Constructing AFRICOM: understanding US Africa Command's articulation of security, contingency, and Africanism for the 21st century.

by

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the creation and evolution of the US' newest military command, US Africa Command (AFRICOM). It contributes to ongoing debates around 'liberal' government, securitization (in terms of circulation, police and the 'security-development nexus'), 21st century 'humanitarian' warfare, militarization of humanitarianism and development, Africanist and interventionist imaginative geographies, and critical public health. I look at the causes and consequences of AFRICOM's establishment, in particular its involvement in the 2013-16 Ebola epidemic and its role in humanitarian and development work more broadly, to critically assess various claims made by government officials and spokespeople for the command which present AFRICOM as a wholly new type of command. AFRICOM is said to take a holistic 'whole-of-government' approach whereby civilian and military branches of government cooperate in service of the 'three Ds': defense, diplomacy and development; AFRICOM is not imposed, but cooperates with African nations as 'partners', through sharing intelligence and providing training programs for African militaries. Through archival examination of government and strategic documents, media coverage and publicly-available transcripts of interviews with AFRICOM officers, I argue that – contrary to official claims – the command's creation is motivated primarily by US interest in facilitating the circulation of African resources (particularly oil) in patterns conducive to US economic interest, and also reflects increasing concern with Chinese competition. The command's claims to holism or 'African-led' involvement represent less a sea change in strategy and more an attempt to conceal continuing tensions not only between US and African interests, but also between the US military and other humanitarian and development actors operating on the continent. I also present evidence of the *contingency* of AFRICOM's

strategic discourses and practices. African understandings of historical (and continuing) Northern dispossession present challenges for AFRICOM in the form of distrustful African media, leaders and publics; however, official and strategic justifications for AFRICOM have been able to rely heavily on both Africanist tropes and the relative invisibility of the African continent – in addition to newer liberal discourses of 'humanitarian' warfare – to present a vision of AFRICOM as mutually beneficial. AFRICOM's involvement in the Ebola response serves as a case study of these tensions.

Lay Summary

This thesis investigates the causes and consequences of US Africa Command's establishment and continuing expansion. Officials have claimed that AFRICOM is a new type of military command, which takes a holistic 'whole-of-government' approach, cooperates with African nations as 'partners', and promotes US interests by facilitating African development: a command which benefits everyone. Using government and strategic documents, media coverage and transcripts of interviews with officers, I argue that – contrary to official accounts – AFRICOM's primary purpose is to facilitate US access to African resources in the face of Chinese competition. I also show how AFRICOM both struggles with and benefits from Africa's colonial history. For example, this history simultaneously informs African hostility to the command *and* provides justification for US involvement in the form of stereotypes of African nations as uncivilized and in need of guidance. AFRICOM's intervention in the 2013-16 Ebola epidemic serves as a case study of these tensions.

Preface

This thesis is an original, unpublished, and independent document authored by Catriona Gold.

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List of Abbreviations

AFRICOM: United States Africa Command

AIDS: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

CCUS: Combined Command United Shield

CENTCOM: United States Central Command

DTRA: Defense Threat Reduction Agency

DoD: US Department of Defense

EID: Emerging Infectious Diseases

EUCOM: United States European Command

GPHIN: Global Public Health Intelligence Network

HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus Infection

MCC: Millennium Challenge Corporation

MSF: Médecins Sans Frontières

OHDACA: Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster, and Civic Aid

OIG: United States Office of the Inspector General

OLE: Operational Leadership Experiences

PACOM: United States Pacific Command

PEPFAR: United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

SARS: Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome

WHO: World Health Organization

USAID: United States Agency for International Development

US GAO: United States Government Accountability Office

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This thesis is dedicated to Margaret Cook, my first and most enduring advocate; to Joyce Gold, who has no time for anyone's nonsense (especially not mine); and to Michaela Mold, my cherished mentor and the embodiment of public service.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 'We don't have a colonial history'

> *One of the beauties of being American – an American in Africa is we don't have a*
> *colonial history; that helps us, frankly. ... With Americans, there's no – there aren't*
> *hidden agendas. That's not in our constitutional makeup.*
>
> - General Carter F. Ham, AFRICOM Commander,
>
> addresses an audience at Howard University,
>
> (US AFRICOM Public Affairs, 2013)

United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) is the youngest Unified Combatant Command of the US Armed Forces, which commenced operations in 2008 with the overarching goal of '[enabling] Africans to address their security threats and [reducing] threats to U.S. interests' (AFRICOM, 2013). My project contributes to a small but growing body of theoretical and empirical work on AFRICOM[1] via a consideration of the implicit and explicit imaginative geographies (Said, 1978) of Africa and the US which both inform and find further elaboration in discussions of AFRICOM's operations and strategy. Close examination of the strategic and policy discourses surrounding AFRICOM[2], in addition to existing interviews with officers[3],

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[1] Academic contributions substantively addressing AFRICOM cited here include Bachmann (2010; 2014), Bachmann and Gelot (2012), Bamba (2010), Besteman (2009), da Cruz et al (2010), Deen (2013), Francis (2010), Habiyaremye (2011), Jamieson (2009), Kpohazounde (2016), Moore and Walker (2016), N'Diaye and Africa (2009), Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Okakorotu (2010), Onuoha and Ezirim (2010), Wiley (2012), and Zeleza (2013).

[2] US military, government and strategic accounts cited directly include AFRICOM (2007; 2008; 2014; 2015; 2017a; 2017b), Brown (2013), Denn et al (2016), DTRA (n.d.), Dunford (2017), GAO (2010; 2012; 2015), Ham (2013), Kelly (2017), Lake et al (2006), Mboup (2008), Mboup et al (2009), McCallum (2013), McFate (2009a; 2009b), OIG (2009), Rodriguez (2014), and Waldhauser (2017; 2018).

[3] Operational Leadership Experiences interviews cited include Dabkowski (2015), Fox (2015) and Grigsby (2015).

reveals a fusion of Africanist discourses (Miller, 1985; Brantlinger, 1988; Mudimbe, 1988) with 21st century 'liberal' conceptions of warfare and security most comprehensively critiqued by scholars of Foucault (2007). In so doing, it offers a route toward better contextualization of recent US and other Northern military interventions in Libya, Mali and the 2013-16 west African Ebola epidemic, as well as contemporary conceptions of Africa as a space of both threat and opportunity (Bamba, 2010). The command is now one decade old, but academic knowledge about American activities in Africa – at least in comparison to knowledge about US activity elsewhere – remains relatively 'murky' (Moore and Walker, 2016). My most basic contribution, then, is to expand this body of knowledge.

More ambitiously, though, this thesis also contributes empirically and theoretically to the emergent critical geographical (and interdisciplinary) literature on humanitarianism, and furthers growing interdisciplinary concern with the apparent convergence of humanitarian and security aims in both military imaginaries and practice. There is an especially lively debate around the post-colonial deployment of 'international development' as a supposed means by which to prevent or subvert perceived threats to international security: the controversial 'security-development' nexus (Duffield, 2001 and 2007; Reid-Henry, 2011; Stern and Öjendal, 2010). An examination of AFRICOM supports contentions that strategic discourses celebrating this ostensibly innovative convergence of humanitarian and military concerns are misleading. Following Chandler (2007) and Stern and Öjendal's (2010) analysis of the 'security-development nexus' as rhetorical tool, discussions of AFRICOM's much-vaunted 'whole-of-government' (Waldhauser, 2018) approach, new emphasis on the 'three Ds [defense, diplomacy, and development]' (McFate, 2008a), or claims to 'partnership' with African governments (Kelly, 2017) can be understood primarily as an attempt to *conceal* continuing tensions in US strategic

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and policymaking approaches post-9/11, rather than representing a genuine sea change in US strategy. AFRICOM's creation and expansion does reflect changing US strategic priorities post-9/11 (Ndlovu-Gatsheni et al, 2010), but the shifting discourses and practices surrounding US involvement in Africa can still be viewed partly as an articulation of a 'colonial present' (Gregory, 2004) in which US military organizations play an increasingly important role. I elaborate on these themes in more detail in my third and fourth chapters, ultimately concurring with critics that while AFRICOM's creation is a product of increasing US interest in securing access to African resources, especially oil – whose dynamics could be understood as neo-colonial (da Cruz et al, 2010) – the development of the command's strategy, practices and self-representations continues to be shaped in important ways by African agency and the specificities of African contexts. Africa's colonial history itself is productive of not only opportunities (with Africa's marginalization producing the conditions of possibility for US access and leverage on the continent), but also problems (e.g. unexpected African hostility), whose role in shaping US involvement should not be overlooked.

1.2 Research questions

My research is governed by two overarching questions:

— How can critical academic observers understand the rationale for, and implications of, US Africa Command?

— How can an examination of US Africa Command inform academic debates around humanitarianism, 'militarization', and 21st century approaches to security and warfare?

These are divided into the following sub-questions:

1) a. What major themes, strengths or absences characterise existing literatures on AFRICOM and broader conceptualizations of the US military?

b. What existing theoretical tools are most helpful for critically understanding AFRICOM's strategic discourses and practices?

2) a. To what extent does AFRICOM articulate a coherent imaginary of the African continent, American interests, and the role of the command?

b. Do AFRICOM's representations and practices represent continuity or rupture with recent (post-1945) US military involvement in Africa and/or more longstanding colonial dynamics?

c. What is the significance of AFRICOM's emphasis on its humanitarian and development work and its narratives of partnership and collaboration?

3) a. What are the practical implications – in terms of both *problems* and *opportunities* – of colonial history, including Africanist 'imaginative geographies' and African 'return' imaginaries, for US military involvement on the continent?

b. To what extent is it possible or critically useful to read African agency, contingency, and/or imperial contradictions into AFRICOM's creation, development and high-profile interventions?

1.3 Methodology

To answer these questions, I have consulted a wide variety of secondary literature and unclassified archival materials including various policy, strategic and government reports; military journals; and speeches and statements delivered by US military figures. I also closely analysed transcripts of including existing interviews with military personnel obtained as part of

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the Combat Studies Institute's series of 'Operational Leadership Experiences' (OLE), which I will introduce in my third chapter. To place the command in academic and historical context, I have also drawn upon a broad range of academic literature and journalist contributions. Although I do draw extensively on archival material in the form of strategic/policy documents and AFRICOM statements, in addition to more novel empirical material (OLE interviews), this thesis is not intended as a detailed empirical excavation of the command's activities to date. Rather, my intention is to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the central discursive techniques deployed by AFRICOM and its proponents, while simultaneously conducting a qualitative 'meta-analysis' of existing critical engagements with AFRICOM, the US military, and broader geographical imaginaries. AFRICOM's initial establishment generated a small flurry of texts, some critical of perceived US imperial expansion and others – such as Francis' (2010) edited collection – denying any 'clandestine' US interest in Africa. AFRICOM's first decade of operations, up to and including major controversies which emerged in 2017, has provided new and unexpected evidence with which to interrogate these claims.

I refer to 'African' interests throughout this thesis. While Africa is a culturally, socially and politically diverse continent with its own complex international dynamics including rivalries and partnerships, it is not unfair to construe African interests as generally at odds with American interests; for observers like Duffield (2010), the privileged status of Northern life is contingent upon the dispossession and exclusion of Southern others. Indeed, for all AFRICOM's talk of 'stabilizing' the continent, the pursuit of Northern economic interests arguably promotes intra-African conflict and fragmentation. This is well-documented in the context of resource extraction, which is especially pertinent given US interest in African oil. Jamieson (2009) describes a verbal spat between Botswana and South Africa resulting from Botswana indicating

its receptivity to AFRICOM in 2007 while South Africa officially opposed the command, while echoing suggestions that South Africa's early hostility to AFRICOM represented South Africa's attempt to maintain its own relative dominance over southern Africa as a 'regional hegemon' (da Cruz et al, 2010). Onuoha and Ezirim (2010) suggest that Nigeria's presence at the 'forefront' of opposition to AFRICOM – which received significant Northern media attention at the time of the Command's creation (Last, 2007) – is also rendered both possible and sensible by Nigeria's 'historical and contemporary hegemonic disposition in the [West African] subregion' (22).

LeVan (2010) demonstrated that African attitudes to AFRICOM varied between nations — but also that these variations track national direct economic dependence on the US. The case of Botswana suggests that more indirect forms of economic power may be at play, too, such as the extent to which nations are dependent upon revenue generated via transnational extractive corporations; Botswana's dependence on extractive resources has been characterized as 'especially high' compared to most African nations (McFerson, 2010). Clearly complex intra-African rivalries, conflicts, and relationships with the global North do pre-date AFRICOM, and the Command will undoubtedly benefit some Africans (e.g. US-supported military leaders) even as it disadvantages others. It is impossible, however, to undertake any holistic discussion of the command without some level of generalization about the context of its creation and reception. I believe that the widely reported hostility characterizing most public African responses to AFRICOM (BBC, 2008; Last, 2007) justifies the strategic essentialism deployed in the shorthand 'African interests', but request that the reader keep these caveats in mind.

1.4 Structure

This thesis consists of five chapters: three substantive chapters, this introduction, and my conclusion. My research and my analysis throughout the thesis is guided by the questions and subthemes listed above. As each chapter approaches these questions in different ways, I have also defined more specific research questions at the outset of each chapter.

With my second chapter, 'From new interventionism to biopolitical empire: 21st century understandings of humanitarianism', I provide academic context and justification for this project. Here, my goal is twofold: through critically assessing recent scholarly approaches to understanding humanitarianism and its development, I provide context for my thesis, and, perhaps more importantly, demonstrate the usefulness of US Africa Command as a case study for better understanding both the shifts and continuities involved in military humanitarianism and responses to it. Although this chapter contains the most detailed consideration of existing literature on humanitarian intervention, it is not a literature review as such. While the two subsequent chapters draw upon the literature outlined in the first chapter, I have also chosen to enrol additional literature within each chapter as it becomes relevant to address the topic at hand.

In my third chapter, 'Security, partnership — and Africanism: the creation and evolution of US Africa Command, 2008-2018', I introduce the Command and summarise its 10-year history. I then survey and assess existing journalistic and academic interpretations of AFRICOM's creation and development, which also necessitates enrolling broader literatures on the subject of police power and contemporary 'empire'. Examination of AFRICOM's public statements, such as press releases and speeches given by commanders, is a starting point for illuminating the strengths and weaknesses of these various framings. However, additional close

reading of archival sources — such as internal (though non-classified) end-of-assignment interviews with high-ranking AFRICOM officers, articles in military journals, and strategic/policy reports — provides sometimes contrasting insight into the imaginative geographies co-constituted with AFRICOM's practice. Finally, detailed consideration of recent high-profile controversies involving the command is enrolled to support my argument first for the continuing necessity of critiquing (post)colonial Africanist visions, and second for understanding their more recent supplementation with liberal narratives of 'consent' and 'partnership'.

My fourth chapter, 'US Africa Command in global context: health and security in the 2013-16 Ebola epidemic', treats AFRICOM's involvement in the 2013-2016 Ebola epidemic as a case study of broader geographical imaginaries, and a lens to critically examine recent academic narratives about security, health, military intervention and their increasing co-constitution. This conceptual exploration draws upon the strategic and policy documents, command statements, and interviews discussed earlier. I place these accounts in tension with the work of critical health scholars, whose attention to the developing geographical and strategic imaginaries surrounding disease helps to illuminate likely motivations for, and implications of, AFRICOM's intervention in the epidemic.

Throughout this thesis, I argue that *Africanism* — i.e. colonial and continuing Northern imaginaries of Africa — is a constant in military and strategic accounts, and should be foregrounded in understandings of AFRICOM. However, the hegemonic status of Africanist discourses cannot be read straightforwardly as a reflection of US power. In fact, the extent of African resistance to AFRICOM suggests that US political and military articulations of liberal and Africanist geographical imaginaries, including AFRICOM's stress on 'partnership', can

equally be read as an expression of US frustration in the face of African agency. Much criticism of AFRICOM takes the hegemony of the US military and its attendant visions for granted, with the size and reach of the US military (Vine, 2015) and the US' self-positioning as global policeman (Bachmann, 2010; 2014) serving as evidence. Such accounts miss opportunities for a deeper consideration of what AFRICOM's strategic discourses reveal about the *limits* of American power and consequent avenues for resistance.

Chapter 2

From new interventionism to biopolitical empire: 21st century understandings of humanitarianism

In this chapter I introduce and critically assess four key threads of recent thinking about humanitarianism over the past two decades. My primary intention here is to contextualise and justify my master's research into US Africa Command (AFRICOM). Barely a decade old, AFRICOM is the US' newest military command. Military and strategic accounts celebrate AFRICOM as a new type of command, but debates about how it should best be understood and the consequences of its establishment are, in academic terms, still very new. Although work such as Morrissey's (2011b) on other US military commands/still-extant predecessors to AFRICOM (such as US Central Command) offers a number of important cues, the establishment of a new command suggests a need for continuing evaluation, as does a decade of developments in US (and broader Northern) strategy, priorities and Africanist discourses – such as Trump's 'shithole countries' remark (Brown, 2018) – since AFRICOM's establishment.

Furthermore, the specific geographies of AFRICOM's remit and activities — now encompassing almost all of the US' military operations in Africa — suggests that particular attention should be given to the history and present context of US and other Northern (and now also Chinese – Power et al, 2012) involvement in Africa. The academic literature is my first port of call. The scope of such a project of course exceeds what can be accomplished in a single paper, and correspondingly my review of the literature will be continued and elaborated alongside empirical detail in my next two thesis chapters. My second chapter assesses scholarly

and journalistic contributions to understandings of AFRICOM specifically, outlining the most promising themes as well as the gaps in the literature on AFRICOM which my research is intended to address; my third chapter further connects these debates with those around the 'militarization' of humanitarian and development work and changing approaches to public health through a consideration of AFRICOM's role in the Ebola response. This first chapter's survey of recent thinking about humanitarianism establishes the wider context and the theoretical insights necessary to foreground these interventions, in addition to pinpointing absences and shortcomings in the *broader* literature which my specific case study offers an opportunity to address. While I will be drawing upon some key scholarship addressing humanitarianism and/or warfare more broadly, my primary focus is on military humanitarianism.

Humanitarianism has not been a primary consideration for scholarly examinations of AFRICOM specifically. This review is intended to go some way toward demonstrating that it should be. The key point to note — and the justification for my own focus in this chapter — is that despite a growing critical literature on AFRICOM, the command's claims about its humanitarian rationale and pursuits (of which there have been many) have yet to be comprehensively engaged. More than any other US military command, AFRICOM's expanding presence in the US has been justified with reference to development and humanitarian goals. The (historical, geographical, imperial) logics supporting this framing, many of which relate to the specific geographical scope of the command (i.e. Africa) will be explored in my next chapter. The 21st century context of AFRICOM's establishment in 2007-8 is also significant, having facilitated, for example, the command's ongoing reliance on relatively new 'humanitarian' technology, e.g. drones (Parrin and Odele, 2015; Turse, 2015b). AFRICOM's use of drones continues to attract critical attention, including criticisms from geographers (Moore and Walker,

2016). In addition, a number of AFRICOM's initiatives and visions share their rhetoric (and to some extent practices) with humanitarian and development practitioners. Finally, AFRICOM's recent involvement in 'a variety of multinational interventions in Africa' (Turse, 2015b) – including humanitarian-styled interventions in Libya, Mali and the 2013-16 Ebola epidemic – is ample justification for examining it in relation to broader trends in humanitarian intervention, particularly given growing academic interest in and critical debates around humanitarianism (Reid-Henry, 2013).

The first section of this chapter (parts one and two) offers a short overview of key themes and texts, beginning with foundational geopolitically-oriented accounts of humanitarianism and proceeding from there to examine the more historically-oriented insights offered by scholars in the discipline of geography. This chapter's second section (parts three and four) is devoted to unpacking more recent and theoretically-oriented scholarship: first, discussions of humanitarian imaginaries; second, scholarship situating humanitarianism as part of a broader reshaping of approaches to security under advanced liberalism. Most of the scholars discussed in this second section directly address both themes, which are deeply interconnected. The placement of scholars in part three or four is dictated by the overall emphasis of their work.

I have grouped this literature as follows:

1. Geopolitically-oriented critiques of humanitarian (non-)intervention (Chomsky, 1999, 2012; Falk, 2015; Seymour, 2008)

2. Largely historical (and geographical) accounts of early (18th century and onward) humanitarian discourses and practices, with particular attention to their relationship with colonialism and imperialism, their imaginative geographies and enduring legacies

(Driver, 2001; Lambert and Lester, 2004; Legg, 2007, 2008, 2010; Lester, 2000, 2008a, 2008b, 2012a, 2012b; Orford, 2003)

3. Theoretically-attuned accounts of humanitarianism's discursive constitution in recent decades: its philosophical foundation(s), *moral economy* and *imaginative geographies* (Douzinas, 2003, 2006, Fassin, 2012; Owens, 2003; Reid-Henry, 2011, 2014; Reid-Henry and Sending, 2014; Walters, 2014; Weizman, 2011, Zehfuss, 2012).

4. A brief introduction to analyses concerned with the shape of humanitarianism in the 21st century, in particular those positioning humanitarianism alongside developments in contemporary warfare as part and parcel of C21 trends toward securitisation, e.g. as a form of 'police', and accompanying criticisms (Fassin, 2012, Holmqvist, 2012; Ingram, 2013; Reid, 2010; Reid-Henry, 2015). This theme recurs throughout this thesis.

Finally, I will summarise the key themes across these literatures. I will also argue for the relevance of my own chosen case study — US Africa Command — insofar as it provides an empirical basis from which to evaluate the usefulness and compatibility of these varied theoretical approaches, in addition to addressing geographical, temporal and institutional gaps in the literature surveyed here.

2.1 Part I

2.1.1 'Military Humanism' and Geopolitical Strategy

I begin with the overviews of military intervention offered by influential writers Noam Chomsky (1999, 2012) and Richard Falk (2015), who both provide compelling and empirically

rich overviews of trends in military intervention through the 20th and early 21st centuries. Both Falk and Chomsky are deeply critical of the selective erosion of sovereignty (Chomsky, 2012) entailed in arguments for the doctrine of 'Right to Protect' (R2P), and each provide ample evidence of double standards in justifications for intervention. These are significant if we take seriously claims such as those of Weiss that R2P has endured insofar as 'acquired normative territory has been successfully defended', and, additionally, that 'the R2P norm has substantial potential to evolve further in customary international law' (Weiss, 2014: 11). To understand this, Falk is especially concerned with the legal dimensions and precedents for intervention, which he traces to the 'victors' justice' of post-WWII war crimes trials. In contrast, Chomsky focuses on the post-Cold War period, emphasising that the fall of the Soviet Union as a power bloc (and 'system of deterrence') markedly increased both the viability and strategic importance of what he identifies as 'military humanism', or 'the new interventionism' (1999). In addition, a cornerstone of Chomsky's arguments, both about humanitarianism but also elsewhere, is that purported 'failures', 'accidents' and 'unintended consequences' are often precisely the opposite: US "mistakes" are overwhelmingly tactical.' (1999: 19)

Both Chomsky and Falk to some extent succeed in constructing seductive grand narratives which are (perhaps too) difficult to disagree with, although Falk's analysis, which I will return to below, does so with less certainty and less prescription. Chomsky favours tidy explanations to the extent that he rarely hints at information which might contradict or complicate the narrative he has constructed. This is not merely a stylistic point; for understanding matters as contested (and grave) as these, nuance is important — and nuance is not the same thing as detailed empirics, nor can the latter substitute for the former. The same is true of Seymour's (2008) popular book, whose style and subject matter is not dissimilar insofar

as it is empirically impressive but also overly sweeping and suspiciously neat. Approached on their own terms, these may not be objective failings, because Seymour and Chomsky's work is largely if not primarily polemic intended to persuade a wider, not necessarily academic, audience.

Seymour does offer a slightly different focus insofar as he is concerned primarily with drawing parallels between contemporary arguments for intervention and (both contemporary and historical) discursive justifications for various colonial and imperial activities, ultimately 'unmasking' military intervention as a contemporary manifestation of Northern imperialism. His attention to historical continuity is impressive, but his account may be accurate while also insufficient: he and Chomsky offer much in the way of conclusions while doing little to spur academic curiosity. Despite these reservations, it will become clear below that many of their insights are mirrored in a number of subsequent academic texts. Nevertheless, I would argue that Chomsky and Seymour reproduce what Reid-Henry (2014: 420) characterises as 'a false binary between humanitarianism as pure ethic and humanitarianism as self-serving intervention'. In a later publication, Reid-Henry expands upon this criticism to suggest productive avenues for investigation:

> Of course, nobody imagines that military operations waged in the name of human rights should ever be entirely pure in their ends: the fact that the international community acted in Libya in 2011 but not in Syria the year after, told us many things, but it hardly came as a surprise. Yet neither can such interventions be written off as lacking any sense of ethical virtue or moral right. And it is the acute indeterminacy this results in that makes humanitarian interventions such illuminating sites for investigating the intermeshings of law, war, and space in the modern era. (Reid-Henry, 2015: 626-7)

In contrast, Falk's (2015) similarly wide-ranging account of recent humanitarian debates frequently does address precisely these 'intermeshings', in addition to helpfully summarising the key political analyses and criticisms of humanitarianism throughout the 1990s and 2000s. His discussion of Kosovo suggests a central role for 'humanitarianism' in furthering the pursuit of 'bloodless' warfare (i.e. innovation in technologies and strategies of warfare which facilitate waging warfare with zero-to-minimal casualties for the militarily dominant nation(s), or 'intervening parties' in the case of humanitarian intervention). Specifically, Falk argues that during the Clinton era general public skepticism about intervention necessitated efforts toward 'bloodless' warfare as a response to concerns about US military deaths, particularly in pursuit of 'humanitarian' (purportedly non-strategic) goals, with public objection to intervention being seen to result from the Vietnam War's toll on the American middle classes in particular. Others, e.g. Owens (2003: 611) agree insofar as they reference this relationship to Vietnam in passing, but Falk devotes a significant portion of his book to unpacking it. Falk provides necessary historical context for understandings which have been voiced (in less detail) elsewhere, such as when Heng (2009: 63) states that 'Clinton understood that in such [humanitarian] wars, political support was sustainable only if it was bloodless' – for the US.

Falk also writes that subsequently, NATO's 1999 intervention in Kosovo has been touted as the prototype for both purely humanitarian and bloodless (air) warfare. Even setting aside the ample and compelling evidence that it was neither (Chomsky, 1999; Douzinas, 2006; Owens, 2003), Falk's account of this particular humanitarian intervention highlights the inextricable entanglement of (so-called) humanitarian warfare with explicitly strategic warfare. US reliance on drones and air bombardment — in contrast to boots on the ground — has only increased

since, including AFRICOM's expansion of US drone bases and drone coverage in Africa (Parrin and Odele, 2015).

Falk's most significant contribution lies in documenting, through painstaking attention to recent historical case studies, how developments in 'humanitarian' law, intervention and the discourses around it can only be understood — at least since WWII — with reference to broader US strategic goals and military pursuits, and vice versa. For example, he asserts that not only did the events on and immediately following September 11, 2001 have 'a major influence on the diplomacy relevant to humanitarian intervention', but that 'liberal hawks' simultaneously seized the opportunity to argue for 'extending the Kosovo precedent to Iraq' (Falk, 2015: 56) — the 'Kosovo precedent' here meaning retroactive justification for military action:

> [Anne-Marie] Slaughter invoked the distinction in the Kosovo Commission Report that stressed the legitimacy/legality reasoning … She argued that an intervention in Iraq could be legitimised *after* the fact, and was thus provisionally legitimate. (Falk, 2015: 57)

Overall, Falk is, like Chomsky and Seymour, deeply critical of the Northern deployment of 'humanitarianism' as rhetorical justification for military intervention. Falk does, however, suggest that the incredible proliferation of humanitarianism-as-justification may also entail a silver lining, insofar as the Northern use of 'hard power' in the form of interventions tends to produce resistance in the form of soft power tactics, i.e. mass movements from below founded on appeals to the moral high ground. He terms these 'legitimacy wars':

> humanitarian intervention (or its post-colonial euphemistic sequel, 'R2P') is in free-fall decline as a rational geopolitical option, and contrariwise, well-orchestrated legitimacy wars are in the ascendancy … the Internet, social media, and disappointments with

government and corporate behaviour are adding mounting strength to bottom up approaches entered in transnational civil society activism (Falk, 2015: 5-6)

This attentiveness to potential opportunities for resistance which humanitarian discourse may open up, or more generally on the potential for forms of blowback or subversion of liberal norms, is uncommon in much of the literature on humanitarianism (cf Holmqvist's 2012 critique of 'biopolitical' presentations of contemporary empire as 'totalising', explored later in this chapter). Exceptions to the norm, such as Falk (2015) and Reid-Henry (2014), are thus worth taking seriously.

2.1.2 Geographical approaches to humanitarianism

With few exceptions — Reid-Henry (2013; 2014; 2015) and Hyndman (2000) being the most notable — geographers do not occupy a central position in debates about contemporary or recent developments in humanitarianism. Most geographical scholarship on the subject of 'humanitarianism' is concerned with its a) 18th century and b) non-military manifestations: this is work by British historical geographers concerned with British colonial activities.

Nevertheless, the work of these scholars provides important theoretical and methodological cues which may be equally valuable in guiding contemporary research, as well historical context which remains crucial for understanding more recent developments. Continuities abound, while even significant shifts in humanitarian discourse and practice can be understood to occur partly in response to these histories, which continue to shape our 'colonial present' (Gregory, 2004). Work such as that of Driver (2001) finds institutions such as the

Aborigines Protection Society and the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery society to be both representative and constitutive of a broader humanity; these organisations 'portrayed the values of liberty, humanity and justice as sacred gifts, to be bestowed by the British on the world at large' (Driver, 2001: 75). This conclusion is reaffirmed in numerous recent engagements by fellow geographers Lambert and Lester (2004), Lester (2000; 2008a; 2008b; 2012a; 2012b) and Legg (2008, 2010).

Methodologically speaking, the empirically dense historico-biographical approach displayed by these texts is often favoured by historical geographers in seeking to understand Britain's colonial history more generally. The same impulses underpin both colonial biographical work and calls (Fassin, 2012) for closer institutional work. This body of geographical work is not only attentive to the particular, but has also striven to avoid the sort of textualism of which Said (1978) and other postcolonial theorists have been accused (summarized in Sharp, 2009; McEwan, 2009). Driver (2001: 8) contends that 'texts have been too quickly reduced to a sort of imperial will-to-power … an essentialized model of 'colonial discourse' which obscures the heterogeneous, contingent and conflictual character of imperial projects', and thus has sought to emphasise the production, circulation and consumption of colonial texts. Meanwhile, Lambert and Lester's (2004) complicating analysis urges attentiveness to the networked heterogeneity of colonial discourse, imploring us to avoid monolithic accounts of imperialism or humanitarianism. We are to consider 'imperialism as a set of discourses and practices both producing, and produced by, bundles of imaginative and material networks connecting people in distant places, always unevenly and always in contested ways' (Lambert and Lester, 2004: 338), with imperialism and humanitarianism 'reflexively coconstitutive' (321) rather than proceeding in precise lockstep.

There is much to recommend such approaches, although how these methods might best be adapted to analyse contemporary events remains an open question. It is also encouraging that this work has seen something of an increase in theoretical pluralism over the past decade: Lester's (2012b) examination of colonial humanism's racial aspects engages with post-humanism and affect theory, after Anderson (2007), as well as the postcolonial staples of much earlier work. Broadly speaking, this body of literature highlights the ways in which humanitarianism has always comprised 'a contradictory mixture of aims and ambitions: encompassing social improvement, religious conviction, rationalizing imperatives, and scientific and philosophical discourses' (Reid-Henry, 2014: 418). Lester in particular is continually attentive to the ways in which 19th century humanitarianism existed in tension with colonial discourse. Though commonalities have been highlighted, the *tensions* between imperial and humanitarian discourse are underexplored in the contemporary context. The cautious, nuanced approach to understanding humanitarianism exhibited by historical geographers is a useful counterpoint to the work discussed in the previous section.

In a similar vein, the often-cited and deeply spatial work of legal scholar Anne Orford (2003) is an instructive development of what *Orientalism* (Said, 1978) began. She compellingly fleshes out the imaginative geographies of humanitarian intervention, perhaps suggesting a route for academics currently more concerned with other forms of 'benevolent' imaginary (e.g. Tiffin and Gilbert, 2008) to begin thinking about the contemporary framing of interventionist violence in ways akin to charity. She also devotes a chapter to unpacking the key spatial imaginaries at play in interventionist discourse, providing empirical examples of the ways in which the causes of security and humanitarian crises have been discursively 'localized', despite clear international responsibility for 'structural violence' (106) which fomented conflict:

state or local leaders or governments are presented as posing the major challenges to human rights and democracy, and humanitarian crises are seen as largely caused by actions and developments initiated and carried out by local or governmental actors or institutions … driven by forms of premodern tribalism, ethnic tensions and religious factionalism (Orford, 2003: 85)

In thinking about the imaginaries of intervention, Orford considers race, gender, economics *and* institutional dynamics together. Discussing former Yugoslavia, she emphasises the economic when outlining how 'Structural adjustment … in stripping the state of most of its functions, created a vacuum in which 'ethnic nationalism offered a form of community and identity' (95). Following on, her discussion of Northern *failure* to intervene effectively in the Rwandan genocide balances reflections on the institutional factors involved (visiting some similar themes to Barnett's more detailed 2001 account) with a similar economic critique of structural adjustment. She contends: 'racist violence was in part fuelled by rising frustration and unfulfilled expectations in Rwanda during a period of extreme economic and political change' (105). Her account may be strongest where it deconstructs the 'localisation' of conflict, which she does primarily with reference to economic factors. In summary, '[I]ntervention discourse ignores almost completely the current historical context of rapid and massive global economic change within which security and humanitarian crises emerge and security actions take place.' (Orford, 2003: 165)

Her attention to race and gender is less empirically grounded. She provides economic grounds for rejecting the framing of conflicts as intractable ethnic disputes, but race and gender are largely figurative in her account, as they are most prominent in her discussion of the

imaginary figures of intervener versus intervened. Though Orford is specifically focused on the imaginaries of intervention, her explanation of these could be placed in the context of what Miller (1985), in his survey of French colonial literature, calls 'Africanism', and which has also been demonstrated to be equally pervasive in British colonial literature (Brantlinger, 1988). In interventionist discourse, Orford argues, victims are constructed as black and female (or feminine), whereas intervening saviours possess 'masculinism, whiteness and internationialism' (179). Justifications for intervention encourage readers to identify with 'a white, violent, masculine hero', which has legal implications insofar as it 'limits the capacity of international law to address the ways in which the hero's journey of action and self-validation affects the lives of human beings caught up in that quest.' According to Orford, there is no discursive space for agency on the part of the intervened. Meanwhile, humanitarian discourse exhibits a clear moral geography, whereby the 'international' (according to Chomsky, a euphemism for 'the US and its allies') is a source of order and salvation, with the evils of conflict arising purely locally.

2.2   Part II

2.2.1 Military-humanitarian discourse and liberalism: from human rights to lesser evils

Understanding contemporary humanitarianism requires attending to both its material and its epistemological dimensions. The scholarship discussed below is primarily concerned with the latter. Zizek (2008) subsumes both humanitarian and charitable endeavours under a 'liberal communist' framework wherein their key function is to obscure the violence at the heart of the liberal capitalist project. Other scholars trace the problems with humanitarianism to humanism

itself (Lester, 2012b), human rights (Moyn, 2010, 2014; Douzinas, 2003, 2006) or indeed lack of definition of the taken-for-granted concept of 'humanity' (Zehfuss, 2012). With the possible exception of Chomsky (who is equally critical, but focuses primarily on post-Cold War events), what these scholars share is a commitment to unpacking humanitarianism's ideological foundations and a belief in the continuing influence of past developments, including parallels between contemporary and historical discourses. In attempting to establish the 'foundations' of humanitarianism, these scholars emphasise the importance of understanding historical *continuity* in humanitarian thought and practice. This body of work can be contrasted with scholarship which emphasises dramatic *shifts* in the evolution of humanitarianism (Duffield, 2001; Reid, 2010): despite shared theoretical influences, quite different narratives result. While most scholarship does not fall neatly into either camp, considering scholarship in relation to an imagined spectrum of emphasis (from continuity—novelty) is a starting point for assessing its relative contribution and its limitations.

2.2.2   Calculation and asymmetry

Fassin (2012), Weizman (2011) and Reid-Henry (2014) all signal humanitarianism's ideological role in constituting a particular kind of (liberal) politics. Drawing upon the work of Israeli philosopher Adi Ophir, Weizman defines 'the humanitarian present' as the condition of collusion 'technologies of humanitarianism, human rights and humanitarian law with military and political powers' (Weizman, 2011: 4). Weizman is concerned primarily with the philosophical underpinnings and implications of the *legal* framework's moral calculus of violence. In particular, he addresses the deployment of the concept of 'lesser evil' in

international humanitarian law (IHL). This is most prominently in one of IHL's central legal principles: *proportionality*, i.e. 'a moderating principle that seeks to constrain the use of force'. According to Weizman (2011: 11), 'Western militaries tend to believe that by moderating the violence they perpetrate, they might be able to govern populations more efficiently and even finally win over the hearts and minds that have continuously eluded them'.

Weizman's main contribution lies in bringing this idea of 'proportionality' into conversation with critical Foucauldian scholarship on liberal governance and the management of populations. Weizman ultimately extends this analysis to argue that humanitarian intervention, understood as part of the overall liberal project sketched by Foucault (2007), has assumed new respectability as part of an overall doctrine striving for 'lesser evil', which can be contrasted with more ambitious humanitarian projects concerned with salvation from evil (e.g. what Barnett's 2011 historical account calls 'alchemical' humanitarianism). The scope of this analysis is impressive. However, when juxtaposed with the scholarship discussed in the second section of this chapter, it can be argued that Weizman neglects some significant continuities. For example, his discussion of the 1984-5 Ethiopian famine provides a detailed sketch of the political conflicts expressed through debate over the famine, but offers less consideration of the enduring racial imaginaries at play. The role of specifically colonial (Africanist) imaginaries, such as those explored by Brantlinger (1988), Miller (1985) or Mudimbe (1988), is largely absent from an account which is primarily concerned with ideas of 'lesser evil' in liberal governance.

Furthermore, while Weizman's specific focus on IHL and use of the term 'proportionality' is particular to his work, his account of proportionality is consonant with the analyses offered by Chomsky (1999, 2012) , Falk (2015) and Douzinas (2003, 2006) among other theorists of 'humanitarian' warfare. The importance — and asymmetry — of

'proportionality' was arguably demonstrated by US political emphasis on the 'bloodlessness' of NATO's war in Kosovo as a means to legitimise said war, and has been a recurring theme in official US discourse about subsequent interventions (Falk, 2015). This is independent of its effectiveness: Douzinas (2006) notes that ethnic cleansing intensified after the bombing, and Chomsky (1999: 16) goes further in suggesting that the intervening parties *knowingly* exacerbated this violence: 'With full awareness of the likely consequences, Clinton and Blair decided in favour of a war that led to a radical escalation of ethnic cleansing along with other deleterious effects.'

Perhaps most importantly, as Douzinas (2006: 367) observes, 'the high flight altitudes of the bombers increased significantly civilian "collateral damage."' For Weizman the defining characteristic of proportionality is that it is 'not about clear lines of prohibition but rather about *calculating and determining balances and degrees*' (Weizman, 2011: 11; emphasis added). To Weizman, it may be a given that these calculations afford unequal weight to lives. However, the manner in which such asymmetries are justified are numerous, often possess deep historical roots, and are arguably essential to the plausibility and sustainability of liberalism's calculative rationalities in the first place. Reid-Henry's (2014: 425) discussion of humanitarianism's early origins — that its 'calculations were themselves *geographically enframed* and applied to *some people more than others*' (emphasis added) — is equally applicable today. This has implications for how such calculations might be overturned or resisted: it is the *ongoing* construction and reconstruction of such moral-geographical imaginaries — as demonstrated convincingly by Butler (2009) — which offers scope for intervention.

In skating over this consideration, Weizman might also be overlooking a contemporary development. That is, as important (and problematic) as the idea of 'proportionality' and its

necessary corollary — asymmetry — are, these ideas may now be overshadowed, at least in the

history of recent intervention, by what Chamayou calls 'combat immunity'. According to

Chamayou (2015: 127) 'the practical quasi-invulnerability of the dominant camp was, at the end

of the twentieth century, set up as the dominant ethical and political norm.' Returning to the

example of 'collateral damage' in Kosovo, Chamayou — like Douzinas (2006) — notes that 'the

very altitude that ensured that the lives of the pilots were not exposed also meant a potential loss

of accuracy for the air strikes' (Chamayou, 2015: 128). However, for him the celebratory

discourse around this is not simply evidence of *continuing* imperial logics in warfare: this now-

dominant political and ethical *norm* of immunity, or invulnerability, is specific to contemporary

imperial violence, unlike asymmetries of *force* and vulnerability, which he says have been 'a

classic feature of all the "small wars" of history' (127).

Inaugurated in 'humanitarian' warfare, this new 'principle of immunity for the imperial

combatant' (130), i.e. near-total protection of soldiers was rapidly repurposed in other contexts:

for example, as a justification for Israel's *disproportionate* use of force against Palestinians. The

use of massive force against Palestinians is officially justified by Israel's government in terms of

soldier protection, implying and enacting a calculation whereby the life of a single Israeli soldier

assumes precedence over the lives of hundreds of Palestinians (130). It could be questioned

whether this discursive shift is truly a significant development, or simply a reflection of the

continuing technologically-facilitated refinement of what Chamayou acknowledges are

longstanding material asymmetries in terms of force and thus vulnerability. However, there is

clear agreement between all of these theorists that the *humanitarian* intervention in Kosovo

either created or sharpened both normative discourses and practices of military invulnerability

for intervening states — with far-reaching ramifications.

2.2.3 Technology and accidents

The above questions are to be considered in addition to Weizman's work. The broader questions raised by Weizman's writing are first and foremost a testament to both its relevance and ambition. Perhaps the most compelling empirical evidences for Weizman's presentation of the 'humanitarian present' as a novel development are the very real technological developments which have allegedly made new kinds of warfare possible. Claims about the improved accuracy or precision of new weaponry should be viewed with suspicion, because the discursive enrolment of technology — the argument that it is *now* possible to wage 'humanitarian' war — has been a central component of arguments for warfare (humanitarian or otherwise) from at least Kosovo onward. In the US, Falk (2015) contextualises this attention to technological improvements as part of efforts to deflect fundamentally damning interpretations of the US defeat in Vietnam. That is, framing past failures as technical problems allows for the construction of a political imaginary in which warfare can succeed because of (and be justified in relation to) *technological* improvements. This development mirrors Holmqvist's (2012) contention that conventional framings of warfare as 'risk management' or the creation of 'order' allow the fundamental political aspects and problems of warfare to drop out of view. In both accounts, political questions are substituted by technical questions. Zehfuss agrees that, despite the much longer history of humanitarian imaginaries, the role of new technology is now significant in the ongoing construction of such visions:

Western violence appears as somehow not as violent as non-Western violence …

Western violence is construed as a lesser violence—a violence that is said to lead to

fewer deaths, an antiviolent violence. This representation, and its implication that such

violence is in tune with the requirements of ethics, owes something to the influential

interpretation of the impact of the availability of high-tech weaponry. (Zehfuss, 2012:

870)

Walters (2014) approaches this question of technology from an unusual angle: that of science and technology studies, which is not commonly referenced in debates around humanitarianism or warfare. His Latourian intervention argues for the importance of considering the material properties of the object itself. For Walters, the drone 'is not just another weapon, but a technology that intensifies particular lines of problematization (e.g. the logic of discrimination) while foreclosing others' (109). Walters is careful to avoid overstating the role of material agency, cautioning 'against a wholesale application of this framework to issues of security' on the grounds that 'actor-network theory was developed largely as an anthropology of scientific worlds and practices, and faces certain problems when we 'translate' it to examine regimes of security governance' (103). While I share Mitchell's (2016) skepticism about much recent scholarly interest in 'the material', Walters' attention to both broader theoretical context and awareness of his limitations allows him to pre-empt such critiques. Most importantly, it is impossible to deny that the particular characteristics of the drone and other favoured instruments of 'bloodless' or 'humanitarian' warfare do influence the ways in which they can become 'affectively laden' and enrolled to support broader discourses around humanitarianism and warmaking. Questions of materiality are also addressed at length in Weizman's (2012) book,

albeit with a different emphasis: Weizman is concerned with the attribution of 'truth' to objects as evidence in the wake of conflict. In discourses of calculability, this material 'witnessing' is increasingly presented as more reliable than human testimony.

Returning to the question of how technology is enrolled to frame war as 'humanitarian', Owens (2003) focuses in particular on the idea of the 'accident'. Much as Chomsky critiqued what he saw as a feigned ignorance about the likely consequences of bombing in Kosovo, Owens draws similar conclusions about the political framing of the increased civilian deaths occurring as a direct result of NATO's commitment to 'bloodless' (for NATO) warfare, and the broader emphasis since on what has become known as 'force protection'. Owens argues that it is precisely this framing of civilian deaths as 'accidental' which allows for them to be written out of liberal calculations such as those later discussed by Weizman. While emphasising the role of the 'accident' in *narratives* of warmaking, Owens is clear that it is equally important to engage the material bases of political claims to have reduced civilian casualties. Meanwhile, the 'accident' is only one possible justification for noncombatant deaths: in other contexts, the figure of the non-domestic civilian has been disappeared entirely from accounts of warfare (Gregory, 2006).

Finally, geographer Ryan Burns' (2014) engagement with the 'knowledge politics' of 'digital humanitarianism' could be read as a caution against totalising accounts of technology's role. Digital humanitarianism constitutes a much newer series of technological developments, and he is usefully attentive to its specifics in much the same way as the historical geographers mentioned earlier, noting for example that in debates over technological platforms and the uses of data, 'appeals to the legitimacy of expert opinion were *challenged'* (Burns, 2014: 55; emphasis in original). This is not something that scholars would be able to ascertain by a cursory

survey of the discourses around these technologies, because 'in retelling the story of digital humanitarian projects, official accounts are recorded and alternative viewpoints strategically marginalized' (Burns, 2014: 59). This may not be equally true of the discipline's approach to other areas, but if geographers can be said to offer a methodological caution for understandings of humanitarianism, it might be that it is important that attention to either structure or rupture does not entirely override consideration of everyday practices and contestation.

2.2.4   Humanitarianism's place in the 21st century: moral economies and biopolitics

Among the scholarship discussed thus far, NATO's 1999 intervention in Kosovo is unanimously agreed upon as a key turning point for the development of humanitarian and broader military discourses and practices. However, the last 19 years have not been uneventful. I have touched upon humanitarianism's longer history: I wish to turn now to scholarship concerned with more recent developments in humanitarianism. As I have argued, the strongest analyses of humanitarianism situate recent developments in relation not only to the past two decades, but — more ambitiously — the past two centuries. This is not necessarily the norm for such literature: for example, Reid-Henry identifies 'a tendency to presentism in some of the political science literature on humanitarianism' (Reid-Henry, 2014: 420).

Didier Fassin is another author whose analysis Reid-Henry (2014: 421) finds, at times, 'ahistorical'. Fassin (2012: 2) describes humanitarianism as 'a language that inextricably links values and affects, and serves both to define and to justify discourses and practices of the government of human beings'. In contrast to the more historical and institutional approaches taken by Moyn (2010, 2014) and Barnett (2011) in their surveys of human rights and

humanitarian discourses respectively, Fassin — a medical anthropologist and former vice

president of *Médecins Sans Frontières* — adopts a Foucauldian approach to humanitarian

regimes, or the thoroughly modern but always dynamic *moral economy* of 'humanitarian reason'.

Reid-Henry recognises the importance of discourses of morality, while signalling the difficulty

in defining the precise contours of such a 'moral economy': 'even if the dominant Western form

of humanitarianism may constitute no settled doctrine itself, it does present a consistently fertile

way of framing political issues in a moral vernacular and vice versa' (Reid-Henry, 2013: 753).

Another theme which looms large in Fassin's work and in other accounts of

humanitarianism's recent developments is the contemporary pairing of 'emergency' and

'exception' (both temporal and spatial). Ingram's (2012) discussion of HIV/AIDS

'exceptionalism' in aid discourse offers a window into understanding how such discourses are

produced: ideological shifts are not spontaneous, but are grounded in and arise from diverse and

specific material and strategic considerations (in this case, NGOs positioning HIV/AIDs as a

crisis of *exceptional* magnitude in order to mobilize action and win funding). There is some

overlap with accounts which position a sense of *emergency* as central to this political

imagination: what Calhoun (2004) terms the 'emergency imaginary' of humanitarianism, or what

Zizek (2008: 5) identifies as a 'fake sense of urgency that pervades the left-liberal humanitarian

discourse on violence'. Humanitarian initiatives, including military interventions, can then be

justified by way of appeals to increasingly well-established ideas of 'emergency' and

'exception', in addition to the discourses of 'proportionality' or 'bloodlessness' discussed above.

These recurring themes of exceptionalism and emergency signal another important

connection with broader literatures addressing these themes in the 'War on Terror', e.g. where

Reid-Henry (2014: 419) contends that 'humanitarian ambitions have increasingly been subsumed

within the wider discourse of exceptionality that permeates the post 9/11 "everywhere war"'.

Reid-Henry (2015) also explicitly links R2P and military humanitarianism more broadly to theories of 'police' power — these are attributed by Reid-Henry to Foucault, and have probably enjoyed their most extensive exploration in the work of Mark Neocleous (e.g. Neocleous, 2013; 2014). Reid-Henry's enrolment of understandings of 'police' power in criticisms of military intervention is of particular interest to my work, because existing critical literature which addresses US Africa Command (Bachmann, 2010, 2014), the evolution of US military commands (Morrissey, 2011b) or Northern intervention in Africa more broadly (Bachmann and Gelot, 2012) has already positioned it as part of a regime of police power. Fassin and Pandolfi's (2010) edited collection is another significant attempt to bring together theorisations of humanitarianism, while Bachmann et al.'s (2015) edited collection is similarly concerned with intervention as policing.

One example of biopolitics being brought directly to bear on humanitarianism is found in the work of Julian Reid. For him, a biopolitical approach means dismissing critiques which position 'the politicization of humanitarianism … as a result of its ideological capture by powerful states' on the grounds that such accounts are 'far too simplistic' (Reid, 2010: 392). As Reid does not name the authors he is referring to, the claim is difficult to assess, but could be interpreted as a useful caution even in the absence of specificity (and thus accountability). Holmqvist (2012) offers a counter-critique:

> If understandings of the relationship between space/spatiality–politics–war are simply cemented as a totalised and totalising biopolitical empire, then nothing is actually *explained*; it is too neat, too complete. (Holmqvist, 2012: 231)

Holmqvist suggests that biopolitical accounts may not do much more than mirror liberal interventionist discourse; the key difference is their moral valence, which may not hold immense value in and of itself. This critique is somewhat similar to my reservations about Chomsky and Seymour's work, but perhaps more damning insofar as writers on biopolitics cannot claim to be simplifying matters for the benefit of a popular audience. On the contrary, several authors (most prominently Hardt and Negri, and their briefly-incendiary *Empire* trilogy) could be accused of deliberate obfuscation or over-academising, e.g. through unnecessarily complex language and overreliance on/invention of specialist terminology. Reid-Henry's (2011) concern about much of the literature on the 'security-development nexus' (most famously articulated by Duffield, 2001, who Reid cites approvingly) — that is, that it presumes the 'success' of Northern projects — also resonates here:

> there is an overwhelming sense that the nexus is a point of leverage, or pivot, through which 'we' have control of 'them'. This, too, is largely true, but it ought not distract us from also paying attention to the consequences – the return impact – of such a nexus for those who seek to deploy it. (Reid-Henry, 2011: 100)

These arguments over biopolitics constitute one of the most polarized debates in the literature on contemporary warfare. Despite some significant exceptions, though, the majority of the literature on biopolitics is not directly concerned with humanitarianism and so falls outside the scope of this chapter. I will be returning to this body of literature in the next two chapters, however, as it does provide useful theoretical context for understanding existing criticisms of AFRICOM.

2.3 Conclusion

Among the scholarship I have surveyed, areas of agreement could be summarised as follows. First, the importance of Kosovo as pivotal moment for discourses and practices of intervention. Second, the inextricability of humanitarian warfare from explicitly strategic warfare, e.g. where US failure in Vietnam shaped NATO's approach to Kosovo, and where R2P was invoked about Iraq as strategic justifications for the invasion evaporated (Falk, 2015; Weiss, 2014). Third, the discursive centrality (and perhaps, to a lesser extent, the material agency) of new technology in understandings of humanitarian warfare, in particular the extent to which contemporary warmaking is understood as more humane. One picture which emerges is that the blurring of such boundaries — at least discursively, as 'humanitarian' is appended to ever more initiatives — is perhaps defining the shape of warfare in the 21st century. This may be because (as Chomsky contends) it is always a question of geopolitical strategy, which is simply increasingly veiled in humanitarian rhetoric. Equally, however, establishing truly humanitarian versus truly strategic intention might be beside the point in a context where so many of the technologies and underlying rationalities of warfare are shared.

The ramifications of changing geopolitical variables — including UK and US turns to increasingly nationalist and protectionist rhetoric, and the US' swerve toward authoritarianism (measured quantitatively in Economist Intelligence Unit, 2016, and arguably further consolidated during Trump's presidency) — remain to be seen. Trump railed against NATO prior to his election, but subsequently appeared to backpedal (Jenkins, 2017). Meanwhile, UK Prime Minister Theresa May recently announced that 'The days of Britain and America intervening in sovereign countries in an attempt to remake the world in our own image are over' (May, 2017;

quoted in Pasha-Robinson, 2017). Of course, around the turn of the century, similar remarks

were made by neoconservatives including George W. Bush. Their apparent conviction did not

appear to survive the events of September 11, 2001 (Falk, 2015; Weiss, 2014). The inherent

uncertainty accompanying any major change in American political leadership suggests that

scholars of humanitarianism would (as ever) be wise to watch closely, while resisting the

temptation to seize upon unfolding discussions as certain evidence of new directions for

intervention. As Jenkins (2017) asserted in response to May's speech: 'To grasp at a few wild

remarks by Trump as basis for a new global order is near reckless.'

Fassin (2012: 245) calls for 'a critical thinking located "at the frontiers"', both

theoretically and methodologically. In light of this, geographers should be seeking to further and

bolster a dual focus on the discursive and the material in terms of institutions, processes and

impacts, with more work especially needed to attend to the specificities of institutions.

Investigations of contemporary humanitarian institutions, such as the ethnographic work of

Barnett (2002) with the United Nations or Hopgood (2006) with Amnesty International, are too

few and far between, and have yet to be either undertaken or interrogated by geographers. This is

a missed opportunity, as works such as Barnett's are often in dire need of geographical critique.

Our familiarity with Said's (1978) 'imaginative geographies' (cf Gregory, 2004) should be

brought into conversation with work which might otherwise perpetuate imperial narratives or

provide an oppositional mirror which does not offer scope for critical intervention (Holmqvist,

2012).

I began this chapter by arguing for the necessity of bringing insights found in the

literature on humanitarianism to bear on my investigation into AFRICOM, and suggested that the

converse may be equally true. AFRICOM has been projected as a vehicle for both

humanitarianism *and* the service of US strategic interests. The command embodies an ongoing

framing of US warmaking and processes of securitisation as 'humanitarian' in terms of its

reliance on drones and its emphasis on humanitarianism, development and mutual cooperation.

The relative youth of the command also renders it an ideal case study for assessing the changing

shape of the discursive constructions and practices involved in 'humanitarian' military activity.

Meanwhile, the geographic scope of AFRICOM offers a route into understanding US

military activities in relation to specific contemporary geopolitics (e.g. US competition with

China), historical geographies of colonialism in the region and colonial (and/including

humanitarian) discourse about the region. This thesis' attention to AFRICOM responds to

Fassin's (2012) call for careful empirics, while simultaneously addressing criticisms of existing

literature on humanitarianism as ahistorical, presentist or totalising. I am particularly interested

in the extent to which analyses of interventions elsewhere are transferable to this context. For

example, how do questions of sovereignty — or interventionist disregard for it — play out in

conversations about AFRICOM, given both the colonial nature of many African state boundaries

(i.e. the European imposition of often inappropriate divisions) and the recurring theme of African

state 'failure' in policy discourses? Falk (2015: 10) notes that colonial relations did not typically

entail 'mutual respect for sovereignty'. If African sovereignty was and is understood differently

from e.g. Eastern European sovereignty, what implications does this have for the scope of

interventionist discourse and practice in Africa? I continue to explore these questions throughout

this thesis.

Chapter 3

Security, partnership — and Africanism: the creation and evolution of US Africa Command, 2008-2018.

This chapter provides a critical theoretical overview of the creation and expansion of US Africa Command. Guided by the overarching question of how we should think about AFRICOM, I begin with an examination of existing knowledge and interpretations of the command, exploring their limitations and suggesting potential critical syntheses. I will summarize official accounts of AFRICOM's creation and evolution, along with critical literatures which place the command within a broader context of shifting approaches to – and narratives about – warfare, liberal approaches to security, and the role of the US military in maintaining world 'order'. Key themes in literature critical of AFRICOM or US military activities more broadly include interrelated theoretical frameworks such as 'police' or 'policing' (Neocleous, 2013; Bachmann, 2014), the drive to secure circulation (Cowen, 2014), and 'geoeconomics' (Cowen and Smith, 2009; Morrissey, 2011b). I address each of these, arguing for their salience while also constructing an overarching argument that the value of contemporary theorizing for understanding AFRICOM's development is contingent on the extent to which it accounts for the specific considerations of African contexts and especially the social and political ramifications of Africa's colonial history.

Part of my contribution is to bring this recent work on the Command into conversation with wider literatures addressing the continuing relevance of geographical and geopolitical imaginaries enrolled to support American foreign policy. These analytical themes are often

neglected in recent work on the Command or American militarism more broadly. I devote particular attention to AFRICOM's revival and utilization of historical discourses of Africanism (Miller, 1985), which I argue have been combined effectively with (rather than superseded by) newer liberal geopolitical discourses: for example, in the elision of relations of power through continuing emphasis on 'collaborative' activities, invocation of African support for US activities, and claims about AFRICOM's innovative 'whole-of-government' approach (Waldhauser, 2018). Before AFRICOM's inception, representatives stressed the technological and strategic sophistication of AFRICOM, its 'collaborative' and 'partner-led' approach, and 'light footprint' in terms of infrastructure on the continent (McFate, 2008). The success of such narratives in easing longstanding African 'skepticism and suspicion' (Mboup et al, 2009: 87) is dubious (LeVan, 2010; Rock, 2014), but they remain a cornerstone of the story told to Americans. In particular, I show that the command's much-vaunted 'light footprint' approach to infrastructure and operations must be situated within, and understood as an elaboration of, the discourses of 'humanitarian' or 'bloodless' warfare arising at the turn of the century and discussed in my previous chapter. Toward the end of this chapter, I illustrate how Africanist imaginative geographies and liberal security narratives have been deployed together — under a broader framework of 'consent' — to manage recent domestic concern and criticism over service member deaths and alleged American involvement in torture.

Before elaborating on these theoretical themes, I will first provide a brief summary of US Africa Command's development. To situate AFRICOM in broader US military and strategic context, I will revisit literature addressed in the previous chapter, along with other critical analyses of US militarism. In terms of empirical material, I will be drawing directly upon official US military and strategic writing about AFRICOM, in addition to the surveys of these archives

undertaken by other authors. Official statements, press releases and publications issued around AFRICOM have already been well-documented by critical writers. Rather than duplicating these authors' archival work, I seek to synthesize their insights both *theoretically* with those of broader literatures around policing, imaginative geography, 21st century liberal understandings of and approaches to security and warfare; and *empirically* with a consideration of more recent, novel empirical material. In addition to close readings of recent high-profile events involving the command, I will be utilizing a series of interviews with AFRICOM officers which has thus far gone unmentioned in critical scholarly and journalistic accounts of AFRICOM. These largely support existing critical contentions, but also raise intriguing questions about the role of both Northern imaginative geographies and African political understandings.

3.1 AFRICOM's creation

US Africa Command began operations in 2007. AFRICOM's fourth commander — Gen. Thomas Waldhauser — assumed the role in July 2016. Prior commanders include David Rodriguez (2013-16), Carter Ham (2011-2013) and William Ward (2007-2011). Before AFRICOM's establishment, the African continent fell under the purview of EUCOM (United States European Command), CENTCOM (Central Command) and PACOM (Pacific Command). Now — with the exception of Egypt, which is still assigned to CENTCOM — AFRICOM's 'Area of Responsibility' encompasses the whole of the African continent (AFRICOM, 2017b).

Official accounts – catalogued effectively by LeVan (2010), Bachmann (2010; 2014) and Turse (2015c) – describe AFRICOM as unlike any other military command, citing unparalleled integration of development and security concerns, a sophisticated 'small footprint' strategy, and

a plethora of collaborative partnerships with African nations. However, a number of critics (e.g. Mboup et al, 2009; Rock, 2014; Turse, 2015c) contend that US military activities in Africa are either an extension of recent (troubling) trends in US militarism (not a radical break), *or* a resurgence of historical geopolitical struggles: contemporary imperialism (Glazebrook, 2012) or neocolonialism in the shape of a new 'scramble for Africa' (Deen, 2013) in which the US and China are the primary competitors (Habiyaremye, 2011). These understandings are compatible with Bachmann's (2010) suggestion that Africa's historical and continuing marginalization facilitates its use as a staging ground for new military strategies and techniques, in terms of both operations and public relations. In some sense, then, AFRICOM's creation may represent the refinement of established 21st century US military strategies and techniques of warfare. What are less often considered, though, are the 'return' effects (Reid-Henry, 2011) generated by the specificities of African contexts. If Africa is being used as testing ground for broader US policy, what kinds of policy can emerge from this? What kinds of 'experimentation' will African nations permit, with what limitations, and to what extent would such policy be transferable to other places?

AFRICOM is headquartered alongside EUCOM in Stuttgart, Germany. According to policymaker Sean McFate (2008), writing in *Military Review*, this was intended as a temporary arrangement, with the Command to establish permanent headquarters in Africa before commencing operations. African opposition prevented this (LeVan, 2010), with some nations further refusing any US military presence (McFate, 2008). Only historic US ally Liberia offered to host the command (BBC, 2008). Despite recurring discussion of relocation to the African continent or elsewhere — including bids by southern US politicians for AFRICOM to be relocated stateside (Rogin, 2011) — no serious attempts have since been made to shift the

command's headquarters. The US has strategically framed its exclusion from the African continent as part of broader narrative in which AFRICOM is held up as the flagship for a new approach to military strategy and operations (Turse, 2015a). AFRICOM's self-portrayals present a command with minimal infrastructure and personnel, centering nonlethal, PR-friendly operations — humanitarian and development work, collaborative training programs for various African militaries — and largely steering clear of direct combat (Wiley, 2012). Counterterror operations involving killing are to be undertaken either by African forces with the benefit of US training and advice but without direct US involvement, or (more quietly) remotely by drone. The former approach can be celebrated as empowering African nations, while both approaches to violence offer US forces the asymmetric 'quasi-invulnerability' now a prerequisite for Northern involvement in conflict (Chamayou, 2013).

According to officials, shared responsibility for US military operations in Africa between commands prior to 2007 had 'complicated information sharing' and 'impeded the creation of a broad strategic vision for Africa' (LeVan, 2010: 5). There is general agreement that the consolidation of US military operations in Africa into one Command is both a response to and illustration of Africa's growing strategic importance to the US. Waning US strategic interest in Africa during the post-Cold War 1990s had been shaken up by the 1998 attacks on U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. American interest in Africa began to take new form, with Africa's re-conception as a security and strategic problem accelerating further post-9/11 (Ndlovu-Gatsheni et al, 2010; Zeleza, 2013). Policy reports such as the Council on Foreign Relations' *More Than Humanitarianism* (Lake et al, 2006) called for a 'strategic' approach to Africa, justified in terms of a number of concerns other than terror (including access to oil, disease control, and African integration into global economic circuits). There has been official

reticence to publicly discuss these other motivations for the establishment of the command; as such, countering terrorism is one of AFRICOM's few explicit goals.

Appropriately, then, three of AFRICOM's four Commanders have significant Middle Eastern experience in the 'War on Terror'. Dickinson (2009b) asserts that AFRICOM 'fits in quite nicely with the world of counterinsurgency traditionally left to commanders in the Middle East and Central Asia'. The command's explicit concern with terror has intensified African fears of being subject to US military reprisals for terrorism post-9/11 (Sharp, 2011; LeVan, 2010). This mirrors longstanding US domestic concern about the possibility for 'blowback' whereby US military excursions, and now particularly counterterror activity, generate rather than prevent retaliation against the US (Johnson, 2005). Some military accounts, such as Mboup's (2008), acknowledge that the 'War on Terror', particularly in the context of the US' longer-term 'abandonment' of Africa, damaged the US' reputation on the continent.

American counterterror presence on the continent precedes AFRICOM's establishment, with major infrastructure and operations having already been ongoing for a number of years. CJTF-HOA (Combined Joint Task Force — Horn of Africa), headquartered at Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti (which remains an important US base), was established in 2001. Responsibility for their operations was transferred from CENTCOM to AFRICOM late in 2008, but by 2015 CJTF-HOA officers still claimed to undertake 'a significant amount of work in support of [United States] Central Command (CENTCOM) … Special Operations Command (SOCOM) and … other US government agencies,' downplaying the importance of AFRICOM as 'parent organization' (Fox, 2015: 3). By centralizing US activities in Africa, AFRICOM was supposed to respond to the need for 'comprehensive' US policy in Africa cited by strategic reports such as Lake et al's (2006). Yet corresponding official representations of the command as offering a

holistic approach which breaks from conventional 'fragmented' approaches to security, including counterterrorism, are belied somewhat by these continuities.

3.2 Reach and influence

The circumstances of AFRICOM's establishment are relatively easy to deduce. As LeVan (2010: 8) summarises, there is 'general agreement about America's expanding interests in Africa', to which I will turn later in this chapter. Critical and policy accounts concur as to the nature of US strategic interests, which Deen (2013) groups into three related themes: the rise of China, oil, and counterterrorism. However, assessing the extent of the command's growth, reach and influence has proven more challenging. As of 2006, before the command's creation, there were already 1,800 service members deployed on the continent as part of CJTF-HOA (Schogol, 2006). It is notable that AFRICOM's (2017a) website details only the number of 'personnel' employed by the Command, which they currently approximate to 2,000; however, last year AFRICOM's commander confirmed that the command had approximately 5-6,000 soldiers deployed across the continent (Waldhauser, 2017). In stark contrast to the mere 176 tasks AFRICOM inherited from its predecessor commands, the command now conducts 3,500 'exercises, programs and engagements' per year (Turse, 2017b).

The command has also since its inception been secretive about the number and locations of its operating bases. Turse (2013, 2015a, 2017a) has long contended that 'America's network of African bases is neither insignificant nor provisional' (Turse, 2017a), and more recent evidence in the form of formerly classified material supports his claims. Until 2015, the command purported to possess only one single base, or 'forward operating site'— Camp

Lemonnier — but has more recently admitted to making use of at least 46 'outposts' across the continent. These include two 'forward operating sites', 13 'cooperative security locations' and 31 'contingency locations'. In the absence of a clear distinction between these categories and the category 'base', the command's reluctance to term more than two of its operational sites 'bases' appears less likely to be a reflection of a genuine sea change in strategy (a 'lighter' footprint) and more probably an attempt to manage the image of the command, given both recent and longstanding criticism of the US 'empire of bases' (Vine, 2015; Johnson, 2005). While the recent substitution of terms such as 'contingency location' or 'lily pad' for 'base' is not restricted to AFRICOM and in fact appears to be a broader US military policy (Vine, 2015), AFRICOM is the most glaring example of this new PR strategy.

In concurrence with official accounts stressing efficiency, effectiveness and a newly coherent strategic approach, LeVan (2010: 5) describes the creation of AFRICOM as a 'logical outgrowth' of US strategic interest in the region. This much is uncontroversial. However, LeVan also makes the corresponding observation that AFRICOM further served to raise the *profile* of the continent in US political and military imagination, a trend already well-established during the last Bush presidency (Mboup et al, 2009). Even so, the command's rapid expansion has struck many as surprising in light of its relative youth and the fact that Congress has not authorized any military engagements on the African continent since 2001 (UN Security Council Resolutions and congressional funding were secured for engagements in Liberia in 2003 and Libya in 2011, with the latter the sole example of authorized, direct US military engagement in Africa since AFRICOM's inception).

A decade since the command's creation, it is clear that while AFRICOM's activities may be a 'logical' extension of prior American activity in Africa, the rapid proliferation of both

personnel and exercises undertaken by the command do suggest a significant intensification of US strategic interest and military activity on the continent. Turse (2013) concedes that most US military operations in Africa are each 'relatively limited'. He argues, though, that 'taken as a whole, U.S. military operations are sweeping and expansive', with *TomDispatch* having documented recent US military engagements in 49 African nations as of 2013. Drone locations and operations in particular have expanded dramatically since the command's founding (Turse, 2013; 2015b), though usually in secretive fashion (Parrin and Odele, 2015). This is characteristic of the 21st century shift in approaches to warfare discussed in my previous chapter, with technology presented as facilitating a more 'precise' or 'humanitarian' approach (Weizman, 2011). In recent years US approaches to warfare have increasingly been understood by scholars under the framework of 'police power' (Neocleous, 2014). AFRICOM's reliance on drones may support such understandings of the command as 'policing' the continent (Bachmann, 2010; 2014), which I explore later in this chapter.

3.3 The 'light footprint': AFRICOM and 21st century warfare

Official discussions of AFRICOM's 'light footprint' are analogous to the narratives of 'bloodless' or 'humanitarian' warfare which arose in the late 20th century as justifications for military intervention (Douzinas, 2003; 2006). These invoke precision bombing, celebrate the use of unmanned aircraft, and wherever possible describe casualties (especially civilian casualties) as 'accidental' (Owens, 2003). These new liberal-technocratic imaginaries of warfare formed the crux of justifications for NATO's bombing of Kosovo, and have evolved further since. In addition to AFRICOM's extensive use of drones (Parrin and Odele, 2015; Moore and Walker,

2016; Turse, 2015b), the command's presentation of itself as primarily training or assisting foreign troops and not engaging directly in combat conforms to contemporary expectations of 'combatant immunity' for Northern participants in conflict (Chamayou, 2015).

As I will explore in more detail later, these constructions also allow the US to conceal its role in violence formally perpetrated by other militaries (but facilitated by US 'partnership'). In any case, by evading formal culpability, the US is able (to some extent) to maintain a peaceful, humanitarian image of its operations. Zehfuss (2012: 870) writes that Northern violence now appears increasingly not only as a 'lesser violence', but as an 'antiviolent violence'. No small part of the reason for the durability of such imaginaries is the reduced visibility of Northern violence in the African context. This reduced visibility is not solely a result of AFRICOM's 'partnership' strategy. Since the conclusion of the transatlantic slave trade, US economic and strategic interests in the African continent have generally been overshadowed by interests elsewhere. Even during Cold War proxy conflicts and the recent 'War on Terror', US involvement and interest in Africa was consistently dwarfed by the attention paid to the Middle East, Asia, or Central and South America. Correspondingly, Africa has long been underrepresented in Northern news reporting — except where crises on the continent threaten to exceed its borders, as with the Arab Spring or the recent Ebola epidemic. If a possible threat to global order is construed, longstanding representations of the continent as 'dark', chaotic, corrupt or otherwise disorderly (Achebe, 1978; Brantlinger, 1988; Miller, 1985; Mudimbe, 1988) re-emerge, but there is otherwise limited interest in African happenings, including American military activity on the continent.

Conventional framings of warfare as a technical endeavour, geared toward managing 'risk' (Weizman, 2011), or creating 'order' (Holmqvist, 2012), have undoubtedly been facilitated

by new, celebrated technological developments — but they also, crucially, enrol and update older geographical visions. They are additionally enabled by the relative non-visibility of activities in Africa, which allows for counterfactual accounts of US activities and interests in Africa, e.g. the 'light footprint', to pass relatively unchallenged. Prevailing Africanist understandings of the continent are ideal scaffolding for technocratic visions of warfare: what other world region has been (and, more crucially, *continues to be*) persistently understood as chaotic, unsophisticated and technologically undeveloped — and consequently in need of education (training programs), order (counterinsurgency operations) or indeed Northern technological innovation (drones)?

Thinking geographically, it can be argued that the significance of AFRICOM's creation extended well beyond the stated rationales of technical efficiency and holistic strategy. The command's creation also marked the (re)invention of the African continent as both an object of US strategic interest, and a space in which American intervention is not only legitimate but in fact requested and desired by Africans themselves. These 'cultural' dimensions of AFRICOM have been neglected by existing critical accounts of the command, which tend to focus instead on the material discrepancies between official US claims about the nature and intended results of African operations and their clearly-demonstrated or otherwise-deducible extent and consequences. Exposing such mistruths is the main thrust of much critical writing on AFRICOM and indeed the US military more broadly. Many such exposé-style interventions are rigorous, compelling and potentially illustrative — but not in and of themselves explanatory. An understanding of the historical and contemporary (post)colonial imaginaries around both Africa specifically and interventionism more broadly are necessary for contextualizing both these

discrepancies between official accounts and actions, and broader discussions of Africa as strategic space.

3.4 Africa's strategic value: geopolitical imaginaries in (un)official accounts

On the subject of America's interests in African oil, critical, sympathetic and policymaker accounts all broadly concur – from the South African navy captain who asserts that '[m]ost African observers firmly believe that the United States is redefining its strategic national interests in an attempt to control the world's dwindling oil supplies' (Jamieson, 2009: 320), to BBC news coverage prominently echoing 'concern that Africom is really an attempt to protect US oil and mineral interests in Africa, amid growing competition for resources from Asian economies' (Last, 2007). Rock (2014) notes that 'many of AFRICOM's efforts are located in oil-rich regions – specifically Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, and the Gulf of Guinea', though — much as in Iraq — officials deny that oil is a motivating factor. Similarly, official reports disavow Chinese competition as a concern (e.g. Brown, 2013).

However, less formal accounts have demonstrated clear continuous concern about both oil and Chinese strategic interests from the outset of the command's establishment (LeVan, 2010). One critical account in *Military Review* — co-authored by a Senegalese military officer, a retired US officer, and a military studies professor — claims that 'Africans and most journalists find as disingenuous the continuing U.S. denials that AFRICOM has nothing to do with China' (Mboup et al., 2009: 88). Another early *Military Review* piece on AFRICOM's creation dwells at length on American interest in African oil, and describes China's 'expanding influence' in Africa

as 'a continuing worry' (McFate, 2008a: 13). This article was quoted at length, prior to its publication, by AFRICOM (2007) on the command website — though they omit his comments about oil.

The centrality of these concerns does not appear to have receded since. In some of the last interviews conducted as part of the army's *Operational Leadership Experiences* (OLE) project before its 2015 discontinuation, AFRICOM officers stressed Chinese involvement as both competition and a security concern (Dabkowski, 2015; Fox, 2015; Grigsby, 2015). Established by the US Army in 2005 and coordinated by Fort Leavenworth's Combat Studies Institute, the OLE for ten years conducted and published unclassified interviews with personnel involved in counterterrorist operations. The program functioned primarily as an official mechanism for collecting an oral history of counterterrorism operations (Kuehn, 2015), with all interviewees instructed to avoid revealing any potentially classified information.

Although such officers have an appreciable role in shaping the execution of US grand strategy, they were not (at the time of interview) its central architects. Accordingly, the interviews gathered by the OLE have been completely ignored by academic and journalist critics of the U.S. military. Yet given official reticence to discuss geopolitical considerations such as China and oil, these less formal interviews with officers who are not trained spokespeople are arguably a useful window into how these problems are being understood within the military as it actually operates in Africa. General concurrence between the three officers interviewed on these matters supports the contention of both internal (Mboup et al in *Military Review*, 2009) and external critics that official accounts are at best incomplete, if not disingenuous.

The three interviews discussed below were with officers who had recently served with the Combined Joint Task Force — Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA), i.e. in East Africa (though concern with Chinese involvement has not been restricted to the East African context). Army Colonel Todd Fox was interviewed subsequent to his 2014-15 deployment as the CJTF-HOA operations officer. When asked directly about Chinese involvement in Africa, he responded as follows:

> TF: … They are much better connected in East Africa then we are. They're pouring tons of money into Djibouti. They're pouring tons of money into Ethiopia. They're in South Sudan. They're in Kenya. *They're all over.*
> LB: Is that a strategic issue?
> TF: *I believe so.* … I think that the Chinese are posturing themselves very well. (Todd, 2015: 12; emphasis added)

Implicit in the tone of Fox's fuller response is that Chinese involvement on the continent is generally understood as a pressing strategic issue. A higher-ranking CJTF-HOA member interviewed a month earlier — Major General Wayne Grigsby — was more emphatic:

> WG: The Chinese area [sic] *all over the place.*
> LB: There [sic] moving in significantly.
> WG: Significantly. And there's no strings attached to their money. Like we have Leahy vetting. We have all this stuff that's attached to it, which I agree with. United States banner still works. We're the good guys. We're good. So, in order to be good you've got to have certain wickets you got to pass. But I'm just telling you be worried.
> LB: But if it takes 14 months for the guys to get the stuff to you . . .
> WG: He's going to go to China.
> LB: And get it within a month or a couple weeks or whatever.

WG: That's right. You just hit it on the nose.

[…]

LB: That's a serious security issue.

WG: *Serious security issue.* (Grigsby, 2015: 7-8; emphasis added)

Grigsby appears deeply concerned with the security threat posed by China, which he ties directly into an Orientalist/Occidentalist conception of US intervention as legitimate ('We're the good guys. We're good') and Chinese activity as less ethically constrained. McFate (2008: 15) calls this China's 'don't ask, don't tell' policy, stating that no-strings Chinese aid to Sudan illustrates an 'implicit willingness to abet genocide'. These accounts sketch a familiar picture of global geopolitics in which the US is hamstrung by its ethics, while the Chinese have no such compunctions. Dabkowski (2015: 11) sees other kinds of moral coherence between Chinese and African nations: with respect to 'human rights, various international policies with respect to trafficking, economic development', he states that 'China and East Africa [see] the world in a more similar way and differently than the US sees it'. Strategic documents also envision Africa itself as poorly governed and corrupt, with the US an upright and unblemished promoter of democracy (Zeleza, 2013) — hallmarks of longstanding Africanist (Miller, 1985) and interventionist (Orford, 2004) narratives. The idea of moral leadership is important here: Mark Dabkowski (2015: 9), former assistant to Grigsby, describes Grigsby's work as 'plant[ing] a seed of US Army, US Military-type values' with East African militaries.

A cursory examination of AFRICOM's own record would raise serious questions about such 'US Military-type values'. William 'Kip' Ward, the Command's first leader, was quietly demoted in 2012 for misuse of hundreds of thousands of dollars — among other misdemeanours — during his time as head of AFRICOM (Associated Press, 2012). Since then, AFRICOM has

been embroiled in a number of scandals running the gamut from sex and drug-related misconduct through 'lost' funds and accusations of civilian killings and human rights violations (well-catalogued by Turse, 2015c; 2018). I discuss the implications of one recent scandal — reports of torture in Cameroon — later in this chapter. Indeed, the altered social conditions for servicemembers accompanying 21st century transformations in US military organization may render certain kinds of problematic behaviour more, not less, likely: Vine (2015) notes that the recent US 'lily pad' strategy of creating numerous smaller installations (of which AFRICOM's 'light footprint' is intended to be emblematic) typically excludes servicemembers' families, while Dabkowski (2015: 6) states that CJTF-HOA experiences 'about 150 percent per year' turnover due to large numbers of four-month deployments.

3.5 Securing circulation: China, oil, and geoeconomics

In both critical and OLE accounts, there is an explicit logic of *circulation*. AFRICOM's efforts can be understood as part of a broader US drive to secure the circulation of commodities, the most pressing of which is oil (Rock, 2014). This is not to say that access to commodities such as oil is the US' only strategic concern in the region, but that securing certain kinds of circulation can be understood as an organizing principle uniting other US strategic goals in the region. Critical accounts along these lines cite Foucault's analysis of circulation as a key concern of liberal governance — and increasingly the main object of security. For Foucault (2007), security is a corollary of liberalism, and security practice and discourse are concerned with the protection and maintenance of liberal order: security is a problem of liberal government and its accompanying political rationality of liberal governmentality. Elbe et al. (2014: 448) explain that

'[w]ith the rise of the era of governmentality … security policy becomes about more than just the traditional geopolitical games of territorial influence. It also becomes about managing circulation and sorting the 'good' from the 'bad' circulation.'

For example: if the unimpeded flow of oil to the US is a desirable form of circulation, undesirable forms of circulation might include anything from so-called terrorist networks to major epidemics (such as Ebola, in which AFRICOM intervened) which might jeopardise the 'free' and desirable movement of commodities or capital, or which otherwise conflicts with US policy (e.g. the movement of narcotics). Accordingly, US counterterrorism or 'state-building' operations would also fall under the umbrella of activities presented as essential for securing circulation. Kpohazounde's (2016) analysis of recent US activities in Sub-Saharan Africa understands them in terms of increased twin concerns with terror and natural resources. A seemingly endless array of activities can be justified in terms of protecting not just US economic interest, but the entire global economic system. The US' self-positioning as the arbiter of *global* (economic) order justifies programs of 'securitization' (Morrissey, 2011b). These liberal discourses of securitization lean heavily, too, on pre-existing Orientalist or Africanist imaginaries of chaotic Other spaces long-conceived of as in need of (Northern) order (Gregory, 2004; Orford, 2004).

This concept of circulation has received much scholarly attention in recent years. Cowen's (2014: 77) examination of changing approaches to logistics, for example, presents these as part and parcel of the broader political shifts entailed in neoliberalism. She asserts that 'the material flows of the economy and the transportation and communication infrastructures that underpin them are increasingly the object of security', as evidenced by 'a model of security

devoted to the protection of supply chains'. Securing the movement of goods requires a transformation (but not a straightforward replacement) of national borders, and the rise of alternative and/or additional security practices. 'Securing' a region is therefore not an end in itself, but a means by which to secure the flow of commodities out of, through, or nearby it — or to mitigate the effects of disruption elsewhere in a supply chain. I will be returning to this theme of circulation in the next chapter's discussion of Ebola.

Morrissey (2011b, 2016) asserts that Cowen & Smith's (2009) related concept of 'geoeconomics', whereby 'market calculation' largely succeeds older territorial logics, is directly relevant to AFRICOM — with the caveat that 'the old concerns of geopolitical calculation, territory and access still matter too' (Morrissey, 2016: 17). Morrissey's (2011b) analysis of CENTCOM, meanwhile, presents a 'neoliberal securitization project' (877) at the heart of that command. He is careful to stress, too, that regions must be discursively *produced* as 'vital to US geoeconomic interests' (875) in order to justify US activities there. In this vein, then-Vice President Cheney's Energy Policy Commission advised in 2001 that oil imports from West Africa should be increased as an 'insurance policy against over-dependence on Mideast oil'. Bush reiterated this in 2006 (LeVan, 2010: 8), the year that planning for AFRICOM began in earnest. Other early accounts were similarly candid:

> America is also interested in Africa's natural resources, especially in terms of energy security. As instability in the Middle East grows and international demand for energy soars, the world—and the United States in particular—will become increasingly beholden to Africa's ability to produce oil. (McFate, 2008: 12)

This is cause for concern. In a material sense, US interest in African oil may exacerbate already well-documented existing problems arising from resource dependency in African nations (Ferguson, 2006; Le Billon, 2001). Resulting 'return' geographical imaginaries of perceived colonialism could also facilitate attempts at secession or other forms of fragmentation, and attendant conflicts:

> [t]he likelihood of political secession increases when "outsiders" are perceived to extract "local" resources without sharing the wealth, and when local populations are displaced by the extractive industry or suffer from its environmental costs (Le Billon, 2001: 574)

That is, the ongoing discovery of new oil sources in West Africa — and intensified US (and Chinese) interest in these — may stoke political turmoil and/or violent conflict including, potentially, violence targeted against the US or other perceived foreign interests. Increased instability in the Middle East following the War on Terror, noted even by sympathetic observers (Jamieson, 2009), serves as a worrying historical precedent.

For Morrissey, 'ageographical' claims of a new kind of deterritorialized 'empire' (Hardt and Negri, 2000) must be tempered by an understanding that security concerns with various kinds of flows are still geographically enframed. In the context of these debates, similar critiques and calls for attention to spatial specificity have been made by other geographers (as catalogued by Sidaway, 2005). Anthropologist David Vine (2015), too, has more recently stressed the centrality of 'place' in organizing responses to US military installations. Accounts stressing the contemporary conceptualization of flows as objects of security can run the risk of decontextualizing these flows from their geographical context. For geographers, this is obvious cause for concern. While acquiring territory, for example, may not be *necessary* for protecting

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circulation (Cowen and Smith, 2009), it has a continuing — if transformed — relevance insofar as nodes such as 'bases, logistic facilities and pre-positioning sites' (Morrissey, 2011b: 891) are still required for enacting practices of securitization. Securitization must occur somewhere, and as such still entails discursively constructing specific places as sites in need of intervention (as discussed in my last chapter). Rumsfeld's 'lily pad' strategy of numerous, smaller 'enduring' (formerly 'permanent') installations signifies a military approach in which territorial calculations are transformed, not superseded (Vine, 2015). AFRICOM need not be headquartered on the continent, but 'policing' circulation does involve material and territorial concerns:

> instability in the Niger Delta region has reduced output periodically by as much as 25 percent, escalating world oil prices … To help control this volatility, AFRICOM may become increasingly involved in the maritime security of the Gulf of Guinea, where the potential for deep-water drilling is high. (McFate, 2008a: 12-13)

McFate's use of 'instability' as refrain is also salient. In recent academic literature on both AFRICOM and other US commands, there is a recurring theme of 'police' and 'policing', whereby the US purports to bring order to 'unstable' regions. The rise to prominence of narratives decrying 'ungoverned spaces' invokes Orientalist (or, as here, Africanist) tropes to support a liberal-interventionist political imaginary of bringing order to chaos. Existing critical literature which addresses US Africa Command (Bachmann, 2010; 2014), the evolution of US military commands (Morrissey, 2011a) or Northern intervention in Africa more broadly (Bachmann and Gelot, 2012) suggests that AFRICOM should be firmly positioned as a key actor both maintaining and justifying a particular regime of *police power*.

My understanding of the concept of 'police' is informed by the work of Mark Neocleous (2013; 2014), who also provides a link to my last chapter in the form of his analysis of the history and uses of air power. For Neocleous (2013: 580), police power refers not to 'crime prevention and law enforcement', but to 'the more general process of administration, security and order' — that is, 'a set of apparatuses and technologies constituting "the economy" and the order of labour' which are intended for 'the maintenance of the body politic'. According to Neocleous, police's central concept — security — is also the fundamental concept of bourgeois society. The explanations offered by Neocleous and other theorists of 'police' power are explicitly indebted to various works by Foucault, most notably *Security, Territory, Population* (2007).

It is Jan Bachmann (2010; 2014), though, who has provided the most detailed treatment of — and compelling argument for considering — AFRICOM as police power. According to Bachmann, AFRICOM is extending the remit of US military operations and responsibilities, with Africa 'likely to become a testing site for new military activities' (2010: 565). Bachmann is particularly concerned with the military concept of 'stability operations', which for AFRICOM encompass a 'vast spectrum of activities … from health projects to drone attacks' (2014: 119). The primary goal of stabilization activities is not to create forms of order which benefit domestic populations (although it might be presented as such) — it is to order nation states in ways conducive to 'global' stability. As others have observed, such 'stability' is often achieved to the detriment of local populations: repressive and autocratic regimes which do not serve the interests of their domestic populations can still be construed as 'stable', and so receive US political, economic and military support (Deen, 2013).

Bachmann (2014) cites Foucault (2007) to argue that the preventative logic of 'policing' — forestalling future disorder — is now being used to justify greater US presence and expanded operations in Africa. Along with Ndlovu et al (2010), he contends that AFRICOM's creation is part and parcel of post-9/11 constructions of 'weak states' or 'ungoverned spaces' as threats to *international* security, with Africa thus in need of securitization. US activity in 49 of 55 African nations from 2012-13, much of which appears irrelevant to short- or medium-term US strategic interests, is read by Bachmann as evidence of this expansive preventative approach.

The construction of Africa as 'ungoverned' produces a space in which intervention is legitimized (Orford, 2003; Ndlovu et al, (2010). According to Holmqvist et al (2015), in the context of warfare, 'policing' implies and naturalises 'a fundamental inequality between intervening actors, whether military or civilian, and the recipients of interventions'. This inequality is reinforced by discourses of intervention. Such logic is at play, for example, in 'the insistence in liberal discourses on the use of force by liberal states not as "war" but as "stabilisation", "peacebuilding", "counterinsurgency" and so on' (Holmqvist et al, 2015: 8). As discussed in my previous chapter, '[l]iberal interventionism has been accompanied by a specific discourse of war – or rather, non-war' (ibid: 1). Contemporary discourses of warfare are thus evacuated of political content (Holmqvist, 2012), with intervention understood as both right and necessity. Historical conceptions of Africa as chaotic and ungoverned precede and assist these 21st century liberal-military imaginaries.

3.6 Discourses of (non-)intervention: power, collaboration and consent

In 2017, new claims emerged that US-trained troops and US-provided weaponry may have been used for military purposes which are not only ethically troubling but may also work against US strategic interests. Last summer, AFRICOM ran into PR difficulties as a result of Cameroonian forces using facilities shared with US soldiers to illegally torture and detain Cameroonian citizens, ostensibly as part of the US- and French-backed fight against Boko Haram (Page, 2017; Trafford & Turse, 2017). There is significant evidence to suggest that US personnel stationed in Salak would have been aware of the torture being carried out on the base, from the layout of the base in question to detainee testimonies. According to Amnesty International (2017), 'several detainees' testimonials confirm the presence of Westerners in Salak, including Americans'. Although AFRICOM has denied knowledge of these practices, it seems unlikely that US personnel were unaware of the torture (Turse and Trafford, 2017). Nevertheless, it remains unclear whether these tactics are in practice condoned, encouraged, or simply overlooked by AFRICOM.

If controversial tactics such as torture *are* considered strategically desirable, working 'with' African forces is a way to provide plausible deniability for US military forces. Lutz (2009) contends that US military training programs may include explicit training in techniques such as assassination and torture. Even if not, letting African forces do the dirty work could be useful for US strategic goals in two specific ways: allowing the US to deny involvement, *and* potentially providing justification for the US' civilising mission. That is, Cameroonian use of torture or unlawful killing in the fight against Boko Haram or its escalating anglophone uprising could ultimately be used to justify expanded and direct US involvement and oversight in the region.

Both Amnesty and the US have raised alarm about more recent of killings of women and children, which Amnesty claims were perpetrated by the Cameroonian military (Ntaryike and Bax, 2018) in the context of what many see as a brewing civil war resulting from government oppression of Cameroon's anglophone minority (O'Grady, 2018). While reports of torture might seem like bad PR at first glance, one useful aspect of Africanist visions is that they allow for flexible interpretation in the US strategic interest: racial-geographical imaginations are characterised by a permissive combination of fixity and fluidity (Kratz, 2002: 109).

Understandings of the US intervention as necessary for combatting forms of corruption allegedly endemic to Africa (or, in the most recent updatings, introduced by China) are not only issued by the Command, but widely repeated elsewhere. Self-identified critics of AFRICOM often slide into Africanist discourse: the Self/Other binary is reinforced even, or especially, in response to clear evidence of US complicity in torture and corruption. For *Washington Post* journalist Page (2017), America's activities in Africa are worrying not because of the risk they pose to Africans, but because of the risk that *African* armies and leaders will sully an imagined American purity. While acknowledging that 'it is hard to believe that our eagle-eyed special operators could have been oblivious to what was going on', Page nevertheless asserts that 'it is unthinkable that U.S. forces were *involved* in the abuses' (emphasis added). His core question — '[i]s working closely with a brutish military like Cameroon's worth compromising U.S. values on human rights, rule of law and democracy?' — resurrects a vision of the continent as a murky swamp in which the morally pure US risks becoming mired. The imaginative geographies at play here are reminiscent of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, following a long tradition of similar Africanist visions. They also conveniently overlook the US' routine use of torture, as in

Guantanamo (Reid-Henry, 2007), in addition to more spectacular revelations of US abuses such as the atrocities committed at Abu Ghraib (Mirzoeff, 2006).

Amnesty and the aforementioned journalists held that there was enough evidence to suggest the strong possibility that US forces were aware of Cameroonian detention and torture and chose not to intervene. Regardless, the idea of African troops running amok (regardless of whether they are US-trained or US-armed) can be readily enrolled to argue that the continent requires *further* US training and intervention. As current White House Chief of Staff General John Kelly recently stated, the US is in Africa 'teaching them how to respect human rights' (Kelly, 2017). In the same press briefing, Kelly stresses the *collaborative* (read: consensual, mutually beneficial) nature of US activities in Africa. His full response to the question of why US soldiers are in Africa at all is as follows:

> They're there, working with partners, local, Afric—all across Africa—in this case, Niger, working with partners, teaching them how to be better soldiers — teaching them how to respect human rights. (Kelly, 2017)

In a related briefing days later, General Joseph Dunford stresses the same point, stating that US involvement in Niger is part of the broader US general strategy of '*enabling* local security forces to deal with the challenges in their countries and regions' (Dunford, 2017; emphasis added).

These briefings took place in response to public outcry over the October 4, 2017 death of four US soldiers in combat in Niger. Interestingly, public concern about the soldiers' deaths was quickly eclipsed by media coverage of the US president's phone call to one of these soldiers' widows, in which Trump is said to have asserted that the soldier 'knew what he signed up for' (Blake, 2017). Nevertheless, in the aftermath of this event and the press coverage surrounding it,

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it became clear that much of the US public was not aware that there was a US presence in Africa, let alone what activities were being undertaken on the continent. This event revealed not only US presence in Africa, but US participation in combat. These deaths contradicted AFRICOM's narrative of noncombat collaborative training and development activities; the White House and the military were at pains to reassure the public that this was an anomaly, rather than a revelation of clandestine US activities on the continent. Presenting 'training' as the US' main mission in the continent also allows AFRICOM to downplay its involvement — in fact, according to Kelly (2017), AFRICOM's activities are necessary to ensure that 'we *don't* have to send our soldiers and marines there in their thousands' (emphasis added).

Critics are sceptical of such claims because the historical pattern has been the opposite: once a foothold has been established by such 'advisory' or 'support' missions, US involvement tends to expand further. This is what Timm (2017) refers to as 'the "war on terror" circle of life: send troops into a country to "advise and assist", troops inevitably get killed by local militants when they inevitably engage in combat missions, send more troops in to "fix" the problem. Rinse. Repeat.' Much as Cameroon's human rights abuses could be used to justify further US involvement, so can the deaths of US soldiers, or the failure of 'US-supported' missions: interventionist logic (Orford, 2004) dictates that more, not less, oversight is required. The case of Niger, Timm (2017) contends, is the 'perfect example' of US 'perma-war'.

Despite such strong criticism, this presentation of AFRICOM as acting primarily in 'training', 'advisory' or 'support' roles has been central to the command's self-presentation since its inception (Bachmann, 2010), along with the invocation of 'African' requests for the command (AFRICOM, 2008). Furthermore, since then, these ideas of cooperation and support have only become more prominent in AFRICOM's stories about itself. Gen. Waldhauser, the current head

of AFRICOM, has begun to describe this approach as 'By, With, and Through' — a 'framework' involving three key tenets, which he summarises as follows:

> 1: security operations are conducted almost exclusively By [sic] the partner nation's security forces, and specifically not American service members.

> 2: AFRICOM works With [sic] these forces based on *their requests and their needs*.

> 3: the *compatible strategic objectives* of both the US and the partnered nation are achieved Through [sic] a *cooperative relationship* in which AFRICOM plays a *supporting role*. (Waldhauser, 2017; emphasis added)

AFRICOM's 2018 *Posture Statement* (Waldhauser, 2018) also hinges on this construction, which is especially interesting not only in its invocation of African agency and thus consent to — even requests for — US activities, but also in its emphasis on *strategic compatibility* and *cooperation*. Each of these rhetorical constructions facilitate an understanding of US-African relations as harmonious, founded on cooperation, and even African-led. In this liberal framework, the imbalance of power between the US and the forces with which it 'cooperates' is not only vanished — it is reversed. AFRICOM does not lead, but 'plays a supportive role'; the US presence is not imposed, but is requested. Officers replicate this language:

> Information. *Enabling partnership capacity.* Right. That's what we can do. Being partners. Let them solve *their* problems in East Africa. (Grigsby, 2015: 5; emphasis added)

Within the countries themselves, MG Grigsby essentially had to defer to the chiefs of defense. I mean, *we had no authority* to tell these various East African militaries what they had to do or what they couldn't do. So again, it was all through informal power, through influence-type activities. Primarily, MG Grigsby did that through relationships. He had to *build trust* (Dabkowski, 2015: 9; emphasis added)

In Dabkowski's account, a CJTF-HOA general has 'no authority' over East African militaries; the US does not exercise power but 'build[s] trust'. The general himself, meanwhile, stresses that while the US is willing to 'enabl[e] partnership capacity', East African problems are 'their[s]' alone. Implying US generosity, such constructions erase colonial and continuing histories of dispossession, as well as contemporary US strategic interest in the region. Crucially, they also allow the command to disavow responsibility for its failures, some of which have been significantly more deadly than the recent ambush. In December 2008 — having only been fully operational for a few weeks — AFRICOM assisted Ugandan forces in planning an attack on the Lord's Resistance Army, with the command also providing satellite phones and fuel in addition to intelligence. This operation's failure resulted in the death of hundreds of civilians. AFRICOM's response was to state that the mission was not theirs, and thus the failure was not their responsibility (Bachmann, 2010).

However, due to the involvement (and death) of US soldiers, the 2017 event received press attention which far eclipsed the meagre reporting devoted to past failures of the command in which US soldiers did not come to harm. Death of US soldiers in combat in Africa is relatively uncommon; AFRICOM's strategy in this regard reflects the broader late-20th century US adoption of technologically-facilitated and deeply asymmetrical 'bloodless' approaches to warfare, as discussed in my last chapter. As has been noted by many commentators, such

'bloodless' or 'humanitarian' warfare is not without casualties (Falk, 2015), and has in fact not infrequently resulted in *increased* civilian casualties (Douzinas, 2006; Chamayou, 2015). These asymmetries of vulnerability reflect the unequal weight afforded to US and African lives — a 'geographically-enframed' calculation Reid-Henry (2014: 425) also finds constitutive of early humanitarianism, and which Chamayou (2015) argues has more recently become an expectation of total invulnerability for dominant powers.

For domestic, African and international critics, the US' long, mercenary history of collaboration with repressive, undemocratic and/or violent regimes is especial cause for alarm (Lutz, 2009), given AFRICOM's strong emphasis on training African militaries (Kelly, 2017; Waldhauser, 2018). One serious concern about these training programs is their potential to 'strengthen the power of military forces in relation to other sectors' (Lutz, 2009: 5), which in the context of 'fragile democracies' could precipitate military coups. Critics see this as an ongoing problem. According to Lumpe (2002), 38 percent of the nations hosting US bases in 2002 were cited for violations of human rights that same year. The US' use of facilities and involvement in military training programs in Cameroon, whose military forces have recently beaten and shot dead peaceful protestors along with tens of other civilians – also contributing to mass displacement (O'Grady, 2018) – would appear to substantiate such concerns. More generally, presenting AFRICOM's activities as indirect *requested* support (AFRICOM, 2008) rather than direct and unwanted intervention allows the command to avoid falling foul of US public aversion to military intervention (Falk, 2015), while also performing an imaginary inversion of the power imbalances between US and African nations. In short, narratives of consent and partnership provide rhetorical cover for the pursuit of US strategic interests (Deen, 2013), enlisting varied discursive techniques and reviving colonial imaginative geographies in the process.

3.7 The limits of 'empire': African agency and American frustration

Critics have pointed to the material inequities which underpin 'consent' to intervention, both generally and in African nations (LeVan, 2010). Contemporary economic imperatives operate in addition to awareness of the US' historical willingness to suppress popular movements elsewhere, installing or supporting client governments which do not reflect the will of local populations (in Africa as well as Latin America, East Asia and the Middle East). Yet even in this context of demonstrated US readiness to forcefully acquire consent, opposition to AFRICOM has been sufficient to keep the command from establishing its headquarters on the continent. Military spokespeople and proponents have been forced to explain African hostility to the command as founded in *African misunderstandings* due to 'Africa's colonial *past*' (emphasis mine) or, in the mildest possible gesture toward US culpability, 'AFRICOM's inability … to articulate its message to Africans' (McFate, 2008: 18). AFRICOM's first commander, General William Ward, similarly described the command as 'misunderstood', and furthermore denied that AFRICOM had ever planned to establish its headquarters – or any other 'large US garrisons' – on the continent (BBC, 2008). Another intervention – a Fort Leavenworth master's thesis concerned with 'the reluctance of significant segments of the African intellectual and political elite' – even more creatively lists 'China's increasing influence' first among various factors producing hostility to the command (Mboup, 2008: iv).

As Vine (2015) illustrates vividly in his account of resistance to US bases, *place matters*, and in complex ways: historical and geographical specificities continually undermine the sort of empire envisioned by Hardt and Negri (2000). N'Diaye and Africa (2009: 62) explain that the US' focus on 'technical' explanations for African hostility – founded in *African*

misunderstandings – allows for the implication that 'if only Africans really understood that AFRICOM is in their interest, they would welcome it with open arms'. These accounts envision Africans as 'eternal children' (ibid: 63), and as such do little to convince African audiences. Among other illustrations, CJTF-HOA officer accounts show that African experiences of (post)colonial dispossession are materially and discursively alive, and continue to shape – and even frustrate – US initiatives:

> The Ethiopians take great pride -- now whether this is true or not -- they claimed to be the only country in Africa that was not colonized. So, they really do not like -- they're okay working with you, but *it has to be very clear they're a partner.* They are not somehow becoming this neo-colonial aspect. … Djibouti struggles with being a former French colony and the French are still there and they need them, but they have this weird relationship. Almost like a petulant teen trying to grow out of it, but dad's still here. (Fox, 2015: 13)

Africans have their own imaginative geographies and geopolitical representations, with anticolonial narratives often front and centre. Sharp (2011; 2013) rebukes critical scholars of geopolitics for their neglect of African imaginaries; she finds that condemnations of contemporary (US) economic imperialism and the related strategic self-positioning of East African leaders as champions of the oppressed are key narratives in Tanzanian political discourse, and (significantly) increasingly so post-9/11. Much as scholarly visions of US 'biopolitical empire' suffer from their 'ageographical' perspective (Morrissey, 2011) or tendency to mirror conventional strategic discourse (Holmqvist, 2012), critics presenting AFRICOM as emblematic of US imperial power could be accused of neglecting the significance of African geopolitical imaginaries in shaping AFRICOM's strategy. When the CJTF-HOA officer quoted

above derides Ethiopian anticolonial sentiment as 'great pride', with Djibouti a 'petulant' child, his tone is one of frustration. Northern understandings of Africa allow Americans to wield Africanist tropes to advantage elsewhere (i.e. justifying the command to Northern audiences), but cannot save them from having to reckon with African political understandings. In at least the East African context, these include a heightened sensitivity to perceived American imperialism which has been re-invigorated by the US' 'war on terror' (Sharp, 2011). Nigerian understandings, meanwhile, might include disquiet about US interest in West African oil. Coupled with Nigeria's relative power in the region, this produces both *possibilities* and *incentives* for Nigerian resistance (Onuoha and Ezirim, 2010; Last, 2007).

Of course, no amount of unpacking African agency can render assertions such as Lieutenant Commander Dabkowski's (2015: 9) — that CJTF-HOA possessed 'no authority' over East African militaries — truly accurate, unless considering only the most formal, technical definition of 'authority'. The felt frustrations of military officers do not alter the fundamental imbalance of power between the US and the nations in which AFRICOM operates. If anything, they reflect the problematic supremacist expectations resulting from it. Yet AFRICOM's discursive strategies and practical approaches — the 'light footprint' and emphasis on 'consent' — cannot be understood only as representing the pinnacle of American military supremacy and strategic thought. They could also be productively conceived of as an American attempt to reframe as strategic *innovation* what are in fact significant strategic *challenges* presented by African opposition to the command.

Scholars should be suspicious of the US enrolment of African agency under the liberal framework of African 'consent' to US presence, or US 'support' of 'African-led' operations. AFRICOM's development/humanitarian activities, too, form part and parcel of the

'problematization' of African spaces as ungoverned, which in turn legitimizes further

intervention (Bachmann, 2014: 130; Ndlovu et al 2010). However, it is also crucial to avoid

reconstructing an Africanist/interventionist narrative which strips Africans of agency altogether.

The command's 'partnership' approach and humanitarian/development activities can be read as

sinister manifestations of long-term US strategy; they can also be understood additionally or

alternatively as concessions (to African desires or hostility) which do not necessarily serve

broader strategic goals.

This caution is not intended as a hopeful note: agency exerted by (some) Africans may or

may not advance the interests of the oppressed any more than the 'agency' of Northern political

leaders serves marginalized domestic populations. Nevertheless, it is important to be attentive to

the occasions where African nations resist or shape US involvement, rather than imagining

Africans as straightforwardly subjugated to US imperial might. Deen (2013) is correct to point

out that 'US interests can be secured even if African states rhetorically oppose AFRICOM',

citing a $30 million payment to Djibouti made in exchange for permission to establish a US base

there. Even this payment, though, is evidence that — significant imbalances of power

notwithstanding — American strategic will is not simply imposed upon Africans; AFRICOM's

activities are (to varying extents) conditioned by its participation in geographically-enframed

struggles.

3.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I first provided a brief overview of the rationale and strategic interests for

the establishment and development of US Africa Command. From there, I expanded upon the

literature discussed in my previous chapter by bringing it directly into conversation with both additional critical accounts about US Africa Command and novel empirical material. My goal was to contextualize the command in relation to these existing literatures and novel empirical material, and in so doing indicate the advantages and limitations of existing critical work for understanding the command. My key question — how should we understand AFRICOM? — can be answered partly in terms of related frameworks of 'policing' the continent to render it more capital-friendly (Neocleous, 2014; Bachmann, 2014), securing circulation generally in patterns conducive to American interests (Cowen, 2014; Morrissey, 2016), and in terms of 'geoeconomics' in particular relation to US access to African oil (Cowen and Smith, 2009: Morrissey, 2011b).

I initially approached this project with the above analytical themes in mind, intending primarily to illustrate the (critically-neglected) geographical specificity of justifications for AFRICOM through attention to the ways in which older Africanist discourses have been enrolled alongside more recent liberal formulations of security. In the course of my research, though, I became increasingly concerned about a related shortcoming of much of the critical literature on AFRICOM and US militarism more broadly. Specifically, I expanded my analysis to contend that changing US approaches to military power as embodied in AFRICOM do not straightforwardly represent the pinnacle of military and economic hegemony or empire-building whereby American or more broadly Northern order is successfully imposed on imperial Others across the globe. AFRICOM's creation may well have heralded a 'new scramble for Africa' (Deen, 2013), but changing US military practices and narratives are still formulated in response to the specific 'challenges' either faced or anticipated in particular foreign contexts. These analyses are not incompatible, but the latter tends to be dwarfed by concern about the former.

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This is the caution voiced by the historical geographers cited in my first chapter: that (imperial) power is imposed 'always unevenly, and always in contested ways' (Lambert and Lester, 2004: 338). Critics rightly raise alarm over the potential use of Africa as 'testing site for new military activities' (Bachmann, 2010: 565), but — as with other kinds of imaginative geographies (Said, 1978) — such constructions in and of themselves do not demonstrate American *ability*, only American *desire*. Furthermore, if critics accept military understandings of African nations as experimental 'laborator[ies]' (Dabkowski, 2015: 10) for US strategy, this should also entail accepting that the African context – including African political understandings and strategic thinking – exert influence over US military strategy worldwide.

I hope to have also demonstrated that, in terms of empirics, paying close attention to both semi-official accounts and potential indications of African agency is necessary in order to properly interrogate claims made for and about AFRICOM, particularly those concerning its alleged innovations. My close examination of 2015 *Operational Leadership Experiences* interviews along these lines suggests that there may be more-than-rhetorical substance to AFRICOM's celebrated 'partnership' approach, while on the other hand finding no evidence for the command's purported holism, and arguably cementing critics' contention that US military activity in Africa is strongly motivated by 'geoeconomic' concerns including access to oil and Chinese competition. I keep these cautions in mind throughout my next chapter, where I deepen my analysis through an exploration of AFRICOM's role in the Ebola crisis (and critical responses to it).

Chapter 4

US Africa Command in global context: health and security in the 2013-16 Ebola epidemic

For its role in the Ebola response, US Africa Command has been variously accused of 'militarizing' humanitarian aid, proving ineffective or counterproductive, or duplicitously pursuing US interests in African oil. By elaborating on the theoretical themes explored in my previous chapters, I demonstrate the ways in which the command's involvement in the Ebola response is relevant not only to scholars of public health, but also to contemporary debates around humanitarianism, 21st century warfare, and the shifting relationship between humanitarian and security imperatives. There has been a tendency among critics of AFRICOM to minimize its humanitarian and development activities, and to focus instead on revealing AFRICOM's 'real' mission. AFRICOM's emphasis on its development work has been critiqued thoroughly along these lines (Rock, 2014; Wiley, 2012; Turse, 2017c), and while this work is difficult and necessary, it is my contention that critics who write off AFRICOM's humanitarian work as rhetorical cover for a hidden 'grand strategy' run several risks.

First, critics presume the existence of a coherent US-Africa strategy and approach (desirable or otherwise), thereby lending policymakers credibility which may or may not be deserved. Second, dismissing AFRICOM's humanitarian and development work as a rhetorical smokescreen has tended to forestall any further investigation of its potential significance beyond its utility as such. Third — and this need not necessarily follow, but typically does — treating AFRICOM's humanitarian/development work as something undertaken primarily for PR

purposes is often concurrent with a wholesale dismissal of the discursive realm. An examination of Ebola renders the limitations of such narratives clear, and suggests that a properly critical approach would seek to investigate more thoroughly how the discourses around AFRICOM's humanitarian/development work function (or indeed, the extent to which they do): who are their intended audiences? Who is producing them, and what is the relationship between AFRICOM's PR strategy and actual perceptions of the command and the continent? Conclusive answers to these questions are beyond the scope of a single chapter; what I hope to demonstrate is that these remain pertinent and unanswered questions.

Finally, I contend that while it is important to understand the implications of AFRICOM's most dramatic foray into the humanitarian arena, AFRICOM's motivations are a separate question. I argue that intervention in the Ebola epidemic reflects the 21st century evolution of US strategic interests and conceptualizations of security, without necessarily exemplifying a long-term strategic plan. Critics are correct to understand the Ebola response as potentially useful for shaping conceptions of the command (Bartzokis, 2014), but emphasizing only its optical dimension misses another possibility: that presidential and military declarations identifying the spread of Ebola as a 'national security priority' (Rodriguez, 2014) reflect a *genuine* concern with the security, if not humanitarian, implications of Ebola. The same can be said of broader Northern involvement, but US interest in African oil is especially suggestive. This chapter provides theoretical context for understanding both the American response to Ebola, and the material-discursive logics which produced the response, arguing that both are significant, but should not be conflated.

4.1 Imagining Ebola: Africanism, standard epidemiology, and the foreclosure of possibility

Ebola's 2013 re-emergence and subsequent rapid spread took observers by surprise (Sack et al, 2014). Previous Ebola epidemics had been much smaller in scale, and inadequate healthcare and surveillance infrastructures, along with liberal-Africanist understandings of disease as normal and tolerable in the African context, contributed to the spread and the initial invisibility of the epidemic. The WHO (2018) dates the beginning of the main outbreak to the first confirmed case on March 13, 2014, with 28,637 Ebola cases recorded between then and January 13, 2016, 11,315 of which were fatal. The majority of these occurred in west Africa: Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. These figures are likely dwarfed by the number of unconfirmed cases, with Ebola also having been vastly underreported (BBC, 2016). The WHO's own response was widely criticized as 'too little, too late'. Similarly, it was not until September 2014 — many months into the Ebola epidemic — that the US announced that it would send 3000 military personnel to assist in combatting Ebola (Brown, 2014). This involved establishing a new command headquarters in Liberia (AFRICOM, 2014), one of the most affected nations and also an historical US ally, with Liberia's president having personally appealed for US military support. The Liberian government, whose low domestic approval ratings predated the Ebola outbreak, was subject to further criticism for its own disastrous response to Ebola (Onishi, 2014).

While the large scale of the US deployment surprised observers (Brown, 2014), numerous critics ranging from outside observers (Bartzokis, 2014; Dionne and Seay, 2014; Peterson and Folayan, 2017; Sandvik, 2015; Williamson, 2014) to military insiders (Tomlinson, 2014) were quick to express concerns about its lateness, its inefficacy, and the possible implications of the US military undertaking such humanitarian work. AFRICOM, predictably,

celebrated its 'success' in tackling Ebola (AFRICOM, 2015), while critics contended that there

remained a lack of evidence that the military deployment was a 'game changer' (Sandvik, 2015),

with some implying that the intervention had worsened the outbreak (Peterson and Folayan,

2017) and many suspecting that the US intervention reflected US interest in west African oil

(Williamson, 2014).

Longstanding Northern dispossession of the African continent undoubtedly played a part

in creating the conditions for the emergence and rapid spread of Ebola. Unsurprisingly, though,

arguments for military intervention tend to overlook factors such as Northern recruitment of

African healthcare workers (Hagopian et al, 2005; Mills et al, 2008), or the impact of structural

adjustment programs on the continent's healthcare and welfare systems (Ferguson, 2006).

Instead, the Ebola epidemic provided Northern actors such as the WHO and the US government

with an opportunity to reinforce Africanist discourses alongside newer liberal-technocratic

understandings of disease as security problem. Early on, the UN declared Ebola a 'threat to

world security' (BBC, 2014), with the US also adopting this language. Such assertions now

appear commonsense, because 'Africa has been "overdetermined" by discourses that depict it,

writ large, as a global security problem' (Smith, 2005: 163).

All too frequently, analysts 'parrot the common sense [sic] view of autochthonous

African anarchy' (Dawson, 2011: 183) in which African problems are Africans' doing. Military

language around helping Africans with 'their' problems (Grigsby, 2015: 5; McCallum, 2013),

discussed in my previous chapter, exemplifies the problem. These discourses drown out

'competing historical and political economy explanations' (Smith, 2005: 164). Some of these

neglected explanations are historical, such as the impact of colonialism and 'structural

adjustment' (Ferguson, 2006; Orford, 2003) on the continent; many are continuing, arising from

Africa's selective integration in global circuits of circulation in connection with its natural resources (Ferguson, 2006) or, in the case of Ebola, the ongoing Northern recruitment of African healthcare workers (Hagopian et al, 2005), the extent of which has been described by some observers as 'criminal' (Mills et al, 2008). Through a series of discursive elisions, Africans have been pathologized and Northern policymakers' role in generating 'African' problems is erased. The cumulative effect of all of this is to create a vision of Northern humanitarian and development activities such as intervention in Ebola as above and beyond the call of duty (Orford, 2003), whereas even the most cursory examination of African history and Northern strategic discourse would reveal that such interventions are neither ethically adequate nor benevolent.

As Smith (2005: 168) explains, sensational images of African 'sickness', including diseases which might emerge from the continent to threaten the rest of the world have also become also commonplace. Originally-colonial fears of African diseases have found their most recent home in mainstream public health discourses of 'emerging infectious diseases' (Weir and Mykhalovskiy, 2006), which I will return to later in this chapter. When these discourses began to emerge during the 1990s, Paul Farmer was already critiquing what he saw as the myopia of 'standard epidemiology' (Farmer, 1996), which focuses strictly on the properties of viruses without considering any of the social, political and historical circumstances which facilitate disease emergence. In conjunction with Africanist understandings of the continent, this produces a 'geography of blame' (Farmer, 1992) whereby Africa and African diasporic communities (Fassin, 2004) are pathologized as 'natural' breeding grounds of diseases (including *social* ills) which threaten the North. Farmer explores this 'geography of blame' in relation to the spread of HIV/AIDS in Haiti. Haiti's discursive pathologization endures, having most recently found high-

profile expression in Trump's description of Haiti and African nations as 'shithole countries', with the president also reportedly telling an Oval Office meeting that Haitians 'all have AIDS' (Brown, 2018).

The most cursory examination of structural factors illustrates the counterfactuality of narratives naturalizing disease as an 'African' phenomenon. For example, as of 2008, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia had a physician-to-population ratio of 0.11, 0.3 and 0.3 physicians per 1000 people, in contrast to the US' 2.56, with even starker inequalities evident in nurse-to-population ratios for these nations (Mills et al, 2008). Even so, discourses naturalizing African disease and pathologizing African cultural practices continue to follow Africans outside the continent, with significant consequences for scapegoated populations. Fassin's (2004) case study of child lead poisoning in France — which particularly affected African immigrants — illustrated that the attribution of blame to African 'cultural practices', despite being unsubstantiated, effectively foreclosed consideration of — and thus potential intervention in — more important structural factors producing the poisonings. During the Ebola epidemic, 'standard epidemiology' was at play in statements like this, which reified 'Ebola virus' as the cause of the crises:

> The Ebola virus was sweeping through Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone in West Africa leaving tragedy, death, economic ruin, and weakened governments in its wake (AFRICOM, 2015)

Africanism, too, was evident in military understandings. A Combined Command United Shield (CCUS) report about the situation in Liberia cited problems of health care provision and cultural practices together, as though they were equally significant contributing factors:

overburdened medical infrastructure and cultural practices continue to hinder containment efforts (CCUS, 2014)

The broader concern is that the construction of disease as *security* problem which is *endemic* to Africa blames Africans both for their plight *and* for the threat such diseases supposedly pose to the global North. These understandings have assumed near-hegemonic status since the 1990s construction of 'emerging infectious diseases' discourses (Ingram, 2013; Weir and Mykhalovskiy, 2006). The vanishing of structural factors producing epidemic crises also allows for emergency measures such as military intervention, and the military's creep into humanitarian work, to be rendered not only sensible, but necessary.

4.2 Ebola, AFRICOM and the militarization of aid and development

There are precedents for the militarisation of aid, development and humanitarianism supposedly represented by AFRICOM. US engagements with Africa during the Cold War, for example, were not exceptional. Rather, they mirrored US strategy elsewhere insofar as the US both overtly and covertly supported 'pro-Western' regimes and sought to topple others. In this respect, some critical and military accounts appear to agree: among critical scholars, Bachmann (2010: 566) asserts that US Cold War commitments in Africa had 'little to do with the continent itself', but were primarily concerned with curtailing Soviet reach, which mirrors Kpohazounde's (2016) assessment; Senegalese army captain and Fort Leavenworth student Mboup (2008: 3) states that in terms of US strategy, 'Africa has hardly ever been more than an inconsequential

concern, entrusted primarily to the former European colonial powers'. Zeleza (2013: 171) makes the related claim that US-Africa security policy has 'largely been framed through the prism of the humanitarian paradigm' not just recently, but for the past fifty years. Bamba (2010: 93), however, is critical of such 'indiscriminate' assertions, instead arguing that Africa's 'birth' as an object of strategy occurred during WWII. There are at least some precedents for current strategic interest in Africa, although these may not be incompatible with Zeleza (2013) or Peterson's (2007) accounts of the US' primarily humanitarian framing of the continent.

Debates over the exact point over which Africa itself became a security concern aside, there is certainly a consensus among critical scholars and activists that the humanitarian and development landscape has shifted significantly since the onset of the 'War on Terror'. Geographer Simon Reid-Henry (2014: 419) contends that 'humanitarian ambitions have increasingly been subsumed within the wider discourse of exceptionality that permeates the post 9/11 "everywhere war"', with humanitarian work becoming increasingly 'militarized'. Recent analyses of AFRICOM's activities have presented AFRICOM's role in militarizing the continent as beyond question (Kpohazounde, 2016; Moore and Walker, 2016). Even prior to many of these accounts, the command was already sensitive to accusations of 'militarization'. AFRICOM's commander framed its intervention in the Ebola epidemic as follows:

> U.S. Africa Command is supporting the comprehensive U.S. government effort to help
> contain the outbreak of Ebola in West Africa (Rodriguez, 2014)

In a general overview of military-humanitarian developments written for the British Red Cross, Hofmann and Hudson in 2009 reported that NGOs had already identified AFRICOM as a

particularly concerning example — this only two years after its creation. In the same year, Dickinson (2009b) asserted that AFRICOM had already resulted in State Department personnel feeling 'both confused and threatened'. In August of 2009, the Office of the Inspector General published a lengthy report to this effect, specifically concerned with the State Department's African Affairs bureau (OIG, 2009). Early figures provided in a 2012 US Government Accountability Office report also substantiated these concerns: AFRICOM's spending on humanitarian assistance programs defined as Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster, and Civic Aid (OHDACA) increased 'from about $7.5 million in fiscal year 2008 to about $11.4 million in fiscal year 2010'. AFRICOM also spent 'about $16 million' on Humanitarian and Civic Assistance (HCA) programs over the same period, and received an additional $7.5 million from USAID for its assistance with combatting pandemic flu (US GAO, 2012: 61).

Less than a year after its establishment, AFRICOM's response to multiple similar criticisms already appeared defensive:

What AFRICOM is not about is in any way militarizing the continent or its island nations, says its commander, General William "Kip" Ward. "It's not the case," Ward emphasized … [AFRICOM] has been created to work with sovereign African nations in support of mutual objectives. (AFRICOM, 2008)

Narrowing the security-development gap does not mean militarizing development. (McFate, 2008: 16; cited approvingly by AFRICOM, 2007)

Others point out that despite military and policymaker talk along these lines, stressing the 'three Ds' (defense, diplomacy, development) (McFate, 2008a), 'whole-of-government' (Waldhauser, 2018) or 'comprehensive' approaches (Rodriguez, 2014), there is 'very real dominance of

Africom, and the Defense Department in general, over the State Department' (Dickinson, 2009b). Thus, US strategic documents stressing the need for improved 'interagency collaboration' (US GAO, 2010; 2015) are also suggestive of increased military influence in traditionally civilian arenas. Discussing US military deployment in the Asia-Pacific region, Women for Genuine Security (WGS) (Fukushima et al, 2014) term this tendency 'disaster militarism': 'a pattern of rhetoric, beliefs, and practices' in which the military is positioned as the natural first responder in large-scale disasters. AFRICOM may represent an acceleration of such processes: according to Bachmann (2010: 565), '[t]he consolidation of existing and the establishment of new military-to-military programmes within the new US Africa Command have led to fears about a further militarisation of US Africa policy.' Declarations of 'war' on Ebola (Bartzokis, 2014; Gregory, 2014) may be more than metaphorical.

'Militarization', however, does not necessarily imply an overarching 'grand strategy'. Later, I discuss how the conceptualization of disease as a security emergency — and military intervention as an appropriate response — has been facilitated by humanitarian actors (Ingram, 2013; Sandvik, 2015). It can also be understood as a result of competition between agencies for funding. There is an internal imperative for armed forces to diversify their operations insofar as this can offer protection against funding cuts or help to acquire additional funding which would previously have been allocated to other government agencies. Considered in this light, along with the surprise with which the Ebola outbreak was received, AFRICOM's role in the Ebola crisis or in other disease-fighting contexts appears more contingent. With that said, it is commonly proposed that involvement in disaster relief does provide strategic benefits insofar as it provides an opportunity for the US military to soften its image and normalize its enduring presence overseas. While the US is not alone in seeking to leverage disaster relief for longer-

term strategic gain — WGS also cite Chinese and Japanese responses to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami (Fukushima et al, 2014) — the US military has long been unparalleled in terms of both its share of government funding and the magnitude, reach and endurance of its overseas commitments (Johnson, 2005; Vine, 2015).

The US' involvement in disaster relief, then, complements the longer-term, more subtle strategy of legitimizing its military presence overseas by establishing smaller bases ('lily pads'), and undertaking smaller-scale development or aid work in order to build 'goodwill' (or, less sympathetically, create a sense of dependency and obligation) with local communities (Vine, 2015). Da Cruz et al (2010) suggest that AFRICOM's emphasis on its development activities should be understood in this light; another critic of AFRICOM's involvement in the Ebola response directly cited the Indian Ocean tsunami as the most recent example of the US successfully doing precisely this:

> US aid following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami forged ties between military and civilian leaders and ultimately led to the reestablishment of military ties in 2005. … [It] also swayed public opinion, creating a positive image of the US delivering aid to replace negative feelings surrounding American action in Afghanistan and Iraq. (Bartzokis, 2014)

There is increasing concern that funding for the types of initiatives which would previously have been undertaken by civilian agencies is now being awarded instead to the US military, especially post-9/11 (Dickinson, 2009b); and, relatedly, that US military attempts at diplomacy or other traditionally civilian pursuits are either unhelpful or directly at cross-purposes with continuing civilian diplomatic efforts. This is the thrust of criticisms of the newly-established AFRICOM

presented in the Office of the Inspector General's 2009 Report of Inspection of the Bureau of African Affairs (OIG, 2009). In the wake of military expansion into these arenas, critics contend that civilian branches of government are construed as unnecessary, defunded, and become increasingly ineffectual (Deen, 2013). Lending credibility to this position is a critical understanding that such vicious cycles of de-allocation have long been a cornerstone of neoliberal domestic policy: defund public services, declare them unworkable, and dismantle them altogether.

In the context of foreign aid and development, the re-allocation of resources from civil branches of government (such as the Department of State or USAID) to the US defense umbrella poses other specific problems. First, the moral value assigned to humanitarian work shifts significantly. Caring for distant others is understood less as intrinsically valuable, and the value of humanitarian work becomes increasingly contingent upon whether or not it serves strategic interests. As much as AFRICOM touts its humanitarian and development work, the overarching strategic imperatives and long-term ambitions of US foreign policy lie elsewhere. In the UK, too, Sharp et al (2011: 507) assert that 'the scales are tipping towards national interest as the main impetus for giving', with leaders stressing a relationship between poverty and terror in order to justify an approach to development which 'seems designed primarily to keep danger at a distance from the domestic population'. This subjugation of development and humanitarian aid to security concerns supports Duffield's (2001, 2007) understanding of the distinction between (Northern) 'insured' and (Southern) 'non-insured' life. Viewed this way, US policy toward Africa is to 'let die' — except when US strategic interests are at stake.

Second, particular problems are posed by the military's increasing presence as a first responder to the humanitarian emergency of disease. In general, McFate (2008a: 20)

acknowledges that 'many NGOs are uneasy about working with the U.S. military, believing it puts their people at risk of violent reprisals from groups targeted by U.S. combat operations'. In the context of broader US strategic narratives, McFate's implication is that this belief may not be well-founded. In fairness, disease and conflict are often already intertwined, as shown by the most recent Ebola epidemic (Branswell, 2018), and the implications of HIV/AIDS for some African conflicts (Elbe and Ostergard, 2007). In the context of increasing attacks on medical facilities (Shaheen, 2016), however, the substitution of military forces for civilian organisations in addressing health emergencies does bring genuine cause for concern. Military proponents might argue that this is neither here nor there: it is civilian-, not military-run medical facilities which have already been subject to devastating attacks. The context of increasing attacks on medical facilities could even be enrolled to argue *for* 'securing' humanitarian facilities on the grounds that the militarisation of medical care might serve to deter attackers — the repercussions for an attack on a military-run or guarded facility might be more immediately dangerous than the response provoked by attacking a civilian facility. The flip side is that loss of NGO 'neutrality' allows for the construction of humanitarian workers and infrastructure more broadly as justified targets of violence. These arguments surrounding medical humanitarianism usefully illustrate the circularity of the 'security-development nexus' discussed below: 'securitization' can be precisely what provokes violence.

Finally, AFRICOM's non-combat activities, including intervention in the Ebola epidemic, may serve an important PR function regardless of their immediate practical success (Bartzokis, 2014). The language of winning hearts and minds has been directly succeeded by the language of 'trust-building' (Dabkowski, 2015). As with other recent US military endeavours, the question less often asked is: whose hearts and minds — whose trust? Critics of 'disaster

militarism' and the military's creep into humanitarianism and development work, in addition to critics of AFRICOM (da Cruz, 2010), have generally left intact the notion that such projects are undertaken by the military in order to win the hearts and minds of Africans and facilitate further expansion. US humanitarian and development work in Africa appeared to intensify in the 5-10 years before AFRICOM's establishment, with PEPFAR's creation and 2008 expansion much-publicized evidence of the Bush administration's humanitarian commitments to Africa in particular (Ingram, 2011).

Explaining US surprise at African hostility to the command, military observer Mboup (2008: 20) states that US presumption of the goodwill generated by such programs was part of the reason why the Bush administration expected 'no significant hurdles' in establishing AFRICOM. The overall impression is one of US bewilderment: the US' 'stated willingness to divorce itself from a policy of abandonment that the Africans have been denouncing for decades … could have been expected to facilitate the acceptance of the new command' (Mboup, 2008: 20). In short: Africans should have been pleased to be noticed. Yet by 2008, it appeared as though AFRICOM had given up on moving its headquarters to Africa (BBC, 2008), having already made a $30 million payment to Djibouti in order to establish its largest base there (Deen, 2013). LeVan (2010) demonstrates convincingly, meanwhile, that African support for the command correlates directly with national economic dependence on the US.

This suggests that pro-African rhetoric, and even limited humanitarian engagement such as PEPFAR, is not in and of itself convincing unless accompanied by more substantive material incentives. AFRICOM's intervention in Ebola did entail the establishment of a 'Joint Force Headquarters' in Monrovia (AFRICOM, 2014), but Liberia is already one of the US' closest allies on the continent. Early on, Liberia was the only nation to offer to host AFRICOM's HQ

(Last, 2007), and specifically requested US military assistance with Ebola (Brown, 2014).

popular understandings of AFRICOM's response to Ebola as underwhelming (Bartzokis, 2014),

with critics contending that the command 'came late and left early' (Sandvik, 2015), also

suggests that AFRICOM's response to Ebola may not have been as successful in swaying wider

public opinion as was the US response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Post-hoc reports (e.g.

AFRICOM, 2015) attempted to construct a 'publically accepted narrative focused on how the

Western military degraded and destroyed the Ebola crisis' (Sandvik, 2015). Public acceptance of

this narrative would have worrying implications, but the question remains: who, if anyone, has

AFRICOM convinced?

4.3 The security-development nexus: policy or pretense?

AFRICOM's creation and growth is generally understood as part of a broader US shift

away from management of humanitarian work by traditional civilian organisations such as

USAID and the State Department, and toward the military administration of humanitarian work

(LeVan, 2010). One framework for understanding this militarization is that of the 'security-

development nexus'. Most extensively described and critiqued by Duffield (2001), its central

premise is that development concerns have been subsumed within Northern security concerns.

For proponents of AFRICOM, this is a positive project:

AFRICOM's strategic mandate must be to narrow the security-development gap …
fusing the capabilities of DOD with State, USAID, and other civilian organizations'
(McFate, 2008: 16-17)

Yet CJTF-HOA officer Mark Dabkowski's account illustrates the circularity of the construction. Development produces security, but security is needed for development, in a recursive loop:

> Almost every problem that you're going to find or at least that I confronted while I was in Africa, seemed to be a problem that required a 3-D solution. So, there was defense, there was diplomacy and development. Not necessarily in that order. The order changed depending on the type of problem. So, USAID plays a critical role. In order for USAID do to their work, you really need to have a secure environment. (Dabkowski, 2015: 10)

AFRICOM's latest Posture Statement (Waldhauser, 2018) emphasizes its 'whole of government' approach, also entailing these 'three Ds'. Yet Dabkowski describes the scene in Somalia where he served in 2015 as follows:

> there were a very large number of international players and entities involved in attempting to stabilize the situation in Somalia in many ways not operating under an umbrella type organization … there was no single, if you will, common operating picture for Somalia (Dabkowski, 2015: 10)

Perhaps revealingly, this is a common refrain: fellow CJTF-HOA officer Fox (2015) describes similar disorganization. AFRICOM has also been cited by the US government for its failures in this area. A 2010 US Government Accountability Office report pointed to particular failures in AFRICOM's strategic planning and interagency collaboration (US GAO, 2010). Two years later, another US GAO report similarly lamented that

DOD, State, and USAID do not have full visibility over each others' assistance efforts … there are questions as to whether DOD's efforts are an efficient use of resources since USAID serves as the lead U.S. development agency (US GAO, 2012)

In 2016, military figures writing in *InterAgency* Journal raised similar concerns (Denn et al, 2016). Further to both civilian and military official scrutiny, the purportedly holistic approach signified by the 'three Ds' has been subject to significant external critique. Some academics are sceptical, moreover, of the overall significance of the 'security-development nexus'. Chandler (2007: 362) describes the concept of the security-development nexus as 'anti-foreign policy': the use of the international sphere 'as an arena for self-referential statements of political mission and purpose, decoupled from their subject matter'. Justifications for AFRICOM stressed the need for a holistic strategic approach to Africa in which security and development are linked (LeVan, 2010), but the creation of AFRICOM is not in and of itself evidence of such an approach. For Chandler, the security-development nexus is a rhetorical device constructed by and for policymakers, representing no particular practical approach: a collection of policy statements which 'read more like rhetorical wishlists than seriously considered policy options' (Chandler, 2007: 368). These serve to conceal rather than address the genuine crisis of policy coherence from which they arise. Other critics concur:

beyond a recognition of the meshing of processes and domains commonly understood as 'security' and 'development', consensus around what is meant by 'the nexus' rapidly comes tumbling down. (Stern and Öjendal, 2010: 7)

Following these accounts, AFRICOM's claims to a holistic approach integrating the 'three Ds' can be understood primarily as discursive techniques which may or may not reflect the command's commitments on the continent. For Ebola, this rings true: the framing of the intervention and the deducible motivations for it do not correspond. More generally, Chandler's (2007) analysis would support the continuing relevance of discursive analysis and particularly imaginative geographies as a concept for understanding AFRICOM. If the 'security-development' nexus is policy fantasy, its believability hinges upon a broader scaffolding of related discursive constructions which, some contend, '[a]cademic discourses have not – in spite of the high stakes – adequately addressed' (Stern and Öjendal, 2010: 7). Thus, examining the rhetorical deployment of 'security-development' or the 'three Ds' by both proponents and critics of AFRICOM assumes greater urgency.

With their caution that the 'security-development nexus' should be investigated rather than taken as given, Chandler (2007) and Stern and Öjendal (2010) are critiquing fellow academics as much as policymakers. Concepts of liberal (biopolitical) empire, often invoking this nexus, have enjoyed a meteoric rise to prominence over the past two decades, but continue to be plagued by this and related critiques. Most of these centre on their perceived vagueness and lack of explanatory power (Holmqvist, 2012). For example, Reid's (2010: 394) explanation of what defines liberalism and distinguishes it from other political projects states that 'Liberalism and Nazism are not the same', claiming that liberalism's distinction is in its 'commitment to constituting the human as biohuman', but then proceeds to draw his examples from Nazism. He shies away from defining liberalism, but his assertion that the concept 'evades definition' belies a huge literature addressing precisely this question, some of which he has cited elsewhere in his essay (most conspicuously Foucault, 2007). This illustrates Holmqvist's (2012) critique of such

'biopolitical' approaches: in short, they run the risk of mirroring liberal interventionist discourse without explaining it.

Where scholars of liberalism, biopolitics and strategic concepts such as the 'nexus' are reluctant to define or unpack these terms, they lose their utility as concepts. On the other hand, careful empirical engagement with particular liberal/biopolitical techniques — e.g. the discursive construction of African consent — does evidence their continued relevance. My main concern, following Reid-Henry (2011), is that considering AFRICOM as a manifestation of US liberal-imperial power (as expressed in the security-development nexus) should not entail presuming the success of the project. Unfalsifiable attributions of strategic wisdom to the US also serve an Africanist/Orientalist function, insofar as their imaginative geography is one of Northern strategy and African passivity. In addition, Northern and Southern interests are not always in strict opposition. Imaginative geographies do reflect 'grids of power' (Gregory, 2009), but — much like the practices enrolled under the framework of the security-development nexus (Reid-Henry, 2011) — these discourses will not infrequently exert an unwanted 'return' influence on their perpetrators. In the case of the Ebola outbreak and the failure to anticipate it, the invisibility of the African continent long-cultivated in colonial and (until recently) economic imaginaries was directly at odds with US strategic interests.

4.4 Circulation, biopolitics and disease

In my last chapter, I argued that AFRICOM exists partly to secure the circulation of commodities for US consumption — in this case, oil. In this chapter, I return to these questions of circulation as they relate to a more recently-constructed security issue: disease. Even before its

launch, 'rising commitments with respect to global health in Africa' were cited by strategic thinkers as a key factor in AFRICOM's creation (Northam, 2007). Among those championing AFRICOM, McFate (2008: 12) cites the need to 'retard the spread of HIV/AIDS' as a key US security issue. LeVan (2010: 7-8) also relates existing precedents for the securitization of HIV/AIDS to the development of AFRICOM. Well before AFRICOM's involvement in the Ebola epidemic, he warned that the command may well follow in the footsteps of programs such as the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), which 'effectively shift the instruments of soft power away from the traditional foreign policy agencies', ultimately 'overshadowing traditional health and development infrastructure with American security interests'. Both of these initiatives – created in 2003 and 2004 respectively – were intended (and to some extent served) to soften the US' image in the wake of its 'War on Terror'. These are cited by da Cruz et al (2010) as strategic precedents for AFRICOM's development commitments, and by Mboup (2008) as part of the reason why the US expected a warmer response for its new command. Preexisting concerns about the 'militarized vision of security and development' and visions and practices of US-African partnership furthered through PEPFAR (Ingram, 2011: 670) suggest that US humanitarian and specifically health initiatives on the continent were laying – or attempting to lay – the groundwork for AFRICOM well before official discussions of the command's creation even began.

To explain how military intervention in the Ebola epidemic was rendered sensible, it is necessary to attend to the increasing conceptualization of flows as an object of security (Cowen, 2014). As Dillon and Lobo-Guerrero (2008: 282) argue, 'the problematic of biopolitical security apparatuses [which would include AFRICOM] is fundamentally that of securing the contingent

freedom of circulation'. Scholarly arguments over the precise horizons and mechanisms of 'biopolitics', usually indebted to Foucault (2007; 2014), continue to proliferate, but generally concur on their basic definition of biopolitics as the government of life at the level of population. With respect to the 'movement of persons, commodities, artefacts, knowledge, communications across and between nations', Lentzos and Rose (2009: 246) argue that the contemporary problematic is not one of 'halting circulation, but of managing, monitoring and regulating it'. They argue that 'this entails multiple endeavours to redefine spaces and the relations between them, and to reclassify the entities that circulate, in order to differentiate the permitted, the suspicious and the prohibited without destroying those flows upon which globalized liberty depends'.

Disease, of course, is near-universally agreed upon as an 'undesirable' form of circulation. However, the (un)desirability of particular kinds of disease is not straightforwardly determined by absolute considerations such as their bacterial or viral properties; instead, it is mediated by economic and geopolitical concerns. Accordingly, Ebola's construction as a 'matter of concern' (Latour, 2004) relates not only to its (admittedly formidable) viral characteristics, but by the threat it poses to the (increasingly conflated) security and economic interests of intervening parties. If, as critics contend, liberal government is about 'insuring' certain forms of life while '[rendering] others not worthy of insuring' (Stern and Öjendal, 2010: 16; also Duffield, 2010), the 'undesirability' of Ebola lay not in its mounting human toll but in the threat it posed to Northern (ways of) life; the Northern 'bunker' (Duffield, 2011); and the 'insured' lives within.

Such partiality may be explicit in certain strategic documents, but it is absent from public-facing accounts. The aforementioned evolving visions of both Africa and security combine in discourses of weak, failed, poorly- or un-governed states which legitimize

AFRICOM's 'police' presence (Bachmann, 2014). Such narratives also justify the continuing exclusion of African nations from global economic circuits — except for the highly selective forms of inclusion surrounding extraction of resources, which AFRICOM is likely intended to facilitate (McFate, 2008a; Rock, 2014). These discourses provide a circular justification for US military supervision, conveniently neglecting the extent to which alternative Southern government and economic formations are themselves a result of historical colonial dispossession and liberal exclusion. They also tend to imply that all 'informal' or 'shadow' forms of circulation are inherently wrong, rather than simply undesirable for the US or Northern interests more broadly (now more commonly euphemised as 'global' stability or economic interests). The separation of forms of circulation into 'desirable' and 'undesirable' flows demonizes those informal economic activities which are arguably 'morally benign and socio-economically profitable' and essential for many Southerners' survival (Le Billon, 2010: 576), but are nevertheless constructed as grounds for intervention under the framework of 'global' liberal government.

Unlike informal economic flows, Ebola's undesirability is uncontested. However, although the emergence of Ebola is itself a result of these continuing exclusions, its geographically-contingent construction as a security problem also constructs regions associated with the disease as disordered, chaotic and poorly governed. Undesirable forms of circulation (such as Ebola) are construed as uniformly bad and more importantly endemic to such areas, rather than morally varied and 'globally' and historically produced. The logic of securing circulation dictates Ebola's conceptualization as a 'global' and national security problem, and renders military intervention not only sensible but imperative:

the president considers containing the spread of Ebola to be a national security priority that requires mobilizing our collective resources to enable the success of the international effort. (General Rodriguez, 2014: emphasis added)

Ebola threatened to explode on to international circuits, wreaking direct epidemiological and social devastation in the global North as SARS (briefly) did (Wilder-Smith, 2006). Even if contained to west Africa, the epidemiological, social and economic impacts of the disease could seriously jeopardise the evacuation and transportation of West Africa's increasingly coveted oil reserves. The delayed response to Ebola partly reflected the extent to which the North remains 'in the dark' (Smith, 2005: 164) about the so-called 'dark continent', which in turn stems from Africa's 20th century (and for the most part, continuing) unimportance to 'global' economic circuits. The heightening of American and Chinese interest during the 21st century has shifted priorities, but mostly in relation to specific continental 'nodes'. Returning to the discussion of circulation in my last chapter, the selective incorporation of certain parts of the African continent has centered upon oil and mineral resources and defensible transportation routes: 'the source of power … [is] control over key nodes of the commodity chain' (Le Billon, 2001: 576). The geographies of circulation and Ebola converged. As such, while Ebola fell completely outside the remit of traditional military objectives — which conservative and strategic commentators were among the first to lament (Tomlinson, 2014; OIG, 2009) — it had everything to do with newer, liberal conceptions of security.

4.5 Disease as a problem of security

Scholars of public health have for several decades expressed concerns about the construction of disease as a security problem. Writing around the time of AFRICOM's creation, Bashford (2007: 2) is critical of recent developments through which disease prevention 'has become a vehicle for, and even an instrument of' geopolitics, while also suggesting that these developments build upon a long history of disease control serving as a pretext for international intervention. Peterson (2007: 55) is deeply sceptical of both the construction of infectious diseases as security threats, and its effectiveness as a strategy for health practitioners to secure funding. Discussing HIV/AIDS, she states that 'it [HIV/AIDS] does not now pose a significant security threat to most developed states'. This is reflected, she claims, in the fact that the US normally justifies its disease-related interventions in terms of humanitarian (not security) considerations. Even Peterson, though, is forced to concede a key geographical point:

> As the United States relies more on West African states like Nigeria and Angola for oil, the balance between humanitarian and security concerns may shift more towards the latter (Peterson, 2007: 55)

Peterson is discussing HIV/AIDS, but the recent Ebola epidemic overwhelmingly affected West African nations to an even greater degree — and, as discussed in my second chapter, numerous critics (Rock, 2014; Zeleza, 2013) and policymakers (Lake et al, 2006; Ploch, 2011; McFate, 2008a) have cited securing access to West African oil as a key US concern. Dionne and Seay (2014) cite continuing African suspicion that AFRICOM's role in the Ebola response specifically arises not from humanitarian considerations, but from these geoeconomic concerns (usually

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presented in terms of 'global' economic security). These accounts are consistent with health scholars' criticisms of the late 20th century evolution of 'international' health into 'global' health (Brown et al, 2007). The 1990's construction of 'emerging infectious diseases' as new threats and arenas for intervention justified new emphases in public health, including the creation of new techniques of surveillance which undermined state sovereignty by allowing scientists in the global North to remotely surveil and report disease 'emerging' elsewhere.

For example, the 1998 creation of the Global Public Health Intelligence Network (GPHIN) — a collaborative project between Canada and the WHO — which surveils global news reporting for signs of epidemic outbreak (Weir and Mykhalovskiy, 2006). GPHIN revealed SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) before China was willing to, and the WHO's resulting travel advisories caused diplomatic friction which some have interpreted as a pivotal moment in the administration of public health: from sovereign state control to 'global' (Northern) oversight (Fidler, 2007). This recent history unfolded concurrently with a shift in US military understandings, wherein strategic thinkers began to present US military engagements abroad as a form of global 'policing' (Bachmann, 2010; 2014). Taken together, these trends present a convincing argument for Duffield's (2001, 2007) understanding of 'global' government as an evolving imperial project whereby the privileged Northern bunker is protected, with the 'abandonment' of Southern populations and selective interventions in the South representing two sides of the same coin.

When it comes to security, however, not all diseases are equal, and the complicated history of these discourses exceeds longstanding conceptions of the South (and Africa specifically) as spaces of threat and disorder (Smith, 2005; Zeleza, 2013), or of the strategic

insight of policymakers. This story also includes rhetorical strategies deployed by humanitarian actors, alongside the advances in technology which permitted new techniques of surveillance. The late 20th century concept of 'emerging infectious diseases', which would include Ebola, 'had from the first been formulated in relation to US national interests' (Weir and Mykhalovskiy, 2006: 253). Much existing critical scholarship around the construction of disease as security threat, though, discusses HIV/AIDS or other chronic public health problems, which Peterson is correct to argue does not pose a direct security threat to privileged Northern actors able to afford effective pharmaceutical therapy ('abandoned' Northern populations, e.g. US citizens without health insurance, are not invited to the policymaking table).

In direct contrast to Ebola, HIV/AIDS in the African context is a more long-term problem which is in some sense intimately connected with more traditional security and/or military objectives. This allows for more well-considered strategic interventions. HIV/AIDS is, for example, both a weapon and a weakness for many African militaries (Ostergard, 2007), as well as posing other nontraditional security problems (Elbe and Ostergard, 2007). Debates around HIV/AIDS are central to disease's enrolment in security narratives. The construction of HIV/AIDS as a security problem — also during the 1990s — was spearheaded not by technocrats (although these followed), but by humanitarian activists, who seized upon the idea of the disease as a security threat to try to spur government intervention, with considerable success. The HIV/AIDS response then became 'a site for the dissemination of liberal governmental rationalities' (Ingram, 2013: 441), arguably laying the conditions of possibility for discourses of 'emerging infectious diseases' which came to dominate understandings of SARS, pandemic flu, and, most recently, Ebola. Like the 'standard epidemiology' critiqued by Farmer (1996), these discourses vanish inequality through their construction of certain areas as disease reservoirs and

their exceptionalist emphasis on emergency responses to outbreaks, ultimately producing a 'depoliticized understanding of human suffering' (Ingram, 2013: 450).

Critics need not subscribe to standard epidemiology to observe that the viral properties of Ebola and its unfolding as 'event' differed significantly from those associated with slow-acting HIV/AIDS, which can be effectively treated, and whose crises are unfolding mostly in the South. Even accounting for earlier missed warning signs (Sack et al, 2014), Ebola's emergence as a public health crisis was rapid, unexpected and more immediately catastrophic and 'globally' threatening than HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS is less transmissible, less virulent and more treatable than Ebola; at the time of the Ebola outbreak, there were no effective pharmaceutical treatments to combat the virus itself, only its symptoms. In terms of the degree of alarm and the public health responses that followed, the Ebola epidemic could be considered more closely analogous not to the plethora of more longstanding, spatially-delimited and often chronic diseases afflicting millions of Africans, but to the 2002-3 SARS outbreak. The SARS epidemic was much smaller, but its rapid spread and serious economic impact (Wilder-Smith, 2006) in the global North — Canada — would have been relatively fresh in the minds of policymakers. The economic havoc wrought by SARS has been understood by critics as a product of the ways in which the disease and ill-judged responses to it disrupted other forms of circulation, especially tourism (Hooker, 2007).

This conception of disease as a problem of security, and specifically a threat to circulation, is a form of imaginary which suggests both emergency and technical solutions to the problem of disease emergence. By dropping the structural causes of disease (in short: inequality) from view, discourses of 'emerging infectious diseases' also avoid consideration of the unpalatable longer-term projects of redistribution which are needed to address them. For all their

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emphasis on prevention, EID discourses' combination of Africanist and technocratic visions all but guarantees the repeated re-emergence of major epidemics and the apparent necessity of 'emergency' interventions, including military operations. 'Prevention' in this case means using new techniques and technologies of health government to prevent threats to Northern populations; disease must already have 'emerged' and caused harm somewhere (with the presumption being Southern emergence), after all, for GPHIN to be able to detect it.

Worryingly, AFRICOM's eventual intervention in Ebola is a story, too, of the limitations of these liberal technologies of government. Surveillance machine GPHIN has been deliberately thwarted before, e.g. by Chinese censorship of internet news (Weir and Mykhalovskiy, 2006), but its failure in this instance — alongside other failures of surveillance (Sack et al, 2014) — reflects the inbuilt limitations of the device. This serves more broadly as a reminder that, contrary to policymaker desires and critical fears, liberal techniques of government can never fully 'capture' their objects. The late detection and resultant massive human toll of Ebola indicates, meanwhile, that this is not in and of itself cause for optimism. Yet for critics understanding AFRICOM's intervention in Ebola as part of a broader imperial project (Williamson, 2014), the tensions expressed in the ultimate impossibility of simultaneously 'insuring' Northern life while 'letting die' in the South could suggest possible avenues for resistance.

4.6 Conclusion

Ebola's west African emergence posed a threat to desirable circulation in a way that more chronic health crises, such as malaria or dysentery, do not; hence intervention was required.

Ebola's construction as security threat hinged upon the danger it posed to circulation, which arose from a confluence of factors including the virus' characteristics, the geographical location of the outbreak, and US interests in the region. The virus' rapid spread, and the delayed Northern response to it, were in a larger sense facilitated by historical material dispossession (manifest now in inadequate healthcare provisions) and problems of selective visibility relating to Africanist understandings of the continent. The African continent is — in a very 'real', material sense — plagued with preventable diseases. Much like other 'African' problems, this historically-contingent outcome has been naturalized to the extent that Africa and Africans are discursively aligned with disease, and blamed for it, in a variety of contexts (Farmer, 1992; Fassin, 2004). This is a product of continuing colonial discourses and newer, related discursive innovations, including development-security discourses which frame certain spaces as sources of disorder (Bachmann, 2014), and 'standard epidemiology' which evacuates epidemic outbreaks of their historical and political context (Farmer, 1996), allowing for military intervention to be framed as sensible and benevolent.

Despite this, the US has failed to convince many African governments that AFRICOM serves their interests. This is not surprising: it is easy to find evidence that US policy concerns with oil and China have very little to do with African interests. Easily-accessed strategic accounts (Brown, 2013; Lake et al, 2006; Mboup et al, 2009; McFate, 2008a and 2008b; and Ploch, 2011, to name a few) and servicemember accounts (Dabkowski; Fox; Grigsby, 2015) clarify this point. AFRICOM's response to the Ebola epidemic has provided justification for subsequent 'preventative' projects, such as the 'West Africa Disaster Preparedness Initiative' (DTRA, n.d.), in addition to new military infrastructure in Liberia (AFRICOM, 2014). Under this rubric, AFRICOM's non-combat activities, including intervention in the Ebola epidemic, can

serve an important PR function regardless of their immediate practical success (Bartzokis, 2014). This justifies critics' fears that the Ebola intervention might be used to gain a stronger military foothold on the continent (Williamson, 2014). Yet is not clear whether AFRICOM's intervention in the Ebola epidemic has shifted African public opinion, particularly given the delay in the broader Northern response (Sack et al, 2014), and specific arguments that the command was not effective against Ebola (Dionne and Seay, 2014; Peterson and Folayan, 2017; Sandvik, 2015).

As I hinted earlier in this chapter, there is another possibility that critics so far do not seem to have considered, which is that the stories told about Africa and AFRICOM (and discussed above) may not be primarily for the benefit of Africans. As discussed in my first chapter, Falk (2015: 84) holds that Americans 'have become generally opposed to foreign military intervention', particularly on humanitarian grounds — with security understood as a more convincing rationale. But the idea of the development-security nexus — as expressed through AFRICOM's language of unified strategy — allows for security to be packaged as a humanitarian imperative, and vice versa. Concerns about risk to US troops are overcome by publicizing only operations which are 'bloodless' (in terms of US casualties) (Chamayou, 2015). If we consider that AFRICOM's stories may be formulated primarily for more susceptible domestic and international public and policymaking audiences, this leads to different implications in terms of how the 'success' of AFRICOM's practical and rhetorical interventions — and the broader utility of the 'security-development nexus' — should be evaluated.

For the specific crisis of Ebola, though, the analytical frameworks outlined above and in my previous chapters would suggest that AFRICOM's intervention in the Ebola epidemic had very little to do with PR concerns. The Ebola crisis' post-hoc usefulness as a platform for AFRICOM's expansion should be evaluated, but without losing sight of the contingency of the

US response in relation to key material concerns: Ebola posed a threat to American citizens, US interests in African oil, and potentially all manner of other 'desirable' flows. This was the basis for AFRICOM's intervention. At the time, it was apparent that interest in African lives or perceptions paled amidst panic (Siddique, 2015) about the possibility of Ebola taking hold in the 'Northern bunker' (Duffield, 2011), and, critics contend, jeopardizing the circulation of west African oil (Dionne and Seay, 2014).

Finally, care should be taken to avoid reconstructing an idea of an idyllic, non-militarized humanitarian past preceding a militarist fall from grace, or presenting contemporary civilian organizations as completely virtuous. My first chapter includes a small survey of literature addressing the complicated relationships between humanitarianism and imperialism for this reason. There, I contended that authors such as Chomsky (1999; 2012) and Seymour (2008) reproduce what Reid-Henry (2014: 420) terms a 'false binary' between purely selfless and or self-serving forms of humanitarianism. Criticisms of militarization, especially those originating with competing humanitarian actors (e.g. Hofmann and Hudson, 2009) with material interests at stake, should similarly be approached with a grain of salt. Thinking historically, Brantlinger (1988) contends that it was the discursive strategies of 18th century British humanitarians (abolitionists) which truly solidified the enduring racist constructions of Africa and Africans which now bolster arguments for less virtuous forms of intervention. Now, Médecins sans Frontières is most often cited as standing in stark opposition to the militarization of aid, continuing to refuse armed escorts in order to maintain neutrality even when this impedes their immediate operations, as in the most recent (2018) Ebola outbreak (Branswell, 2018).

Even the most sympathetic accounts must acknowledge, though, that MSF's own role in Africa is 'deeply intertwined with the legacies of European colonialism' (Chen, 2014: 89), and in

some sense continues them. MSF's normal operations entail significant inequalities between Northern and 'local' workers, and problematic representations of disease victims. Furthermore, MSF's admirable commitment to 'neutrality' conceals some of the stickier relations of power involved in its operations (Chen, 2014). During the Ebola epidemic, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) were subject to criticism for requesting international military assistance with Ebola (Sandvik, 2015) and so facilitating militarization just as humanitarian activists facilitated the construction of disease as security problem in relation to HIV/AIDS (Ingram, 2013). This long entanglement of humanitarianism and security need not render MSF's work any less valuable, or the military's increasing incursions into the realms of humanitarianism and development any less worrying. However, criticisms of militarization which whitewash humanitarianism ignore continuing critiques of 'humanitarianism as securitization' (Watson, 2011), and risk erasing important historical context for understanding the very process they seek to critique.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this thesis, I set out to investigate the rationales for, and implications of, AFRICOM's creation and subsequent evolution. Having introduced various bodies of literature on humanitarianism, warfare and geographical imaginaries in my second chapter, I used these as the starting point for my subsequent interrogation of the command's most-publicised 'collaborative' or 'humanitarian' discourses, approaches and engagements. In my third and fourth chapters, I placed existing critical understandings of the command in conversation with these aforementioned broader debates and my own findings, suggesting the strengths and limitations of various frameworks. In particular, I demonstrated the importance of attending to the specificities of the African context, including the continuing importance of Africanist imaginative geographies (including their more recent co-articulation with liberal-technocratic visions of warfare) and African political understandings. I also made a small methodological contribution by introducing and demonstrating the usefulness of typically-unexamined empirical material (OLE interviews with AFRICOM officers).

My main theoretical contributions are outlined below. First, I explain how my thesis reveals important limitations of existing *journalistic* interpretations of the command. Second, I summarize the critical contribution my thesis makes to ongoing *academic* debates about not only the command, but contemporary warfare and military forms of humanitarianism and development more broadly. Finally, I argue that US and international academic communities must understand AFRICOM as more than a distant object of scholarly concern. US military activities pose a direct threat, too, to our own academic freedom and capacity for critical scholarship.

5.1 Journalistic understandings of the command

The starting point for my research was surveying existing understandings of the command, establishing its strengths and shortcomings with the intention of bringing these into conversation with a broader body of critical literature. Most media criticism of AFRICOM divided neatly into two camps. First, partial, circumspect critiques which lament certain controversies but in so doing echo conventional strategic claims and geographical imaginaries which support the command (e.g. Page, 2017). Second, exposé style interventions (best exemplified by Turse, 2015c) which highlight specific discrepancies between the command's rhetoric and practice. The former barely qualifies as critique. The latter is necessary, valuable work, and an indispensable reference for building critique – with several key caveats.

Official government accounts of foreign policy and operations are rarely characterized by unvarnished honesty, and there are numerous historical examples of significant mistruths only uncovered by committed investigative journalism. However, many of the most significant aspects of AFRICOM's establishment and development are discussed openly: not in command press releases and speeches, but in policy and strategic documents or interviews with personnel. For fairly straightforward material reasons, investigative journalists explicitly and implicitly stress the value of uncovering secret truths. I argue, however, that revelations about what the US chooses to (or fails to) disclose about its operations in Africa, and the language used in such accounts, are most useful when contextualized within the broader analytical question of what *public* stories such (non)disclosures or (mis)representations form a part.

The other crucial question which follows is what kinds of stories about the US, African nations, and the relationships between these entities are/were considered believable by officials,

US publics, or broader publics worldwide. Furthermore, I asked *how* and *why* these geographical and geopolitical imaginaries came to dominate both strategic and popular understandings of Africa. I addressed these themes throughout my thesis, with my fourth chapter offering the most detailed unpacking of these questions of geographical imagination as they relate specifically to AFRICOM's involvement in a major international event (the 2013-16 Ebola epidemic). None of this analysis required privileged or classified information.

While observers of the command should not be lulled into a false sense of transparency, overemphasis on exposing mistruths through FOIA requests or deep-digging journalism can have a disempowering effect: the implication is that only expert muckrakers, if anyone, will be able to uncover the 'true meaning' of the command. On the contrary, one of the most striking things about AFRICOM is how *easily* many of its major claims can be deconstructed. One of my thesis' major contributions is its illustration of this point. Attempts to conceal or spin US' strategic interests in the region are surprisingly superficial; public statements about AFRICOM's intentions are belied not only by investigations of AFRICOM's material activities (Turse, 2015c), but also by every substantive strategic report on the subject. There is constant oscillation on the part of policymakers and politicians between stressing US strategic interests in the region (e.g. Lake et al, 2006; McFate, 2008a and 2008b) and denying any interest in pursuing them, to the extent that even sympathetic 'internal' observers have bemoaned the absurdity of these contradictions (Mboup et al, 2009).

This relative openness about the US' interests in Africa stands in contrast with the monumental dissimulation involved in conjuring 'weapons of mass destruction' in Iraq. AFRICOM's relatively half-hearted approach may be at least in part a product of strategic and policy assumptions of the cover provided by specifically *Africanist* imaginaries. Africa's

(presumed and actual) invisibility and popular ideas of Africa as corrupt, undemocratic, with disease, conflict and poverty endemic or self-generated should have – and to some extent did – provided enough discursive context for public statements about the command to be taken at face value by Northern audiences, who have little cause to read strategic reports on the command.

Perhaps naively, I think that this is cause for optimism. Much as US political, strategic and military figures received African hostility to the command with surprise and bewilderment (Mboup, 2008; Mboup et al, 2009), last year's public outcry over the death of soldiers in Niger and (to a lesser extent) reports of torture in Cameroon suggests that US officials may have overestimated the power of Africanist discourses, and underestimated the critical faculties of both domestic and international audiences. Government faux-transparency can be and has been cynically deployed as rhetorical strategy, and there are genuinely concerning discrepancies between AFRICOM's stated and actual activities which warrant serious critical attention (Turse, 2013, 2015b, 2017a). However, many strategic debates have genuinely become more accessible to a much wider range of observers (if not, alas, participants) due to burgeoning online archives of government, media, activist, academic and policymaker contributions. The availability of such online archives is the condition of possibility for this thesis — and, I hope, future critical investigations.

5.2 Academic understandings of the command

If journalists can be accused of disproportionate and disempowering interest in 'hidden' truths, so too can academics. Despite some significant exceptions (Vine, 2015; Reid-Henry, 2011) Northern scholarly approaches to understanding post-War on Terror US military activity

more broadly have often favored sweeping theoretical frameworks which also suggest the *im*possibility of resistance (as critiqued by Holmqvist, 2012). These implicitly neglect Southern scholarly accounts which do directly offer strategic possibilities for resistance, such as Onuoha and Ezirim's (2010) discussion of Nigeria's response to AFRICOM. I surveyed and critiqued the most relevant of these broader theoretical contributions in my second chapter, before moving on to discuss debates around AFRICOM itself. Crucially, AFRICOM itself remains under-attended to, likely reflecting dynamics of African (in)visibility discussed in my third chapter, although the command has been analysed convincingly in terms of continuing colonialism (Wiley, 2012; Zeleza, 2013) and/or forms of liberal 'policing' (Bachman, 2010; 2014), especially the liberal-technocratic humanitarian imaginaries facilitated by technological innovations and the broader context of global inequality and asymmetries of force.

Having surveyed these broader literatures, I contend the most useful framework for understanding AFRICOM — and which AFRICOM lends support to — is that of *securing circulation* (Foucault, 2007), to which geographers have become increasingly attuned in recent years (Cowen, 2014). That is, the command is governed by the liberal drive to selectively construct and 'secure' circuits of circulation which favour US or other Northern interests (more often presented as 'global' interests), while attempting to discourage competing circuits. In my third chapter, I discussed this in relation to US concern with Chinese interests on the continent: Chinese contributions to building infrastructure in East Africa — a kind of competing circuit — were understood by officers as a 'strategic' (Fox, 2015) or (more directly) 'security' threat (Grigsby, 2015). Competing informal networks and 'shadow economies' have also long been constructed as undesirable (Le Billon, 2001): they disrupt, or compete with, legitimate forms of circulation.

Under the rubric of circulation, certain kinds of violence or disease are rendered more problematic than others. American interventions can be understood accordingly. As lamented by Tanzanian newspapers (Sharp, 2011), so-called political extremism and/or terrorism in Middle Eastern or African contexts attracted much less US attention before its potential threat to circulation was conclusively demonstrated. Much as 9/11 heightened US interest in Africa, the Ebola epidemic, too, spurred a concerted Northern response *only* once its threat to circulation — of people and commodities, and especially West African oil (Peterson and Folayan, 2017) — became incontrovertible (Sack et al, 2014; Siddique, 2015). An approach which thinks about AFRICOM in terms of securing specific, geographically-enframed forms of circulation can complement discussions of biopolitical or deterritorialized empire (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Reid, 2010), while avoiding the pitfalls of totalizing or 'ageographical' (Morrissey, 2011b) forms of analysis.

Accordingly, the actual and possible impacts of AFRICOM (and vice versa) on the domestic politics of African nations, or indeed on inter-African dynamics, deserve further exploration. LeVan's (2010) political economic analysis and Jamieson's (2009) discussion of AFRICOM from a South African perspective move in this direction, and critics have voiced fears about historic US support for African dictatorships (Jamieson, 2009), suspecting the possibility of overt and/or inadvertent US facilitation of undemocratic military coups (Dickinson, 2009a). US military training programs, including those in Africa, have raised particular alarm for these reasons among others (Lutz, 2009). In my second chapter, I provided a critical discursive analysis of AFRICOM's invocation of consent and African leadership in relation to these programs. There has been little detailed research into the effects of, and discourses around,

AFRICOM's work with particular militaries. Further research into AFRICOM's practices and the discourses surrounding them *as they unfold* in specific contexts is required.

My research has allowed me to intervene in debates around the veracity and implications of AFRICOM's various claims to novelty. At the time of its creation, policymaker McFate (2008: 15) suggested that

> 'AFRICOM represents an experiment in early 21st-century security, and potentially serves as a prototype for post-Cold War unified commands.'

Many are skeptical about the extent to which AFRICOM represents a positive or even a significant change in US strategy (Glazebrook, 2012; Rock, 2014; Turse, 2015c). There are undoubtedly a number of continuities between AFRICOM and prior US military activity in Africa and elsewhere, particularly in terms of counterinsurgency work, interest in securing oil supplies, and strategic maneuvering against another major power (once the USSR, now China). AFRICOM's discourse of 'building trust' and 'partnership' is also reminiscent of, though not identical to, historical discourses around psychological warfare (Whyte, 2017) or 'winning hearts and minds'.

Yet AFRICOM at the least represents an intensification of US interest in Africa, an incredible expansion of US activity on the continent, and the refinement of 21st century discourses and practices of warfare. More generally, the role of technological innovations (such as drones and precision bombing) in facilitating new discourses and practices of asymmetrical warfare has received particular attention (Chamayou, 2015; Douzinas, 2006; Walters, 2011; Weizman, 2011), as demonstrated in my second chapter. The most pertinent question is not

whether AFRICOM is novel, but *how* it is, and what implications follow. Critics of AFRICOM understand the command to represent an intensification of US commitment to drone warfare (Parrin and Odele, 2015; Turse, 2015b), while proponents celebrate AFRICOM as a newly-integrated, holistic, and collaborative approach to foreign policy (McFate, 2008b; Waldhauser, 2017 and 2018). If we take seriously any of these critical and policymaker claims to innovation — with AFRICOM representing at least *some* significant shifts in US interests and strategy, for better or worse — we must also consider how the use of Africa as 'laboratory' (Dabkowski, 2015) exerts a 'return' influence (Reid-Henry, 2011) on the architects of these experiments. These specificities have received less critical attention.

I believe my close examination of (otherwise neglected) OLE interviews with CJTF-HOA personnel, read alongside known African hostility toward the command (BBC, 2007; LeVan, 2010) and the equal measures of disappointment and alarm with which AFRICOM's Ebola intervention was received, offers strong evidence that US' strategic discourses around Africa respond to US *frustrations* in Africa (as well as US failures elsewhere). AFRICOM's combination of liberal-technocratic and Africanist discourses is best understood in this fashion, rather than as a manifestation of geographically unmoored American strategic genius.

The refinement of imperial and/or 'police' strategies and techniques happens not only in the removed strategic 'bunkers' of the global North (Duffield, 2011) but also at the site of intervention, with implications for their success or their transferability elsewhere. Accordingly, it is both empirically and morally important to give due credit to African politicians, military leaders and writers — along with other domestic and international critics — for their role in shaping US strategic discourse and practice. If critics assume agency is the preserve of Northern actors alone, we provide at best an oppositional mirror of interventionist discourses (Orford,

2003), which allows little room for resistance. This tendency is probably best encompassed in Chomsky's assertion, discussed in my second chapter, that 'US "mistakes" are overwhelmingly tactical' (1999: 19). A proper assessment of this claim would exceed the scope of this thesis. However, my discussion of AFRICOM's numerous failures – to anticipate or assuage African hostility, to avoid domestic and international financial and moral scandal, or to intervene effectively in Ebola – suggests that, accidental or otherwise, US 'mistakes' and failures are products of myriad factors beyond the US' will to power.

Whether or not AFRICOM is understood as part of a broader colonial or imperial present, the historical geographers cited in my first chapter offer a useful caution: the 'heterogeneous, contingent and conflictual character of imperial projects' has too often been neglected by historians (Driver, 2001: 8), and the same criticism is equally applicable here. Attention to these specificities does not render critiques of AFRICOM any less urgent, but rather makes for more productive engagements. As Vine (2015) argues, possibilities for rhetorical and material domination *and resistance* are conditioned by specific histories and geographies, to which critics should remain attentive.

5.3 Closing thoughts: AFRICOM in the academy

According to David Wiley (2012: 158), AFRICOM poses a serious threat to academic integrity. First, he estimates that "[f]unding for the study of Africa in U.S. security agencies now exceeds that of American universities probably by a factor of fifty". That is, most research on Africa is taking place outside the university, directly in service to US foreign policy imperatives, and as such are necessarily more instrumental than critical. Second, AFRICOM's concealed

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expansion and PR-friendly projects have enabled it to partially succeed in colonizing Africanist studies and 'Africanist communities' themselves, thus rehabilitating US militarism within a formerly critical discipline. Taken together, Wiley understands these trends to represent the 'militarization' of African Studies. African enthusiasm for AFRICOM clearly tracks with other political and economic imperatives (LeVan, 2010). If DoD funding is increasingly perceived as 'the only game in town' for academics, critical scholarship is at risk.

Scholars in other disciplines are also wary. Among other interventions, the Network of Concerned Anthropologists' (NCA) 2009 *Counter-Counterinsurgency Manual* addressed this very threat: Chapter 6 of the volume is titled simply "Counter AFRICOM" (Besteman, 2009). With the US a hub for a number of disciplines, the militarization of the academy has ramifications beyond domestic US scholarly communities. Accordingly, more recent stirrings in the discipline of geography in the form of the Network of Concerned Geographers (2017) have spanned both Canada and the US. Among other grievances, the NCG has objected to growing US military presence at the Association of American Geographers' Annual Conference, which is well-established as the world's largest gathering of academic geographers and central to the discipline's identity within anglophone scholarly communities worldwide.

I have heard several criticisms of the NCA and NCG framed in terms of academic freedom: that scholars and departments should be free to accept or reject funding as they see fit, without being presumed to have been 'bought'. In this thesis, I have critiqued the liberal invocation of consent — and, relatedly, collaboration — which has assumed rhetorical centrality in justifications for the expansion of US military activity in Africa. Now I ask: in the wake of the neoliberalization of the academy and increasing precarity of academic careers, what does it mean for *academics* to 'consent' to military funding and influence in their disciplines? As I argued in

my last chapter, it is important to critically assess both to the methods by which the US military attempts to win over African audiences, and the extent to which they succeed. Furthering Besteman (2009) and Wiley's (2012) interventions in other disciplines, I argue that it is equally imperative for academics and critical writers in the global North to consider the extent to which *we* – that is, Northern scholars and critics – are hailed by AFRICOM's liberal-Africanist discourses, along with the implications for our own disciplines and for scholarly resistance. With knowledge production itself under threat of militarization, the struggle against AFRICOM becomes more than a question of academic interest; in a much more visceral sense, it is our struggle too.

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