

THE EXPLOITATION OF AFRICA AND AFRICANS BY THE WESTERN WORLD SINCE 1500: A BIRD'S EYE VIEW ¹

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STATEMENT

The exploitation of Africa and Africans by the Western world since 1500, made an invaluable – and even an indispensable – contribution to the building of the economies of three continents (South America, North America and Europe), while products that embodied large quantities of cheap African slave labour, were used by Europe to seriously harm the economy of another continent (Asia).

AFRICA AS A “BROKEN” CONTINENT

The 500 years of European slavery and colonialism seriously harmed the African economy, damaged the African societal structures and undermined the psychological self-assurance of Africans.

- Africa's per capita income as a percentage of the per capita income of the West declined from 55% in 1500, to 22% in 1913 to 6% today.

- Scale of Poverty:
 - 61% live on < \$2 a day
 - 21% live on between \$2 and \$4 a day
 - 14% live on between \$4 and \$20 a day
 - 4% live on > \$20 a day

(Africa Progress Panel of the United Nations)

¹ Paper read at the uBuntu Conference at the Law Faculty of the University of Pretoria, 2 – 4 August 2011.

AFRICAN SLAVERY

- Muslim slave traders “exported” ± 8 million African slaves to southern Europe and to Asia Minor between 700 – 1400. Little is known about their contribution to the economy of the Mediterranean world.
- Portugal got permission from the Pope to practice slavery in 1445 on condition that it should try to convert the slaves to Christianity.
- From 1520 until 1888 European slave-traders transshipped 15 million Africans as slaves to the Americas. Twelve to fifteen generations lived as slaves in the Americas. The total slaves deployed over the 370 years in the Americas may have been considerably more than 100 million at a time when the world population was less than 1 billion.
- The slave trade was cruel and violent. Some African tribes were supplied with the best weaponry at the disposal of the Europeans. It caused a multitude of “slave wars” between African tribes that lasted for centuries.
- The deployment of the African slaves in the Americas was immoral, inhuman and one of the worst crimes against humanity.

SLAVERY, PRECIOUS METALS AND THE RISE OF CAPITALISM

- The slave-trade and slavery were extraordinary profitable – especially for Britain in the eighteenth century.
- Without the precious metals from the Americas – produced by Amerindian and African slaves – Europe could not conduct its profitable trade with the East in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

- The precious metals that were transshipped from the Americas to Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth century embodied large quantities of slave labour. These precious metals enriched the mercantile elite in Europe fabulously and enabled them to bribe the money-orientated landlords into a new Elite Alliance that was rich enough to take over the governments of Holland, Britain and parts of Europe and *then launched the capitalist system at the end of the seventeenth century.*

SLAVERY, THE ATLANTIC TRIANGLE AND THE FIRST 50 YEARS OF INDUSTRIALISATION (1770 – 1820)

- As thousands of peasants migrated to the emerging factory cities in Britain in the second half of the eighteenth century, Britain was obliged to import large quantities of sugar and other foodstuffs from the western flank of the Atlantic Triangle.
- From 1770 to 1820 these “inputs” – that embodied large quantities of slave labour – enabled Britain to succeed with the first 50 years of the Industrial Revolution.
- Without these “inputs” the Industrial Revolution could not have taken place. In 1820 Britain had 17 million acres of arable land.
- In 1820 it imported “inputs” from the Triangle that were produced on 25 million Ghost Acres of land and by millions of slaves.

SLAVERY IN THE AMERICAS AND THE EXPORT OF LANCASHIRE COTTON CLOTHS TO ASIA (1820 – 1870)

- In 1813 the EEC lost its charter to import textile cloths from India to Britain. Britain then coercively “opened” a market for Lancashire produced cotton cloths in India and in the rest of Asia. Imports of cotton fabrics from Britain to India increased from 1 million yards in 1814 to 2000 million yards in 1880.

- But from 1814 to 1880 Britain needed to import large quantities of raw cotton from the Slave States in America and from Brazil.
- Slavery was abolished in the United States in 1808. Under pressure of the Southern States slavery was legalized again for the Southern States in 1819.
- The slave population of the Southern States increased from 700 000 in 1790 to 4 million in 1860. The large quantities of raw cotton that were exported from 1814 to 1870 by the Southern States and Brazil to Britain, embodied large quantities of African slave labour.
- The cotton cloths that were produced very cheaply in Lancashire – and embodied large quantities of slave labour – were sold at such low prices in Asia that the Asian handicraft industry was destroyed almost completely during the nineteenth century.
- The British Industrial Revolution could not have succeeded in the second 50 years (1820 – 1870) without the cheap raw cotton produced by slaves in the Americas and exported to the densely populated Asia.
- It is not only Liverpool that was built on the skulls of slaves. The British Industrial Revolution (1770 – 1870) was also built on the skulls of African slaves and on the skulls of Indian peasants and soldiers.

THE EUROPEAN COLONISATION OF AFRICA (1885 – 1974)

- The colonisation (scramble) for Africa was extremely exploitative:
 - Europeans had industrial weaponry at their disposal.
 - This colonisation took place amidst the vicious inter-empire rivalry between Western states (1885 – 1945).

- During the tempestuous period of two world wars and the Great Depression the blood was sucked out of African colonies by Europe in their struggle to survive.
- African countries became “decolonised” from 1957 until 1974 during the height of the Cold War as rather “vulnerable” entities when President Eisenhower pressurised European countries to get out of Africa hurriedly (when Khrushchev displayed interest in Africa, Eisenhower feared communist-inspired anti-colonial wars).
- African countries became prematurely “independent” and “sovereign” nation-states for the *WRONG_REASONS*, on the *WRONG FOOTING* and at the *WRONG TIME*.
- After Africa’s “independence” the United States and the USSR were dumping tons of weaponry on Africa at a time when the erstwhile European colonial masters continued to “milk” their ex-colonies economically.

THE DEBT CRISIS AND THE RECOLONIZATION OF AFRICA BY THE BWI

- 1973 – 1979: Stagflation, OPEC and the accumulation of Africa’s foreign debt.
- Terms of trade deteriorated in the 1970’s to the disadvantage of Africa.
- African countries borrowed and wasted too much money in the 1970’s.
- Banks with too much Petrodollars lent too much to Africa on too favourable terms.
- After the second “oil shock” (1979) it became apparent that Africa would not be able to repay its debt.

- The West decided early in 1980's that BWI would take over African countries debt, but under "new rules of the game". It was one of the most immoral "*coup d'états*" ever. BWI conditionalities are "SAPping" the marrow out of the African bones.
- A great variety of Private Military Corporations (PMC) from the West and the East are operational in Africa's oil and diamond fields with the full knowledge of their foreign governments. They perpetuate the endemic violence "in" and "between" African countries.
- European governments continue to subsidise their farmers to the detriment of African farmers. It is inexcusable.

OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT AID TO THE SOUTH

- United Nation's General Assembly decided in 1974 on NIEO and Western countries committed themselves to annual ODA = 0,7 of their GDP.
- Scandinavian and Benelux countries maintained their promise.
- The average *annual* contribution of the United States over a period of 37 years is 0.11% of United States GDP. Absolutely shocking.
- The "draining" of ODA-money from Africa to Switzerland is part of the larger problem of a lack of institutions to hold African leaders *accountable*.
- What happened with the Blair-Brown Plan of 2005?
- What Africa needs is not only an issue of *Distributive Justice* but also of *Reparative or Restoration Justice*.
- According to Thomas McCarthy (2009: 236) "centuries of expropriation, extermination, enslavement, and empire, which were part and parcel of the rise of capitalism in the West, left its beneficiaries [in the West] with vastly more power than

its victims [in the Rest of the world] to set the ground rules of the post-colonial global order”.

- The POWER of the West after 500 years of plunderings. The POWERLESSNESS of the Rest as victims of the plundering by the West.

SEVEN VICIOUS AND INTERLOCKING CRISES THAT PARALYSED AFRICA

1. The deteriorating health situation: TB, malaria, HIV/AIDS, other poverty-related illnesses and the inadequate but expensive health service.
2. The inadequate spending on education, the lack of social capital, the brain drain and the very slow diffusion of technology (the role of SAPs).
3. The wars, violence, criminality conflicts, the military coups and the disruptive activities of the private military corporations (PMC) (to control diamonds and oil).
4. The lack of a proper physical infrastructure and the multiple barriers that impede the flow of goods, capital, information and people between the African states and between them and the rest of the world.
5. The lack of political and judicial institutions that can hold politicians, bureaucrats, PMC, capitalists, foreign corporations and the BWI, *accountable* for their *misdeeds*, their *corruptions*, their *pillaging* and their violent *plundering* of Africa.
6. The absence of the economic, judicial and financial institutions necessary for a workable capitalist or market-orientated economic system in Africa. The persistence with the ideology of market fundamentalism by BWI on a continent in which the enabling conditions for a capitalist-orientated economic system is absolutely non-existent, is pure madness.
7. Africa's Poverty: Africa's share of World GDP is just more than 3%, while its population is 15% of the world's population.

TABLE 1: SHARE OF WORLD GDP

	1500	1820	1950	2003
Western Europe	18	23	26	19
Western offshoots	0,4	2	31	24
Asia	62	57	16	34
Latin America	3	2	8	8
Africa	8	5	4	3

Maddison, 2007: Table A6 (PPP converted)

TABLE 2: PER CAPITA INCOME OF CONTINENT AS PERCENTAGE OF THE PER CAPITA INCOME OF THE WEST

	1500	1820	1950	2003
Western World	100	100	100	100
Asia	76	48	10	16
Latin America	56	54	40	24
Africa	55	35	14	6,5

Maddison, 2007

**TABLE 3 : RELATIVE SHARES OF WORLD MANUFACTURING OUTPUT
PERCENTAGES**

	1750	1870	1950	1980
Western world	17	69	73	65
China and India	57	15	4	8
Japan	4	3	3	9
Russia / Soviet Union	5	8	11	15

Source: Bairoch, 1982 and 1993.

AFRICAN PESSIMISM

- Please do not blame me for being African pessimistic. It is much more than that.
- This lecture is meant to spell out my furiousness about the destiny that was meted out for Africa by the rest of the world – especially by the Western world.
- Africa is not simply the neglected stepchild of the world.
- Africa is the most victimized continent of the world.
- It is time to be outrageous about it.
- Let us talk about Ubuntu against this background.

SOUTH AFRICA'S GDP VS AFRICA'S GDP

1. South African GDP is $\pm 25\%$ of the GDP of Africa.
2. If South Africa's share is excluded, Africa's share of WGDP is just more than 2%.
3. The richest 10% in South Africa receive 74% of SA GDP.
4. This 10% is 1% of Africa's population.
5. The richest 1% in S.A. receives $\pm 20\%$ of the income of Africa.
6. South Africa's relative strong position can be ascribed to the fact that South Africa was for a long period an extension of the imperial Western world.