

**‘Gunboats of soft power’:  
Boris on Africa and Post-Brexit ‘Global Britain’**

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## **Introduction**

As Britain prepares to leave the European Union after the popular vote of June 2016, the government embarks on the revision of future foreign policy. Boris Johnson, or ‘Just Boris’ (Purnell 2012), has been entrusted with forging the new ‘Global Britain’ for post-Brexit era and reinventing British economy around new relationships. Britain, according to Johnson, is ready to send its ‘gunboats of soft power...the vast and subtle and pervasive extension of British influence, around the world’ – to promote British liberal values of free markets, human rights and democracy (Johnson 2016a). Johnson agrees with Winston Churchill in his belief that ‘the empires of the future will be empires of the mind’ and adds that ‘in expressing our values ... Global Britain is a soft power superpower.’

Johnson has a track record of misrepresenting and offending foreign peoples, leaders, and entire countries. He once used ‘Papua New Guinea-style orgies of cannibalism and chief-killing’ as reference to Labour Party politics (*BBC* 2008). Africans were described as ‘flag-waving picaninnies’ and ‘tribal warriors [breaking] out in watermelon smiles’ (*The Guardian* 2008). He equated the racist, violent apartheid dictatorship of South Africa with post-1994 democracy stating that ‘the minority tyranny of apartheid [has been] followed by the majority tyranny of black rule’ (in Jacobs 2008). In his article ‘Africa is a mess, but we can’t blame colonialism’, written for *The Spectator* back in 2002, Johnson expressed his belief that the problem with Britain’s former colonies is ‘...not that we were once in charge, but that we are not in charge any more’ (*The Spectator* 2016). Well documented catalogue of Johnson’s gaffes and insulting comments (*BBC* 2008) will now have to be reconciled with his new role of Britain’s Foreign Minister in charge of ‘Global Britain.’

This article is an attempt to assess the prospects for Africa in Johnson’s vision for ‘Global Britain.’ While acknowledging that foreign policy is a result of multiple factors at play, the paper follows an assumption that the international reality is not merely the product of physical forces and material power, whether military and economic, but is a phenomenon socially constructed through discursive power, the power of knowledge, ideas, culture, ideology, and language (Campbell 1993; Foucault, 1980). The discursive construction of Africa is examined on the basis of Johnson’s speeches outlining Britain’s foreign policy delivered in his capacity as UK Foreign Secretary and an article written earlier during a visit to the continent with Tony Blair. Johnson’s ‘Africa’ as a discursive construct is then inserted in a broader historical and political context of British relations with Africa. The paper argues that by constructing Africa as a ‘problem’ Johnson represents continuation of British imperial and post-colonial discourses of ‘developing’ or ‘civilising’ Africa. He offers the

British principles of free markets, democracy and human rights as best suited and a condition, to foster growth on the continent. This way he legitimizes the presence of British aid and development industries in Africa. The paper concludes that imposing western-style liberal democracy to African states may simply provide 'useful means of control over African economic policies' (Arnold 2005: 799).

### **Historical discourses of Britain's engagement in Africa**

The early imperial discourses of Africa evolved around missionary zeal and a 'duty' to develop the colonies. Colonial administrations presented their relationship with the continent as a civilising mission. Despite being driven by economic and political self-interest, colonialism was also explained and justified as a 'highly moral and religious undertaking' (Abrahamsen 2000: 36). Britain's colonial system generated sophisticated patterns of knowledge production, which were designed to serve imperial interests. On the one hand, European empires invented and then established racism, understood as institutional, discursive and legal discrimination on the basis of race and skin colour, to ensure and justify the domination of Europeans over Africans (Miles 1989; West 2002; Young 2001). Scientific racism and various forms of social Darwinism gained prominence amongst the British who became convinced that 'in essential ways the white race was superior to non-white races' (Stepan cited in Wheeler 2001, 33). Such a belief that black skin denoted inferiority had been largely absent from earlier perceptions held by Greco-Roman, Middle-Ages and Renaissance European, or Islamic civilisations that had come into contact with Africans before the European expansion of modern era (Bassil 2011; Edwards 1992; Hunwick and Powell 2002; Mazrui 2005). Early-modern Christian kingdoms of Europe viewed Africans through a religious lens that transcended skin colour (Lomba 1998) and only later and quite unintentionally contributed to the rise of racial prejudice (Curtin 1994; Sherwood 2001). Racial claims did not constitute the language of transatlantic slave trade to the British colonies in America and the Caribbean. Justifications of slavery were initially provided primarily in economic terms and only later produced convictions of savagery and the inherent inferiority of black Africans (Banton 1999; Frederickson 1999; Lorimer 1978; Williams 1994). On the other hand, race was not the only argument used by the Victorian Britain to 'demonstrate' inferiority and sub-human status of African people. Other factors such as religion, class, culture, initiated by missionaries and churches, prevailed and continued to shape the British perceptions of the world from pre-Victorian England right through the British imperialism of the high-Victorian era.

For multiple reasons then, the discourses produced by the Victorian age epitomised the mix of paternalism and racism. Collectively they also vindicated British intervention on the continent. It became the 'white man's burden' to bring religion, culture and the benefits of civilisation to populations regarded as savage barbarians, or 'half devil and half child' (Kipling 1899). The churches pushed for the conversion of 'natives' that would lead to their moral and spiritual fulfilment (Curtin 1994). David Livingstone, an explorer, argued for the

continued British involvement in Africa for the benefit of the 'natives' and 'to make an open path for commerce and Christianity' (cited in Nkomazana 1998). Berlin Conference of 1884-85, the 'scramble for Africa' signed in the context of growing rivalry amongst European empires, concentrated on political, commercial and judicial questions. Although it lacked a specifically philanthropic agenda, it included notions of civilising mission. The Conference declared that the colonial powers had an obligation to care for 'the moral and material wellbeing' of Africans and to bring them 'the blessings of civilization' (in Gann 1988: 329-330). Humanitarian principles were invoked 'in order to justify the empire and, needless to say, were grossly violated by colonial powers' (Abrahamsen 2000: 36). As Bassil argues (2011: 378), this intricate system of knowledge production about Empire and the subjects of Empire 'remained institutionalised even as British colonies gained independence.' It was through the English language that had become the language of trade and diplomacy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that British ideas and beliefs shaped discourses beyond Anglophone countries and influenced modern conceptualisations of Africa and the world (Saïd 1993).

The retreat from colonies in Africa throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s saw the language of 'duty' disappear from official discourses. The colonies were seen as the rescue of the falling empire. As Krozewski argues (2015: 223), under the Labour government in the late 1940s, 'colonial development as part of British post-war recovery, had been designed to boost the British economy via the imperial economy and, in doing so, give Britain new profile as a world power'. Britain manoeuvred to adjust its colonial development finances to the normative doctrine of economic liberalisation advocated by the newly created Bretton Woods institutions, of which Britain was a leading member. Plans for development in both Asia and Africa aimed at easing Britain's transition to a more open economy. In the 1950s, British Malaya and British colonial Africa were designed to become a part of the development of empire upheld by borrowing from the London money market (Havinden and Meredith 1993), an approach soon to be abandoned as the empire came to an end.

The post-colonial British mind-set saw Africa as 'a source of trouble rather than opportunity' (Clapham 1996: 88). The official policy of consecutive governments was to turn Britain's imperial legacies 'from liabilities into assets' during the Cold War (Mayall 1986: 52-74). Three themes came to characterise British discourses on Africa between the end of empire and the end of Cold War. First is the concern with 'damage control', the second is selectivity and the general focus on Eastern and Southern Africa (South Africa, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Uganda) at the expense of Western Africa (with the exceptions of Nigeria and to lesser extent Ghana). The third theme in British policy towards Africa is the overall marginalisation of the continent despite often 'lofty rhetoric' (Williams 2012: 346). During this period the relationship between Britain and African colonies were preoccupied with the protection of trade and investment.

The late 1980s and early 1990s discourses promoted liberal democracy to be implemented in Africa. The end of Cold War in 1989 made liberal democracy the winner in political rivalry

between the East and West. It was quickly pronounced the highest form of political, economic and social development of mankind (Fukuyama 1989) and its tide was enthusiastically predicted to roll out to the most remote corners of the world (Huntington 1991). Indeed, many African countries that had previously allied with the Soviet Union had no other choice but to turn to the West for development assistance and abandon the practice of socialism (Chabal 1998). This post-Cold War triumphalism enabled the West in more moralistic aspects of foreign policies of western powers and international financial institutions. In the face of evidence of persistent underdevelopment across the continent the World Bank concluded in 1989 that the underlying problem of African states was the 'crisis of governance.' The Bank proposed that 'good governance', defined as the 'exercise of political power to manage a nation's affair', should now be the pre-condition for sustainable economic development and further aid (World Bank 1989: 6). Although the Bank never explicitly stated that democracy was to be adopted as part of its good governance remedy, Leftwich concluded that the conditions amounted to a 'comprehensive statement of the minimum institutional, legal and political conditions of liberal democracy' (1993: 610). The twin imperatives of economic liberalization and democratization dominated the international development discourses for the upcoming decade (Chabal and Daloz 1999, Fritz and Menocal 2007).

Britain's discourses on 'good governance' did not correspond to its actions. To Douglas Hurd, former British Foreign Secretary in the Thatcher and Major governments, the promotion of good government was a 'moral imperative.' He believed that aid should be used by Britain as a lever for better government not only because it was right for the developing countries but also because 'we owe it to the tax payer' (Hurd 1990: 4). Despite the elevated rhetoric, however, the reality was one of further disengagement from Africa. As Williams argues (2012), Britain did respond to some displays of 'bad governance' by cutting its aid programmes, for example to Sudan (1991), Kenya (1991), and Malawi (1992). The approach was not consistent across Africa's authoritarian states. Friendly or economically more significant regimes in Ghana, Uganda and Nigeria generally escaped such punishment.

With the arrival of Tony Blair's New Labour government in 1997, African policy was invigorated and British involvement was articulated in terms of promoting peace, prosperity, and democracy (Abrahamsen and Williams 2001). The New Labour government embarked on more 'ethical' foreign policy and returned to the argument of 'moral duty' of Britain to spread democracy and human rights abroad (Cook 1997a, 1997b). Africa policy was embedded in the broader Blair Doctrine that promoted the idea of liberal cosmopolitan order which he described in his 1999 Chicago speech on the doctrine on international community (*PBS Newshour* 1999). The doctrine endorsed liberal intervention and the responsibility to protect as moral imperatives and paved the way to a number of initiatives in Africa including military intervention in Sierra Leone to restore a democratically-elected regime. In 2001 Blair pronounced the state of Africa to be 'a scar on the conscience of the

world' that needs to be healed by the global community (cited in *The Guardian*, 2001). Britain adopted the idea of 'enhanced partnership' with African governments that were committed to 'good governance', human rights, conflict prevention, social justice and poverty reduction (Porteous 2008). Blair's government identified with particular causes, such as the anti-colonial and anti-Apartheid movements. Britain's 'benign role in Africa' was also popularised by celebrity-driven aid initiatives and the British media depictions of Africa as an 'object of pity and charity which could be rescued through British efforts' (Gallagher 2011a: 2295). This discourse paved the way for a massive increase in aid, debt relief, trade and investment. Commission for Africa was established in 2004 and 'The Year for Africa' proclaimed in 2005.

The 'ethical element' in Africa policy was part of an effort to differentiate the New Labour government from the outgoing conservative governments' of 'more overtly realist foreign policy' that neglected overseas development (Gallagher 2011a: 2295). The establishment of Department of International Development (DfID) by Blair was meant to demonstrate the 'moral wing' of the government through increased importance of international aid and the separation of aid programme from the more 'political' agenda of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) (Gallagher 2011b). The moral and ethical justifications connect the colonial duty to develop and enlighten Africans with good governance ideas of the 1990s and with ideas of liberal order on the continent championed by Blair's government. As Abrahamsen argues:

[I]t is not too farfetched to regard the good governance agenda as a reformulation of these justifications, a continuation of Europe's 'civilising mission'. Freedom and democracy are amongst the most highly valued ideals of Western culture, intrinsic to both Western self-perception and the perception of others, and the good governance agenda is frequently couched in moralistic terms (Abrahamsen 2000: 36).

The 'moral duty' also plays an important part in the construction of Britain's self-image. As Gallagher argues (2009), the discourse of 'duty' seems to be devoid of self-interest and projects Britain as a benevolent international actor, playing a key role in an idealised liberal international order. Back in Blair's day, Africa gave Britain an opportunity to present its best liberal self for Britain's political elites:

Africa matters to Britain as a representation of an 'ethical foreign policy', a point of differentiation from other parts of state activity and policy, and from the ways in which other parts of the world engage there. As such it contributes to a sense of British identity as a generous and benign actor, projecting the ideal Britain – generous, altruistic, capable and just – onto Africa (Gallagher 2009: 2297).

The discourses of 'duty' were rooted in the belief in the superiority of Western values and political systems. The 'deal' offered by Blair to Africa upon which the 'healing of the scar' could start, included 'true democracy, no more excuses for dictatorship, abuses of human

rights; no tolerance of bad governance, from the endemic corruption of some states ... Proper commercial, legal and financial systems' (cited in *The Guardian*, 2001).

Under Blair government, Britain also became a proponent of greater engagement in the European Union, including the EU's development policy. The approach led to intensified 'EU-isation' or 'Brussel-isation' of foreign policymaking process (Dimitrakopoulos ed. 2004) and had tangible results such as the Joint Africa-EU Strategy in 2007. Britain generated unprecedented support the development of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) after the EU's failure to deal with the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

Conservative-led Coalition government of David Cameron (2010-2016) expressed the wish to engage the EU in Africa and 'promoted burden sharing amongst its members as a way of maintaining influence on the African continent' (Williams 2012: 344). Britain's dynamic involvement in the formation of EU foreign and security policies, however, was not matched by London's participation in the EU security ventures on the continent. Unlike France that not only maintained its military presence since independence but also initiated a number of EU missions in Africa (Połońska-Kimunguyi and Gillespie 2016), the UK remained focused on training and assistance packages to enhance 'African' crisis management capabilities. According to Williams, 'the likelihood of Britain playing a leading role in African affairs is dwindling' (2012: 344). It is likely to develop influential niche roles in the areas of peace, security and international development and focus on boosting its own national interests in Africa, defined primarily in terms of increasing British trade with the continent (Williams 2012). It is in this setting that this paper contextualises the place of Africa in first foreign policy discourses put forward by Boris Johnson on the road to Brexit.

### **Discourse: Theory and Methodology**

This article explores the discursive construction of Africa in Boris Johnson's discourses of the continent and evaluates how the image sits within the broader historical discursive production of the continent in Britain. Three texts by Johnson are explored: two official speeches given in his capacity as Britain's Foreign Secretary in the aftermath of EU referendum, and one personal reflection dating back to 2002. The first glimpse of future British foreign engagement comes from Johnson's speech to the Conservative Party in October 2016, (Johnson 2016a). The second was his presentation of 'Global Britain: UK Foreign Policy in the Era of Brexit' given at Chatham House, The Royal Institute of International Affairs (Johnson 2016b). The speeches outline the values and principles that will guide the country in its quest for 'Global Britain' once it leaves the European Union. The third text, written exclusively about Africa presents Johnson's personal thoughts on African issues gathered during his trip to the continent with the official visit of Tony Blair.

The paper employs a number of theoretical claims to the analysis of Johnson's speeches. With the use of critical discourse analysis (CDA) the article explains *discourse productivity* of

Johnson's representations of Africa, his 'truths' on Africa, and the way his vision produces (or re-produces) the world it defines. According to Foucault (1980), those who produce discourse have the power to produce a 'regime of truth', to enforce its validity, its scientific and factual status. Through the study of discourse, this paper enquires into the knowledge/power nexus (Campbell 1993; Foucault, 1980, 1991).

Foucault's articulation of an intrinsic and irreversible relationship between power and knowledge is of immense value to the analysis of the development and North-South relations (Escobar 1995, Doty 1996, Ferguson 1994). According to Foucault, power and knowledge are intimately connected and directly imply one another, so that 'there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations (1991: 27). As Abrahamsen argues (2000), this close relationship between power and knowledge:

alerts us to the fact that problematization of a particular aspect of human life is not natural or inevitable, but historically contingent and dependent on power relations that have already rendered a particular topic a legitimate object of investigation.

In other words, concepts characteristic of the North-South discourses, such as 'development', 'underdevelopment' or 'poverty' do not exist objectively. They are discursive constructs, imagined and created by discourse producers in specific historical circumstances and represent practices that are central to hegemonic politics. This understanding of the relationship between power and knowledge enables us to expose the political and strategic nature of discourses. Since discourses do not exist independently of power relations, Foucault urges us to consider 'whom does discourse serve?' (1980: 115). Therefore it is the intention of this paper to expose to critical questioning the discursive and social practices that discourse enables, as well as the *ideological* consequences it carries.

The paper draws on the three-dimensional model of discourse analysis suggested by Fairclough (1995): 1) textual; 2) inter-textual; 3) contextual. The model is based on the principle that texts can only be understood in relation to webs of other texts/discourses and in relation to the social context in which they are created. *Textual analysis* concentrates on the formal/linguistic features of the text (vocabulary, syntax) and examines texts for their common lexicon of terms (labels and attributes ascribed to things). It allows for uncovering of *relationships* in which things are placed in a discourse where one object is distinguished from, or privileged, over another, usually in binary oppositions (e.g. modern/traditional), to ultimately uncover the relation of power (Derrida, 1981; De Saussure, 1974). *Inter-textual analysis*, examines how authors of texts draw on already existing discourses to create their texts. For Fairclough (1995), text analysis alone is not sufficient for discourse analysis, as it does not shed light on links between texts and broader societal and cultural processes and structures. Therefore, putting text into context is the next step. *Contextual analysis* puts text and discourses it draws on into the wider context of social practice. As discourse is socially

embedded, the main aim of this paper is to explore the links between language use and the broader context of social practice.

### **Enter Boris: ‘gunboats of soft power’ and Africa’s place in the plan for Global Britain**

Having assumed the leadership of British foreign policy after the British vote to leave the European Union in June 2016, Boris Johnson outlined the future commitments of the UK with the world beyond its neighbourhood. In his first speeches on Global Britain as the UK’s Foreign Secretary, Johnson pledges loyalty to ‘the conglomerate of western liberal values and ideals’ and the ‘two sides of liberty’s golden coin’ which include ‘political and economic freedoms’ (Johnson 2016a). He voices concerns that both sides of the coin have been ‘tarnished’ and ‘devalued’ in recent years. The war in Iraq has damaged the realm of liberal democracy and the financial crisis ‘seriously discredited our model of free-market Anglo-Saxon capitalism.’ Consequently, it is the ‘lack of western self-confidence – political, military, economic - that in some material ways the world has got less safe, more dangerous, more worrying’. Hence, the plan is for Global Britain to revive the diminishing Western values worldwide:

We should have absolutely no shame or embarrassment in championing our ideals around the world and in this era of dithering and dubitation this should be the message of Global Britain to the world: that we stick up for free markets as vigorously as we stick up for democracy and human rights (Johnson 2016a).

Johnson proposed two ways of Britain’s global engagement: hard power and soft power. Britain is depicted to be reluctant in its use of the military, ‘we will be the leading military player in western Europe,’ but ‘of course we don’t want to wield our hard power.’ The ‘gunboats of British soft power captained by Jeremy Clarkson....JK Rowling... or just the BBC’ are seen as the most effective instruments of British public diplomacy, the ‘final proof of our irresistible soft power.’

Africa stands prominently in Johnson’s first official speech. Exclusive references are made to four African countries: Zambia, Ethiopia, Liberia and Somalia with other international actors and commitments, such as the ‘special relationship’ with the US, the Commonwealth, or Britain’s white dominions such as Australia, New Zealand or Canada not mentioned. Preference given to Russia, Africa and Middle East creates an impression that Global Britain will focus mainly on those regions. Africa, in Johnson’s understanding, is constructed mainly as a problem of governance and retreat from democratic ideals:

Across Africa you can see for the first time in decades that governments are gradually becoming more authoritarian. The number of African countries rated free or partly free has fallen from 34 to 29 in the last ten years. There are 4 African presidents who are currently rewriting their national constitutions to tighten their grip on power.... there are plenty of countries large and small where the idea of multi-party representative democracy is obstinately falling to catch on...



Even though there are more countries in Britain's closer neighbourhood that have spiralled into full- or semi-authoritarian regimes in the recent past, Johnson does not bring Russia, Turkey, Hungary, Poland, or the Balkans to the attention of his audience. Instead indirect references to recent developments in those countries are felt throughout his speech:

there is a view now in many parts of the world that the ONLY way to ensure prosperity and stability is to suppress freedom – to crack down on pesky NGOs and irritating journalists and independent judges and generally to deprecate the western liberal consensus about how society should be ordered (*emphasis original in the speech transcript*)

Johnson believes that 'this illiberal analysis is deeply and dangerously wrong and that these social and political freedoms ... are not inimical to prosperity – they are in fact essential to sustained growth'. Hence, despite the illiberal trend, Britain will continue its commitment to and promotion of the liberal order as a prerequisite for economic development. The evidence to support the superiority of liberal values can be found back at home in a 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain 'that incarnates that symmetry.' He believes that economic and political freedoms are pre-conditions for economic growth and innovation.

Africa is constructed as a direct beneficiary of free markets and free societies. According to Johnson, there is a clear and causal link between free markets, life expectancy and poverty reduction on the continent. Although Johnson does not offer evidence in support of the impact of market forces on wellbeing of Africans, he catalogues the many 'successes that these free institutions have come to engender' in mainly post-socialist countries:

...for all its problems, life expectancy in Africa has risen astonishingly as that continent has entered the global economic system. In 2000, the average Ethiopian lived to only 47 – it is now 64 and climbing; in Zambia the increase has been from 44 years to 60. In 1990, 37 per cent of the world's population lived in poverty – that is down to 9.6% today, and yes, that is partly thanks to UK spending on development aid – £300m a year to Ethiopia alone but above all it is our economic ideas, our beliefs, our values that continue to lift the world out of poverty and that must continue to be our ambition.

There is no justification provided behind the choice of countries. It is not clear why Ethiopia, a country that has long struggled to enter the World Trade Organisation due to its strong state-interventionist protectionist policies and the outright rejection of liberalization of its economy (*VOA News* 2014) is given as an example of successful entrant to or beneficiary of the global economic system. Although Zambia has been a WTO member since 1 January 1995 and a member of GATT since 10 February 1982, both countries enjoy very close relationships with China (*ZambiaInvest* 2016). Ethiopia has openly expressed its admiration for the Chinese development model (*Wall Street Journal* 2017) and its desire to become 'Africa's China' (*OPride* 2016).

Africa in Johnson's vision is also seen as a source of diseases and insecurity. The continent successes are constructed as a direct result of British involvement. Britain not only saves Africa from its own difficulties, Britain also protects the rest of the world from African predicament:

Look at the achievement in Sierra Leone, where we were instrumental not just in ending the civil war, but in wiping out Ebola. Look at Somalia, where my predecessor William Hague helped initiate a bold programme to tackle the pirates that plagued the coast of that country and together with a coalition of other European countries, British ships took them on, with all the courage and decisiveness of our 19<sup>th</sup> century forebears ... and the result? Before the anti-pirate campaign, their depredations had cost the world economy about \$7 billion a year. When Britain stepped in, the attacks stopped altogether.

Africa receives much less attention in Johnson's second official speech on 'UK Foreign Policy in the Era of Brexit' (Johnson 2016b). The engagement with the continent is largely sketched in terms of securing British interests. Three areas of foreign engagement through which Britain 'can do good for the world and for itself' are promoted: 1) contribution to global stability, peace and order 2) global promotion of free trade; and 3) projection of 'our values and our priorities' onto the world. The image of Africa as a 'problem' prevails and British efforts on the continent are seen 'in the fight against piracy off the horn of Africa and in dealing with the migration crisis in the Mediterranean'. This is because 'in keeping Britain safe, our security depends on stabilizing Europe's wider neighbourhood.' Therefore, it is self-interest that will guide Britain's involvement. Free and open markets are seen as 'good not only for Britain but for the world, lifting billions of people out of poverty in the last 40 years.' Hence, Global Britain will re-launch 'the cause of global free trade that has been stalled since the failure of the Doha round.' Johnson's British values and priorities include gender equality and the

British mission to educate young women and girls, to save them from the evil of modern slavery, to uphold our belief in equality wherever we go is profoundly in our interests, as it is of girls in the developing world.

Johnson also makes a commercial case for Britain's interest in educating young women: 'the more girls who can read around the world, the more copies of Harry Potter you can sell.' Hence, the British international contribution in all three priority areas of security, trade and values is envisaged to serve the interests of Britain in the first instance.

Africa is also portrayed as largely overpopulated, a condition responsible for the death of the elephant, 'a disaster that proceeds from other disasters', such as 'poaching', 'the gangs' and 'human trafficking.' 'Massive growth in population' is behind the 'contest for resources that an elephant is never going to win.' The 'tragic fate of the African elephant' not only 'obsesses' the Foreign Secretary, but the fear for elephants' shrinking numbers precedes the concerns for the education of young girls in the developing world.

Nostalgia for the empire is strongly present in Johnson's speeches. On the one hand, he takes pride in the fact that his office 'was once the nerve centre of an empire that was 7 times the size of the Roman empire' and that 'this country over the last two hundred years has directed the invasion or conquest of 178 countries.' On the other, the dissolution of the empire is considered to be a 'profoundly good thing' (Johnson 2016a) and 'a relief' (Johnson 2016b), as Johnson admits that it is 'good for Britain and good for the world that ... those

responsibilities have been taken away.’ However, the idea of an empire and global domination returns as a boomerang at the end of the speech with Johnson proclaiming that:

in an age of anxiety and uncertainly it is surely obvious that the values of Global Britain are needed more than ever ... and that ... Churchill was right when he said that the empires of the future will be empires of the mind and in expressing our values, I believe that Global Britain is a soft power superpower and that we can be immensely proud of what we are achieving (Johnson 2016a).

Overall, Johnson’s discursive construction of Africa employs traditional binary of developed Britain and underdeveloped Africa. Pirates, migrants and diseases, alongside overpopulation and illiterate women, are seen as most pressing matters that continue to plague the continent. The representation of Africa as a ‘problem’ makes foreign intervention a viable option. The language of ‘moral duty’ is absent from the speeches. The element of ‘self-interest’ instead is strongly visible. The language used and the range of African ‘problems’ selected resonate with imperialist ideas of Victorian Britain blended with neo-liberal vocabulary and the soft power terminology of the 1980s and 1990s.

At the time of writing, it is not yet clear, whether Johnson’s vision of ‘dark Africa’ is indicative of concrete policy options for a post-Brexit era. In the aftermath of the EU referendum and uncertain future, his ‘Global Britain’ may as well provide a vision of strong and determined player not only to its political elites but also to the 52% of electorate whose decision to leave the EU needs to be executed. It also gives British leaders, such as Johnson, an opportunity to demonstrate the leadership spirit to Europe and the rest of the world that will be watching its political manoeuvres outside of European structures. It contributes to the sense of British identity as a capable and accomplished actor determined to ‘take back control’, as promised by the ‘Leave’ campaign in the referendum, and ready to re-engage with the world according to its own rules. In the Brexit context therefore, Africa eases the potential pain of the upcoming separation from Europe by invoking soothing images of a largely benevolent empire, useful for both Britain and Africa in terms of economic progress. The British can dust off their past in efforts to build a more prosperous future.

### *The Mango Tree Doctrine*

Johnson first presented his thoughts on Africa and British engagement there in a newspaper article ‘Africa is a mess, but we can’t blame colonialism’. The article was written for *The Spectator* at the time of Tony Blair’s visit to Uganda back in 2002 (reprinted in *The Spectator* 2016). Sitting ‘under a mango tree’ he reflected upon the numerous difficulties troubling African countries. The piece is written in an informal, colloquial language and lacks the flair of diplomacy portrayed in two other speeches he delivered as Foreign Secretary. Whilst the personal reflection cannot in any way represent the official stance of the Foreign Office, Johnson would come to lead in the future, it offers his understanding of African history, economy and politics, and his explanation of the driving forces behind the African condition.

In the article, Johnson advocates greater British involvement in Africa and engages with several themes: African economy, British NGOs present on the continent, the nature of African conflict and international trade. The key message the article is designed to convey is the 'feeling of shame.' Britain 'must hope', he writes before addressing the list of issues, 'for the sake of candour and common sense, that he [Blair] does not blame Britain, or colonialism, or the white man.' In Johnson's assessment:

The continent may be a blot but it is not a blot upon our conscience. The problem is not that we were once in charge, but that we are not in charge any more.

Johnson criticises African 'natives' for deficient industrialisation and the absence of manufacturing. His openly racist language resonates with the 19<sup>th</sup> century British beliefs in racial inferiority and savagery of African people. African economy is seen through the prism of modernization theory, which sought to explain the process of modernization within societies. The theory looked at the internal factors of a country while assuming that with assistance, 'traditional' or underdeveloped countries could be brought to development in the same way more developed countries had been (Berman 2001; Bernstein 1971; Dibua 2006). 'Even now,' Johnson writes, 'the Ugandans can't make their own bikes'. At the same time he praises the practices of colonial administrations that geared African economies towards export of raw, unprocessed agricultural produce and effectively prevented future industrialisation. He debunks the commonly expressed argument that coffee or cocoa monocultures destroyed the economic growth of post-independent African nations (*The Guardian* 2017) and demands gratitude for the colonial decisions on vegetation:

And don't swallow any of that nonsense about how we planted the 'wrong crops'... the colonists correctly saw that the export market was limited... So the British planted coffee and cotton and tobacco, and they were broadly right. It is true that coffee prices are currently low; but that is the fault of the Vietnamese, who are shamelessly undercutting the market, and not of the planters of 100 years ago. If left to their own devices, the natives would rely on nothing but the instant carbohydrate gratification of the plantain.

*Homo economicus* is clearly visible in Johnson's emphasis on profit-oriented farming supported by exports of local produce. The question of whose interest and whose profit should this reasoning serve remains unaddressed. Johnson demands recognition of the advantages of colonialism, yet rejects any responsibility for the legacy that it created. He draws a clear demarcation line between an extractive colonial past and the current state of African economies:

In 1956 Ghana had a bigger GDP than Malaysia, and Egypt and South Korea were economically on a par. Can you really blame colonialism for the subsequent divergence in performance? The Malaysians have air-conditioning and computers; 90 per cent of Ugandans live in Stone Age conditions.

Conflict is another issue addressed in Johnson's reflection. The war against Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda, a 'bunch of millennialist loonies led by one Joseph Kony, a charismatic in Stetson and shades' serves as an illustration of an 'essentially tribal conflict.'

Thoughts of another British diplomat ‘why are they so brutal to each other’ and ‘it is not because of us [British] that they behave like the children in Lord of the Flies’ fail to account for the root causes behind the conflict. This essentialist explanation assigning blame to the nature of African man is not supported by any of the mainstream conflict theories (Clausewitz 1968; Berdal 2011; Kaldor 2013; Mundy 2011). Sources of regional conflicts and failing economies are not considered to be affected by British past involvement. British interventions in Africa, such as a brutal crush of the Mau Mau Revolt in Kenya in the 1950s, in which militarized colonial administration imprisoned more than 80,000 people without trial, hanged over 1,000 convicted ‘terrorists’, and was widely accused of breaking the rule of law in its treatment of the rebels (Anderson 2015: 142) are not mentioned. As Johnson explains, it is ‘just not convincing, 40 years on, to blame Africa’s problems on “lines on the map”, the arbitrary boundary-making by the men in sola topis’. Although he acknowledges that colonial intervention was perhaps not without its flaws and that ‘you could have drawn the map of Africa differently,’ he does not ponder the fate of African states, economies and peoples if the lines would have *not* been drawn in the first place.

Johnson proudly highlights strengths and successes of the British development industry in Africa which is ‘by far the biggest ... and the one that attracts all the brightest and most ambitious’. An exploration of the sector in Kampala, the capital of Uganda, reveals that ‘there are hundreds more, most of them consisting of a single man in an office hoping to strike lucky with, say, the ever-generous readers of the Daily Telegraph,’ or helping Africans through ‘building latrines, fine concrete structures which will soon be used for habitation...’ He reflects upon the negative consequences of foreign aid, too: ‘Of course, aid corrupts and distorts and infantilises,’ he evaluates, ‘but those considerations are probably outweighed by the short-term good it can do.’ Africa’s dependency on foreigners offering temporary solutions, the lack of accountability, efficiency and efficacy of hundreds of understaffed foreign NGOs preoccupied, as he observes, mainly with fundraising, are not considered problematic and quickly dismissed: ‘Even if you are not convinced that the programmes are beneficial, you should surely not feel guilty about what we are doing’. ‘Britain that is big here and getting bigger’ should be encouraged to further use the opportunities the continent offers: ‘He [Blair] should tell us into snapping up that little island in Lake Victoria, investing in hotels, TVs, mobile phone companies.’ There is no mention of social responsibility of business to be encouraged. Johnson ends his reflection with a belief that:

The best fate for Africa would be if the old colonial powers, or their citizens, scrambled once again in her direction; on the understanding that this time they will not be asked to feel guilty.

Overall, the ‘doctrine’ developed under the mango tree removes responsibility for colonial practices and associated feelings of guilt, or shame, for African condition from Britain. Johnson assigns the blame for the state of underperforming economies and the nature of African conflicts to Africans themselves. British involvement on the continent, however short-term in the case of NGOs, or focused mainly on profit-making in the case of business,

should be encouraged. Years later, this understanding of African condition will inform Johnsons' foreign policy for post-Brexit era and the nature of British involvement in Africa.

### ***Western liberal values and future engagement with Africa: The Multiple Contexts***

The rhetoric of the supremacy of the 'golden coin' of free markets and democracy championed by Johnson in his vision for Global Britain and future engagement with Africa needs to be interpreted in the multiple historical contexts: 1) the failure of economic liberalization and good governance agendas in the past, 2) the dent in the democratic order that has appeared at its source making western values less attractive, 3) the impact of 'strategic capitalism' on African loyalties. The three contexts that encompass old and new environments shed light on the suitability of Johnson's ideas and may inform future partnerships and alliances.

#### *1) Economic liberalization and good governance: Africa has been there before*

In its post-colonial history, Africa has already experienced, with painful results, economic and political liberalisation advocated by Johnson. During 1980s, structural adjustments programmes were the defining feature of Western policies towards the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa (Jespersen 1993) followed by the 'good governance' agenda of the 1990s (Fritz and Menocal 2007, Leftwich 1993).

The two types of adjustment programmes, stabilisation and structural adjustment policies, shared the same theoretical foundations in neo-liberal economics. Their primary underlying assumption was that markets are intrinsically superior to planning and physical controls in the allocation of resources, and therefore in dealing with development problems (Abrahamsen 2000). The World Bank (WB) was of opinion that 'the state should not intervene where markets can work even moderately well' (1994: 183). The result of structural adjustment programmes was a general liberalisation of African economies, the role of the state was drastically scaled down, public expenditure reduced, public sector activities privatised and control over imports, exports and foreign exchange were removed. The effects of adjustment programmes were hotly debated. While the WB concluded that the programmes had a favourable impact on economic performance, and that 'strongly' adjusting countries performed better than countries with 'weak', or no programmes (WB/UNDP 1989a:30), the avalanche of criticism followed condemning their negative repercussions. The UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) accused the World Bank of faulty methodology and selectivity of in data gathering, presentation and analysis (UNECA 1989). Both the Commission and later critics (Schatz 1994 and 1996) demonstrated that structural adjustment programmes in most cases resulted in poorer economic performance, that the claimed successes were misleading and that the WB in general failed to adopt an adequate long-term strategy for Africa (Ponte 1994; Mosley and Weeks 1993). The programmes were also criticised for their negative social and humanitarian effects (UNECA

1989; Cornia et al. 1987). In short, the outcomes of the programmes were considered to be 'disappointing' (Mosley et al. 1991: 308), seen as a recipe for deepening poverty, widening social polarisation and rising unemployment (Caulfield 1997; Chossudovsky 1997; Cornia 1991; Onimonde 1989; Stewart 1991). It was proven that the burden of adjustment policies fell disproportionately on women, and adjustment policies were found to have a distinct gender bias against women (Elson 1991; Gladwin 1991; Lockwood 1992, Moser 1991).

As the miracle of the 'invisible hand' of the market had failed to materialise and the single success story had not been produced by the end of 1980s, the search for possible causes began. The World Bank needed to explain why its enlightened, modernist and rational neo-liberal economics had not generated growth. The answer pointed not towards the programmes themselves, global economy or unrestrained markets, but at 'poor governance' and bureaucratic incompetence of African governments. The World Bank concluded that the lack of accountability, transparency, predictability and the general 'crisis of governance' made it impossible for the right economic policies to work (WB 1989b). Unlike the neo-liberal orthodoxy of the 1980s that ignored the political sphere, the subsequent emergence of the 'good governance' agenda, represented the 'rediscovery of politics and its relevance to development' (Abrahamsen 2000: 41). It recognised that merely 'rolling back the state' was not enough to stimulate growth, and that political actors are important in enacting economic change. The ideal 'good governance state' was not, however, envisaged to break away from the neo-liberal minimal state. It needed to be more efficient and competent in carrying out economic reforms, reformed and democratised for the reforms to succeed (WB 1994). The adjustment programmes remained unchanged and the blame assigned to poorly-governed African states. In the context of structural adjustment programmes democracy, or 'good governance', became valued not as an aim in itself, but as a means to the end of economic growth. 'Good governance,' whose description scholars interpreted as equal to that of democracy (Leftwich 1993), was now seen as a 'condition of, a prerequisite to, development' (Chabal 1998: 294). The collapse of communism in the early 1990s consolidated the indisputable authority of the West over the third world. It also delivered new legitimacy for the failure of adjustments programmes by reinforcing the belief that there is no other alternative to the neo-liberal development paradigm. 'Good governance' agenda was established to demonstrate that 'neo-liberal solutions were not wrong, they were simply incorrectly and insufficiently implemented' (Abrahamsen 2000: 43). The agenda can thus be regarded as:

... a discursive transformation that, while claiming to liberate the poor, enables the West to continue its undisputed hegemony on the African continent under the changed conditions of the new world order. It reproduces the hierarchies of conventional development discourse, whereby the third world is still to be reformed and delivered from its current underdeveloped stage by the first world. Through such representational practice the rich, industrialised countries retain the moral high ground, the right to administer development and democracy to the South (Abrahamsen 2000: 44)

Johnson's vision of Global Britain spearheading free markets and democracy, as drivers of and preconditions for development, brings back the painful memory of adjustment programmes and good governance policies. The speeches, however, silence the past African experience, and do not account for failures. On the one hand, decades of ill-conceived policies dictated by the western financial imperatives of conditional economic liberalization and democratization provided no tangible success (Arnold 2005; Fritz and Menocal 2007; Obi and Cheru 2010; Leftwich 1993) and made Africa home to the world's poorest billion of mankind, far from achieving the development goals (Collier 2008). On the other, seen in the larger discourse of the changing global balance of power, good governance policies served to sustain and reproduce specific forms of power and policies. As such they were not simply a humanitarian effort concerned to promote development, democracy and growth, but rather a development discourse intrinsically linked to larger discursive practices through which global power and domination are exercised. Perhaps the recent proposition of British-led democracy and free market-driven development offered by Johnson is closer to the belief expressed by Ake, the late Nigerian political scientist from Yale, 'the problem is not so much that African development has failed as that it was never really on the agenda in the first place' (1996: 1).

## *2) The dent in the liberal order and decreasing attraction of western values*

Democracy and free markets are in crisis, goes the recent message from political theory, from left to right (Crouch 2004; Rancière 2006; Hay 2007; Krugman 2012; Helleiner 2010; Offe 2006; Huntington 2004). This situation renders Johnson's proposition to African states to embrace democracy and free markets as a condition for development much less attractive than during the euphoric 'end of history' moment of the early 1990s.

Johnson's democratic proposition comes against the wave of the 'post-democracy' debate that emerged in Europe in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century according to which the democratic moment is long gone for the democracies of Western Europe and North America. The traditional mass democracy, which was based on strong parties and the collective organization of social interests, becomes slowly dissolved, as globalization, deregulation, the loss of collective organizational capacity in society have eroded democracy from within. Formal processes and institutions of democracy are rapidly becoming a façade that has lost its democratic substance (Crouch 2004: 22). Other symptoms of ailing democracies include rising inequalities, class antagonisms, lack of collective identity and a capacity for concerted action amongst the underprivileged. The influence of private money on political campaigns, the powerful position of global companies, the proliferation of lobbyists simultaneously with the erosion of collective organizations of the lower classes and of workers' interests have won the balance of power. The transfer of political decisions to private actors and anonymous markets enhances business interests, medialization and manipulation of politics further endangers democratic politics. This new post-democratic power situation has resulted in decreasing trust in political authorities, rising dissatisfaction among democrats, weakening



performance of democratic institutions and the overall destruction of democratic gains of the twentieth century (Dalton 2008; Pharr and Putnam, 2000: 25). Although defenders of democracy are cautious about proclaiming a crisis yet, pointing instead to 'trendless fluctuations in system support' (Norris 2011: 241), or the need for empirical research to find evidence that democracy's quality has declined (Merkel 2013), it is not clear in well-established democracies today who governs, who participates and whose interests are represented.

Similarly, free markets Johnson pledges to promote also appear to have been weakened by a tidal wave of internal challenges. The 2008 global financial crisis was not the first shock that the world economy experienced in the neoliberal era, but certainly the most devastating one since the Great Depression (Öniş and Kutlay 2016). It was the culmination of a 30-year domination of economic policy by a free-market ideology promoting the idea that government activity should be constrained, and ultimately replaced, by market forces. Contrary to previous economic crises during the 1990s and early 2000s in the global periphery, the crisis erupted at the centre of global capitalism (Öniş and Güven 2011). From a financial crisis it has quickly become a general economic crisis, then an employment crisis which in many countries produced a social crisis and, in turn, a political crisis. In the short term, it spread throughout the transatlantic economies, the bedrock of free market economy and liberal democracy, to affect economies globally as one of the greatest 'assaults on global economic stability' (Rudd 2009). Since this defining moment in the political economy of contemporary capitalism, the faith in the 'invisible hand' of free markets has dwindled (Krugman 2012; Helleiner 2010).

In the face of the apparent decline of democratic models, excessive greed of markets and the upsurge of 'illiberal', 'flawed' or 'defective' democracies, Johnson's Global Britain will have a hard sell of underperforming liberal values to Africa. If democracy and free markets have not delivered on their promise at the source of their creation, why then, propose the product of dubious quality for others to emulate? It is the absence of new economic and political solutions that is most striking in Boris' proposition to the world.

### 3) *The appeal of strategic capitalism and African 'hearts and minds'*

The damaged reputation of western liberal values has created vacuum of ideas in all corners of the world. It now appears that 'strategic capitalism' has gained advantage over the Anglo-Saxon and social market variants of Western-style liberal governance in Africa and beyond. Strategic capitalism fundamentally differs from free-market capitalism. Its qualities surpass mere growth performance and include, as their main pillars, centrally controlled investment and trade policies. Policy-makers do not treat state intervention as *ad hoc* phenomenon but consider it a strategic choice to design long-term economic strategy. They also think that, rather than being an end in itself to expand individuals' opportunities, markets are primarily 'tools that serve national interests, or at least those of ruling elites' (Bremmer 2010: 250).

The high growth rates of emerging powers in comparison to the weak recovery of western states have accelerated the 'west vs. the rest' debate about alternative modes of economic governance. Johnson's proposition to push for more of the same comes at a time when the centre of gravity in economic thinking has been swinging away from the neoliberalism promoted primarily by Western countries and institutions towards models of state-led strategic capitalism (Ikenberry 2010; Kagan 2008).

Strategic capitalist model also offers distinct political systems in comparison to liberal democratic models. The 'recession of liberal democracy' (Diamond 2015) and illiberal democracy practices on the rise has opened the door for charismatic leadership and strong governments. They are perceived as the safest route to power and prosperity, while consensus-based pluralist politics is increasingly equated with fragmentation and dilution of national power (Youngs 2015). The strategic capitalist models that rely on illiberal practices—promoting majoritarianism rather than pluralism through a rather narrow understanding of democracy—embraced by the most influential rising powers 'create demonstration effects elsewhere, particularly for emerging middle powers aspiring to punch above their weight' (Öniş and Kutlay 2016: 12).

The enviable growth performance of illiberal regimes turns into a source of admiration for elites in developing countries at the time of evident decline in the West. They increasingly look to the East as a reference point for future economic and political development (Öniş 2016). This admiration influences alliance patterns and role model perceptions of various countries. While Africa struggled to implement economic prescriptions of liberalization and democratization dictated by the West, 600 million Chinese walked above the poverty line in the last three decades (World Bank 2010), accounting for three-quarters of global poverty reduction during that period. China has also embarked on a global quest for resources and markets. It is now massively investing overseas, including Africa, building infrastructure that had been abandoned by the West (Obi and Cheru 2010), buying raw materials and foreign debt. What makes the Chinese strategic capitalism model more attractive to African countries is that economic incentives and credit opportunities are not tied to democratic conditionality principles advocated by Western countries and the European Union.

Africa welcomes Chinese infrastructure commitments that have recently exceeded those of the World Bank (Roxburg *et al* 2010: 15). China's ties to the continent have been boosted with the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), formed in 2000, as the primary institutional vehicle for its strategic engagement with sub-Saharan Africa (Pigato and Tang 2015). Its trade with Africa increased from about \$10 billion in 2000 to \$300 billion in 2015 (*China Daily* 2015). China has become a solid political, economic, cultural and social partner for many African governments (Fioramonti and Kimunguyi 2011). Shift in African strategy is already occurring as 'Look East' policies are becoming the norm in Western, Southern and East Africa (*ARB* 2014; *Pambazuka News* 2009). Countries adjust their trade and investment policies to exploit opportunities presented by the emerging powers of the Global South. Obi

believes (2010: 4) that the Chinese are warmly welcomed for reasons other than those of economics and finance:

Disenchantment with the poor track record of Western development cooperation...the double standards that Western governments practice in their relations with African states, the tendency to give with one hand and to retrieve it with the other, through the unfair trade practices and debt structures, have generated a lot of debate ... and a rallying point for pursuing an alternative and independent African development agenda.

Conversely, there are reasons for Africans to remain cautious. Although the enthusiasm to see China as a partner and a role model is largely visible on the governments' side, Chinese abusive and exploitative practices in extractive industries have been well documented (*The New Yorker* 2013; *The Telegraph* 2010). Fears that China's presence in Africa and the soaring imports of its goods 'may have adverse effects on the nascent industries in the African LDCs and exert more pressure on the most fragile economies' are also common amongst the African elites (Fioramonti and Kimunguyi 2011: 72). Melville and Owen (2005) believe that South-South cooperation between China and Africa may be more efficient but not less self-interested. China, although 'not a colonialist, is a successful capitalist in Africa' and there is a real possibility of China becoming a 'colonizing power someday' with African domestic and foreign policies to be 'decided by Beijing' (Junbo, cited in Bhattacharya 2010: 73). Cyril Obi warns that in the absence of deliberate and proactive African action, the outcome of China's involvement in Africa could turn out to be 'neo-colonialism by invitation' (2010: 2).

China, just like Johnson, is open about capitalism being the aim to achieve. The stark differences, however, remain with regards to means. Choosing carefully how to get there, and in what time, seems to have mattered enormously in the case of China. It has demonstrated that alternative paths are possible. The one-fits-all theory-based model proposed by the West, and based on historical experience of the Western nations has not eradicated poverty in Africa. On the other hand, China's gradual and evidence-based approach, careful pick-and-choose policies, combined with the long-term vision and strong state involvement have provided credible credentials (Dollar 2008, Yifu Lin 2013). China did not make the mistake of believing that freer markets require weaker state institutions (Ravillion 2008). Seen from this angle, Johnson's attack on 'illiberal practices' permeating the world echoes the frequent voices from the West that condemn China's engagement on the continent. In doing so his critique may not be an expression of genuine concern about Africa's future. It may be the 'frank hypocrisy' of the industrialized West (Keet 2010: 21), a desperate attempt to maintain influence over the African territory, its markets and resources.

### **Conclusion: Develop Africa we will**

Problematizing Africa is historically contingent and Johnson's particular reading of history gives evidence to that. Although the observations made under the mango tree need to be

taken with a pinch of salt, Johnson's construction of 'Africa' in his official foreign policy speeches points in the direction of pragmatic approach towards the continent as embraced by conservative governments in the past.

Similarly to colonial and early post-colonial discourses in Britain that recognized Africa as 'a source of trouble rather than opportunity' (Clapham 1996: 88), Johnson's language echoes the imperial vision and sees the continent as a 'problem'. The 'regime of truth' established for Africa includes health concerns, re-emergence of authoritarian regimes, and security threats posed to Britain itself. The continent is seen through the traditional binary of underdeveloped, vulnerable and impoverished Africa positioned *vis a vis* developed, innovative, secure and prosperous Britain that empowers others. Achievements on the African soil, ending the civil war and ebola virus in Sierra Leone, combating pirates in the Horn of Africa, raising millions out of poverty, are seen as an exclusive attainment of Britain, with an occasional help of European partners. This depiction resembles the colonial and post-WW2 discourses that saw Africa as lacking agency and an 'object of pity and charity which could be rescued through British efforts' (Gallagher 2011a: 2295). The lack of clearly articulated trade and investment plans for Africa may indicate that Global Britain will not play a leading role in African affairs. The language of 'Africa rising' and Africa as an opportunity is absent from Johnson's speeches. In the face of massive Chinese investments in Africa, that Britain may not be in a position to match, the UK 'is likely,' as predicted by Williams, 'to develop influential niche roles in the areas of peace and security and international development' (2012: 344).

The past discourses of 'duty' encouraged more 'ethical' Africa policy. They were devoid of self-interest and projected Britain as a benevolent international actor. The language of 'moral duty' is absent from Johnson's first foreign policy speeches. British 'self-interest' is emphasized instead, in the areas of migration and border security, as well as global expansion of liberal values of free markets and democracy, planned through development aid. This represents both the departure from Thatcher and Major's 'more overtly realist foreign policy' that neglected overseas development (Gallagher 2011a: 2295) and the convergence with conservative policies in its realist emphasis on Britain's national interest. Just as Blair's moral duty aimed at developing Africa because it was a good thing to do, Johnson's Africa policy will develop Africa because it is good for Britain. The argument that serving the British self-interest was also beneficial for Africans brings Johnson closer to the imperial conservative discourses of civilizing and modernizing Africa. Yet, presenting the paternalistic, neo-imperialist gaze to the domestic audience may easily backfire. Johnson's views and the record of insults may alienate millions of British citizens of African heritage by encouraging hatred and ignorance. This view of history that resonates with British colonial legacy, compounded by the apparent crisis of British identity has real, geopolitical consequences and the potential to inform the future partnerships and alliances. It remains to be seen how Africa, 'that country,' and its 'natives' respond to Johnson's vision of Global Britain and Africa's place in it.

Johnson's conviction that democracy is a pre-requisite for economic development acknowledges that both economics and politics are needed for development, a belief in line with 'good governance' agenda of the early 1990s. Just like the 'good governance' policy, he does not see democracy as an end in itself, but as a means to achieve development. This representative practice gives Britain the moral high ground and confers upon itself the right to intervene in African affairs. As such it is not simply an altruist effort concerned to promote development, democracy and growth, but a discursive practice that extends power and influence globally. In the world of changing global balance of power, the democratic conditionality serves to sustain and reproduce British forms of power and policies.

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## Abstract

As Britain prepares to leave the European Union after the popular vote of June 2016, the government is embarking on the revision of foreign policy. Boris Johnson, or 'just Boris', has been entrusted with forging the new 'Global Britain' for the post-Brexit era and reinventing British economy around new relationships. Boris has a track record of misrepresenting and offending foreign peoples, leaders and countries. This article assesses the prospects for Africa in Johnson's vision for 'Global Britain' as presented in his foreign policy speeches. The paper unpacks Johnson's discursive construction of 'Africa' and inserts it into a broader historical and political context of British relations with Africa. It argues that, by constructing Africa as a 'problem' and offering liberal values as a condition for development, Johnson is continuing British imperial and post-colonial discourses of 'developing' or 'civilizing' Africa. In the post-Brexit world of a changing global balance of power, democratic conditionality serves to sustain and reproduce British forms of power and policies.