

Poverty, Violence and Instability:
The Plagues of Africa: Neo Colonialism, Neo Liberalism,
Modern Day Slavery and Violent Extremism

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A four-part outline designed to invite African scholars to discuss these contemporary challenges of Africa on our website www.africaiss.org

Part One: 'Born in Blackness'

Africa is the poorest continent and it has been blamed for it. According to the world population review of 2022, the 22 poorest countries on earth are all from Africa. "Try something different. Africa is rich, but we steal its wealth" ¹ Indeed, the world has been programmed to believe so, by a measurement model that does not take into account the wealth of the nations. These countries have been denied the right and the opportunity to utilize their wealth to the benefit of their own people. **As we begin 2023, 70 years after the decolonization of Africa, the developed world (mostly the colonial powers and slave traffickers and owners) continue to profit from Africa's wealth.** Africa is the richest continent with the largest untapped resources of copper, bauxite, cobalt, gold, phosphate, platinum, uranium, diamonds, lithium, timber, tropical fruits and 65 per cent of the world's arable land, ten percent of the planet's internal renewable fresh water source and the world's biggest precious metal reserves on earth. It is estimated that 30% of the earth's mineral resources are found in the African continent. Despite not being poor, Africa still lags behind in development due to exploitation, unfair global economic order, mal-governance, violent extremism and conflicts, corruption and resource mismanagement. In a just world, Africa could have surpassed in growth every other country. **Africans are not poor. They have enormous resources, which has been feeding the global economy for centuries.**

Analysis by a coalition of UK and African equality and development campaigners including Global Justice, claims the rest of the world is profiting more than most African citizens from the continent's wealth. It is said African countries received \$162bn in 2015, mainly in loans, aid and personal remittances. But in the same year, \$203bn was taken from the continent, either directly through multinationals exporting profits and illegally moving money into tax havens, or by costs imposed by the rest of the world through climate change adaptation and mitigation. The campaigners said illicit financial flows, defined as the illegal movement of cash between countries, account for \$68bn a year, three times as much as the \$19bn Africa receives in aid.²

Yet "Poverty is a widespread issue across Africa. Around 460 million people, over 75% of the population of the continent, (1.4 billion) lives below the extreme poverty line of 1.90 U.S. dollars a day in 2022. Although the levels of poverty on the continent are forecast to decrease in the coming years, Africa would remain the poorest region compared to the rest of the world" while much of the continent's wealth is being extracted by those outside of Africa. ³

We find that the countries of Africa are collectively net creditors to the rest of the world, to the tune of \$41.3 billion in 2015. Thus, more wealth is leaving the world's most impoverished continent than is entering it.⁴

- ▶ African countries receive around \$19 billion in aid in the form of grants but over three times that much (\$68 billion) is taken out in capital flight, mainly by multinational companies deliberately misreporting the value of their imports or exports to reduce tax.
- ▶ While Africans receive \$31 billion in personal remittances from overseas, multinational companies operating on the continent repatriate a similar amount (\$32 billion) in profits to their home countries each year.
- ▶ African governments received \$32.8 billion in loans in 2015 but paid \$18 billion in debt interest and principal payments, with the overall level of debt rising rapidly.
- ▶ An estimated \$29 billion a year is being stolen from Africa in illegal logging, fishing and the trade in wildlife/plants.⁵

There are other ways in which the rest of the world extracts resources from Africa, but for which figures are not available; for example, trade policies mean that unprocessed agricultural goods are often exported from African countries and refined elsewhere, causing the vast majority of their value to be earned abroad. The figures show that the rest of the world is profiting from the continent's wealth – more so than most African citizens. Yet rich country governments simply tell their publics that their aid programs are helping Africa. This is a distraction, and misleading.

Columbia journalism professor African American Howard French, author of: *A Continent for the Taking*; (2005) and *Born in Blackness* (2021) attributes the rise of the West to the exploitation of Gold and other resources and the transatlantic slave trade which was vital for the production of cotton and sugar in the Caribbean islands and the American South. These commodities were central to the growth of capitalism in America and Britain. *Born in Blackness* describes in agonizing detail how the riches of the West were extracted from Africa and the enforced labor of Africans. In a revealing narrative covering more than six centuries, Howard French puts Africa at the centre stage of the modernization of Europe and America.

The timing of the publication of *Born in Blackness* could not have been more appropriate as black consciousness in the US, the Caribbean and generally in the west reaches its peak. In summary, the two books by Howard French specifically his last book: *Born in Blackness*, make it abundantly clear that the poverty of Africa has nothing to do with Africa but with the 'former' colonialists who so brutally and successfully re-colonised the continent before it had any chance to be truly independent. The newly independent nations had neither the education, nor institutional capacity, political system, informed and educated population and financial capital that would have enabled them to manage their own affairs in their own way. Instead much of Africa was built on the ruins of colonialism with artificial boundaries, uneducated populations and governments that heavily relied on the colonial masters and colonial advisers.

Born in Blackness enlightens the world and challenges the fiction in Africa's history and inspires the African youth to look at itself from the true historical perspective. This book should be taught in schools and discussed in all African studies centers and institutes. The book has forced many European and American scholars to reflect on the narratives that they had refined over the years. Their books were and narratives were exported globally in different forms and dominated the curricula of learning institutions. Scholars had closed the case until this revelation with irrefutable evidence unveiled the truth confirming what has always been the truth, that ***the economic ascendancy of Europe and America was founded on slavery***. Mass atrocities, gross human right violations, looting of the continent's natural resources, unprecedented in human history, were the mission of the colonizers; ***"Revealing the central yet intentionally obliterated role of Africa in the creation of modernity."*** ***Born in Blackness*** restructures the understanding of world of history and puts Africa at its rightful place: the Centre of Modernity, contrary to familiar narrative that makes Europe and America at the centre. This narrative has now been thrown to the junkyard of history and Africans demand the world to accept this truth and its consequences.

"The way we think about history is entirely wrong, says Howard W. French at the start of this magnificent, powerful and absorbing book," writes Peter Frankopan, the author of *The New Silk Roads*.

"The problem is not just that the people and cultures of Africa have been ignored and left to one side; rather, that they have been so miscast that the story of the global past has become part of a profound addition to the 12 million people shipped across the Atlantic, another 6 million lives were lost in or near their homelands in the hunt for slaves. That placed extraordinary demographic strains on domestic societies, transformed agriculture and changed gender relations, as it was mainly able-bodied young men who were in demand to do the hard work in colonies overseas. Slavery led to fragmentation, fracture and warfare fueled by weapons – above all, guns – that were sold by Europeans, forcing neighboring states to compete with and turn on one another in an attempt to defend their own populations from being carted away.

It had other effects too. The rich diversities of the many different people of Africa became subsumed into a single category of "blackness" that obscured and ignored proud histories and cultures and treated all the inhabitants of the continent and their descendants as being the same. That was ironic, of course, given that populations were deliberately distributed in the Americas and Caribbean to prevent family and kinship groups being able to communicate with each other, reducing the chances of rebellion against the Europeans who were heavily outnumbered. At times, the dehumanization that French describes so powerfully is hard to read." 6

The graphic depiction of slavery and the extent slave owners went to get the maximum from the forced labors is soul distressing. American slave owners squeezed the last drop of energy from every slave to get the maximum production. To understand the rise in the production of cotton over the years, historian Edward Baptist has estimated a 400 per cent increase in the period from 1800 to 1860.

How this increase was made possible, is left to our imagination. Edward Baptist argues it was through a systematic increase in violent methods of supervision and punishment, the type that was depicted in the recent movie played by Will Smith, titled *Emancipation*. It was based on a true story. Slaves went through harrowing suffering to satisfy the daily production rate decided by the slave owners. Nothing in the annals of history can compare with this mass dehumanization, exploitation of African resources and the suffering caused by the transatlantic slave trade for years. The details might make the ancestors of the colonialists very uncomfortable and guilty. However, it is only the acceptance of the truth and a subsequent reparation that can create social harmony and pave the way to a new world order of justice and equality.

“Born in Blackness” is filled with pain, but also with pride: pride at the endurance of oppressed millions, at the many slave uprisings and rebellions culminating in the Haitian revolution, which defeated “the idea of Black slavery itself,” and in the cultural riches of the African diaspora. Some of the most illuminating chapters deal with the nations of Africa themselves: polities such as Benin, Kongo and Mali that featured thriving urban centers, exquisite artisanship and legal and administrative systems on a par with much of medieval Europe. Early on, Portugal discovered the folly of sending soldiers charging up beaches in plate armor and changed tack to making alliances, transacting with informed and eloquent African leaders largely as equals and outsourcing the deadly business of capturing humans for enslavement. Remarkably, no African state would be conquered by Europeans until the 19th century; our modern image of the continent dates from 1885, when the imperial powers divvied it up, creating arbitrary, dysfunctional countries that have stuck. “Africans themselves,” French acerbically notes, “were not consulted.” 7

Certainly, under a different circumstance and times and different global political order, the criminal acts of Europe and America would have fallen under the current genocide convention.

The genocide convention defines genocide in this way.

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

The Rome Statute defines ‘crime against as wide spread attacks directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack:

- a. Murder;

- b. *Extermination;*
- c. *Enslavement;*
- d. *Deportation or forcible transfer of population;*
- e. *Imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental rules of international law;*
- f. *Torture;*

Short of justice, there is reparation. There are International human rights laws for reparations. The United Nations “Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparations for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law.” in its sections V8 and V9 states that: “For purposes of the present document, victims are persons who individually or collectively suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss or substantial impairment of their fundamental rights, through acts or omissions that constitute gross violations of international human rights law, or serious violations of international humanitarian law. Where appropriate, and in accordance with domestic law, the term “victim” also includes the immediate family or dependents of the direct victim and persons who have suffered harm in intervening to assist victims in distress or to prevent victimization.

Furthermore, the UN principles and guidelines elaborate on how to remedy past grave violations of human rights in its section IX.15. “Adequate, effective and prompt reparation is intended to promote justice by redressing gross violations of international human rights law or serious violations of international humanitarian law. Reparation should be proportional to the gravity of the violations and the harm suffered. In accordance with its domestic laws and international legal obligations, a State shall provide reparation to victims for acts or omissions which can be attributed to the State and constitute gross violations of international human rights law or serious violations of international humanitarian law. In cases where a person, a legal person, or other entity is found liable for reparation to a victim, such party should provide reparation to the victim or compensate the State if the State has already provided reparation to the victim.”⁸

The UN principles and guidelines also indicate that there can be no prescription to crimes related to grave violations of human rights under the statute of limitations: “Where so provided for in an applicable treaty or contained in other international legal obligations, statutes of limitations shall not apply to gross violations of international human rights law and serious violations of international humanitarian law which constitute crimes under international law” in addition the Convention on the Non-Applicability of Statutory Limitations to War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity adopted by the UN general assembly by resolution 2391 on 26 November 1968 that entered into force on November 11th, 1970, states in its article 1. “No statutory limitation shall apply to the following crimes, irrespective of the date of their commission” and its section b. This applies to ...”Crimes against humanity whether committed in time of war or in time of peace”... as they are defined in the Charter of the International Military Tribunal, Nürnberg, of 8 August 1945 and confirmed 2 by resolutions 3 (I) of 13 February 1946 and 95 (I) of 11 December 1946 of the General Assembly of the United Nations...⁹

The idea of reparations sends shivers down the spines of all the governments and some religious institutions whose economies were built on the back of enslaved Africans, and bolstered by often-brutal practices. The Catholic Church has been a direct accomplice in these gross human rights violations. Pope Pius IX (May 13, 1792- February 7, 1878) “Slavery itself considered as such in its essential nature, is not at all contrary to the natural and divine law, and there can be several just titles of slavery, and they are referred to by approved theologians and commentators of the sacred canons....it is not contrary to the national and divine law for a slave to be sold, bought, exchanged or given”¹⁰

Perhaps, it is this fear of having to come to terms with the need, at some point, to pay reparations, in one form or the other, that made it necessary for Europe and America to ensure that Africa remains weak and poor and never be in a position to challenge its former masters. Africa, the biggest contributor to the advancement of Europe and America, has come out with less than nothing, burdened with debts and poverty and unable to exploit its own resources. With so much debt and rampant poverty, Africa has been made unable to aggressively follow up on its demand for justice and fairness. The west and the USA have therefore been able to continue controlling much of the world, significantly Africa.

In the *New Age of Empire: How colonialism and racism still rule the world*; the author Kehinde Andrews, associate professor in sociology at Birmingham City explores how the intellectual, political and economic frameworks inherited from colonialism are still governing today's world, resulting in a new age of empire that perpetuates racism, white supremacy and global economic order. The underdevelopment of Africa becomes necessary if the developed world is to continue prospering by controlling Africa without having to pay reparations.

In a strange and arrogant twist, the British stated that they have paid reparations. They are referring to reparations paid out after the abolition of slavery to **the slave owners**. So great was the loss of wealth by the slave owners and traffickers in the transatlantic slave trades the British government found it necessary to pay them “reparations “ the equivalent of £2bn, which has now been tracked by researchers at UCL.”¹¹

In his article titled: “How the West Grew Rich on Gold and Slavery:”Anver Versi, the editor in chief of New African writes on New African:

“The underdevelopment of the African continent continues with corrupt trade policies and the domination of the economy from the outside. One in 12 children dies in sub-Saharan Africa before their fifth birthday, in large part because the continent continues to be crippled by ‘western development’.”¹²

He points out that the issue is so clear that a federation of Caribbean countries (CARICOM) is now demanding reparations, as is the Movement for Black Lives Matter; in America and the Pan-African Reparations Coalition in Europe.

“Nothing short of a massive transfer of wealth from the developed to the underdeveloped world, and to the descendants of slavery and colonialism in the West, can heal the deep wounds inflicted. But real reparatory justice would allow the developing world to build strong, sustainable economies that could eradicate global poverty. No one would need to live on less than a dollar a day and children would not die by the second “¹³

Indeed the question Africans have been asking is being clearly and unambiguously answered. Africa is no more the dark continent. The truth is there for everybody to read. The glorious past and the periods of pain and agony will never haunt Africa. It stands up to claim reparation and leveling the field for a fair and just world. Howard French, writing in the UK’s *Guardian* newspaper, says, “The most important site of erasure, by far, has been the minds of people in the rich world. As I write these words, the US and some other North Atlantic communities, from Richmond, Virginia, to Bristol, England, have recently experienced extraordinary moments of iconoclasm. We have seen the pulling down of statues of people who were long perceived to be heroes of imperial and economic systems built on the violent exploitation of people extracted from Africa.”

“For these gestures to have more lasting meaning, an even bigger and more challenging task remains for us. It requires that we transform how we understand the history of the last six centuries and, specifically, of Africa’s central role in making possible nearly everything that is today familiar to us. **This will involve rewriting school lessons about history just as much as it will require the reinvention of university curricula.** ¹⁴

“It will still take a long time and many battles will still need to be fought before those who profited so hugely from the vilest of trades will accept their part and even more time and effort will be needed before the reparations, which are now the birth right of people of African descent, are made in a meaningful manner – but the first bricks have been laid and a new, more glorious monument will surely arise in homage to the suffering of all the millions of Africans without whose contribution in blood, sweat and tears the modern world in which we live would not have been possible. All it takes is a few determined people to keep on at it. History shows us that once a course has been set, the impossible is no longer so.” ¹⁵

With this, we move to the next chapters of how the developed world is manipulating Africa to continue the pillage of the resources. I will outline the policies of Neo Colonialism, Neo Liberalism, Modern-day Slavery and Violent Extremism; their individual and combined efforts to pull Africa back to where the developed world wants it to be; **the provider of natural resources and cheap labor and consumer of its goods; and how Africa should fight back more vigorously for a new inclusive global order.**

END

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