had a question relating to the New Scramble, as

it was presented in one chapter, the next chapter would address it. The topical and geographic range of this work is also a strong reminder to showcase the diversity that is within Africa, whenever seeking to speak of its relationship with external players. The foundation for the arguments in this anthology also do tremendous work in uniting a range of research centered on African researchers and citizens, using multidirectional analyses of, say, the very concept of a Pan- or United Africa. Each contribution to this work reminds the reader of the different effects that each 'new' scramble for Africa has on its locality, and the broader continental project. Because these chapters collectively span a wide range of country-specific examples and economic-political components, and tie in how Africa's colonial histories act and how there are different outcomes, they effectively map a difficult, but also thought-provoking trajectory through colonial experiences shared across the continent, right up to this latest version of the same. One key theme arising from this work is the importance of eliminating imagined communities that were arbitrarily and subjectively placed around different people and disconnecting folks. These did not serve to create a united community, and they do not help the continent in its complex and competing efforts to advance a better vision now.

My scholarly background is in cultural analysis, with a focus on mobilities and identity. As a Westerner from this critical perspective, I can confidently say that anyone with interest in globalization and identity will benefit from reading *Who Owns Africa?* To help understand how international power-plays shape today's realities, and to re-centre our sense of who should have the most agencies in these conversations and ongoing regional developments. What other perspectives toward education are we overlooking or erasing?

This anthology also offers strong parallels for similar re-centring taking place elsewhere in the colonized world. We are starting to see a shred of opportunity through transformed approaches to education in Canada: for example, with some of the early work of "Truth and Reconciliation" processes with Indigenous folks. My own opportunity to learn from First Nations Elders - their stories and histories from the land we lived on together - highlighted the importance of storytelling as an alternate method of knowledge sharing. Indigenous teachings look to holistic practices and are inclusive of their communities. Rather than the top-down, external model of educational development so often proposed in international development, a Pan-African future, as explored in this volume, would absolutely need to invite locals from rural communities to centre their own strength, their insights, and their ways of being in regional growth processes.

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Who Owns Africa? Neocolonialism, Investment, and the New Scramble provides an engaging and organic interdisciplinary guide for seasoned scholars and students alike who are concerned about the latest form of age-old colonialism in Africa and keen to learn how current investment structures have created a complex continental environment aptly named the “New Scramble”. This is an essential text to help shift conversations away from how Africa serves the world, with all its own, external power plays, to how the world’s complex presence in Africa serves – or does not serve – Africa itself.