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**Gallagher, Julia. *Britain and Africa Under Blair: In Pursuit of the Good State*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011, viii + 166 pp.**

While employed at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office during Tony Blair's prime ministership, Julia Gallagher found herself struck by the distinct rhetoric about Africa that Blair and his cabinet expressed. In *Britain and Africa Under Blair*, Gallagher seeks to understand this "new" moral, ethical discourse which differed from that used to describe the rest of the world. Where Africa was concerned, Blair's government expressed an "ethical foreign policy," which was "grounded in utopian and cosmopolitan ideas and highly idealised... [as well as] offered a grand, heroic identity for Britain" (4). The rhetoric, interestingly, was not restricted to the New Labour party; politicians from all parties seemed to employ it. Africa was thus set above party politics as the government undertook a moral crusade to "help" the continent, claiming that it was supporting human rights and creating social justice, all the while contributing to global stability and economic improvement.

Gallagher's approach has a second, crucial façade. She argues that Africa was a perfect "Other" where Britain could project its international efforts, which contributed to domestic notions about the ideal British state. She derives her argument from the realm of psychology by considering how individuals – and by extension, the states they comprise, she argues somewhat controversially – can solve internal traumas and maintain well being. In the case of the British state, this was achieved in part through attempts to "'repair' external objects," that is, trying to fix the problems facing African peoples (69). This is an original argument that is grounded on Gallagher's conviction about the "importance to human wellbeing of a connection to a sense of the good" (73). She provides the evidence for this thesis in the second half of the book through contemporary case studies of recent British engagement in Sierra Leone and Nigeria, though one wonders whether Kenya or Zimbabwe might have provided more complex, richer examples.

Gallagher begins with a theoretical chapter that weighs the "good" a state might wish to accomplish against its "political" considerations, and dips into the history of the British Empire to begin explaining the intellectual background to New Labour's approach to Africa. The first half of the book, indeed, is really an intellectual history of the idea of the "goodstate" in Britain since the late eighteenth century. Gallagher's approach reminds this author of Alice Conklin's efforts in writing the history of early colonial French West Africa. Like Conklin, Gallagher believes in the importance of ideology in British efforts in Africa, and links later Labour ideologies to the period of the Scramble for Africa and beyond.

For Gallagher, "doing good" was no simple veil covering economic and

geo-political considerations, but an important aspect of British policy and consciousness. The various strands of the “good” of British state policy from the past through New Labour are clearly explored, though these sections leave a sense of uneasiness about the omission of those slightly less “good” aspects. There is also a problematic tendency to take statements from politicians like Joseph Chamberlain or publications like the Times at face value without subjecting them to critical analysis, something Gallagher acknowledges in the conclusion.

It is perhaps in the second half of this book that Gallagher makes her most striking contribution. She evaluates interview testimony from a variety of contacts she made during her years working in government. They range from Clare Short to Malcolm Moss, and serve to justify her claims about the perceptions of Africa among Britain’s high-ranking contemporary politicians. Politicians viewed Africa idealistically; whereas British domestic politics was a murky maelstrom of chaos and argument, Africa’s “massive problems appear[ed] to generate clear-cut solutions,” and permitted the justified expression of British power abroad, despite the fact that African issues were rarely vote-winners at home. The same ideals, Gallagher continues to demonstrate, were mirrored by officials in the field who felt genuine satisfaction in their work, and felt a deep responsibility to it. They spoke, officials believed, for the common man and woman of Africa, and steered clear of politics as much as possible. Here, in “empty” Africa, “British officials [could] embody the good state” (122). After the Thatcher years in which Britain had failed to sanction apartheid South Africa and its later inaction in the face of the Rwandan genocide, the nation state came to hold little moral authority. New Labour “felt itself to be inheriting a damaged state,” and international activity and the crusade in Africa, undertaken with little ostensible self-interest for the government, served as a venue for moral action in the new, globalized world (127).

To my mind, there is one major weakness in this work. Gallagher is convincing in tracing the ideology of the “good state” until the beginning of the twentieth century. But the remainder of the century yawns like a gaping hole between that point and the Blair years: how did the ideology of the “good state” transform due to the Second World War, for instance? And what about the golden age of colonial development, in the 1940s and

1950s? These would seem like vital subjects for study and analysis of them might permit the author to more directly link the periods together. Finally, and perhaps this is a historian’s grouchiness, the author has the tendency to assert rather than demonstrate; the actual evidence for many statements is sparse. This could be, in part, a result of the author’s total familiarity with her topics, but it is occasionally unsettling for the non-specialist reader.

This is a highly theoretical and erudite work. Hegel and Rousseau share the

pages with Mbembe and Mudimbe, and Gallagher possesses the enviable skill of being able to relate philosophy, intellectual history, and psychology directly to her topics in a comprehensible manner, although these sections do limit the flow of the prose in places. Overall, Gallagher's argument is largely effective. While she may not succeed in wholly convincing readers about her convictions, she certainly provides an important perspective that will inspire scholars of the continent to heed her insights and think more deeply about their own research.

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