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*The West's Debt to Africa  
An Argument for Reparations  
by Courtenay Barnett  
Guest Commentator*

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Africa is poor and destined to remain poor for quite some time because of bad governance, failure to develop natural resources, corruption, inadequate or non-existent primary educational, scientific and technical training. Western countries and Euro-America are rich, because they have good governance, have developed their natural resources, have credible legal systems that are able to deal effectively with corruption, have educated their populations, and have a wealth of scientific and technical skills. This script, for some, adequately contrasts the poverty and the wealth of nations.

Ireland, a European country exploited by England, has raised itself from a low income small farming agricultural country, to impressive levels of GDP. If Ireland can develop from a mono crop de facto plantation economy in Europe into the high income domain of advanced technology, what is wrong with the Africans? Investment in Irish education, and the European Union's structural support mechanisms for research and development and direct investment facilitated Irish economic development. Africa's absence of such supportive regional and international mechanisms contrasts drastically with the Irish experience.

Some additional distinguishing features of the Irish and African experiences include:

- Bizarre national borders imposed under colonialism
- Western sales of arms (e.g. British arms sales in West Africa's diamond wars)
- Dumping subsidized European and North American goods on the African market, crippling efforts at domestic African manufacturing

## The Black Commentator – The West's Debt to Africa – An Argument for Reparations

- Trade barriers blocking African access to G–8 markets.

Furthermore, a systemic supportive mechanism between corrupt elites and vested interests of multinational corporations says as much about lingering and protracted poverty in Africa, as do historically derived structural disadvantages. These conditions demand that any genuine humanitarian concern about Africa's poverty requires a placement of Africa in its historical context. Only in this way does it become possible to discern from the past, such conditions that create the genesis of contemporary African impoverishment.

### *Colonial Legacy*

In 1884 certain Western European nations, Britain, France, Germany, Belgium to mention some, convened the Berlin Conference to colonize Africa. King Leopold II of Belgium, a smaller and less important nation, extracted the Congo as his prize – territory then deemed of little economic importance. The turn of the century witnessed the invention of the automobile and a consequential global demand for rubber. The Congo had a rich supply of natural rubber. The Congolese were an available labor source to harvest the vines from which the rubber was extracted. Leopold II turned the Congo into his personal fiefdom – an actual slave colony. In 1908 when he handed the colony to Belgium, there had been some 10 million Congolese people slaughtered.

In 1956 the Congo had its first university graduate. Between 1908 and 1960, when the Congo became politically independent, there were a mere 17 university graduates from the already decimated Congolese population of some 13.5 million.

Patrice Lumumba was democratically elected the Congo's first president. He was left to govern a country with no administrative or infrastructural mechanisms for governance. Further, Lumumba did not share the Belgian King Baudouin's view of the wonderful civilizing gifts bestowed by Belgium on the Congo. Lumumba's awareness of the extreme barbarity inflicted on the Congolese and his determination to set things right, made him unacceptable to Belgium and Western interests. Lumumba, in a coup effected by Belgium was first tortured by Belgian agents and then murdered. Belgium most recently has acknowledged its wrongdoing and apologized to Lumumba's children.

Mobutu Sese Seko, as a leader acceptable to both Belgium and Western multinational interests, was installed as President and dictator in 1965. By the time of Mobutu's demise in 1997, like Leopold II before him, he had plundered the entire Congolese state – renamed Zaire by him – with billions of the country's earnings deposited for his beneficial interest in Western banks.

### *Historical Realities*

Mobutu's kleptocracy for all his years of rule, did not inspire another Western led coup, nor resolute disapproval of bad governance. Instead there was Western complicity in the rape of the country having the world's richest stock of mineral resources. It was uranium from the Belgian Congo that had supplied raw material for the Manhattan Project that produced the world's first atomic bomb. This kleptocratic form of governance under Mobutu was expressly approved by President Ronald Reagan. Reagan, astonishingly, described the dictator Mobutu: "A voice of good sense and good will."

The historical picture that emerges is of Western complicity in African ruin, genocide, militarization, under–development and ultimately, marginalization of Africans. Professor Ali Mazrui, describes the process in these terms:

"The West stopped exporting Africa's sons and daughters and colonized Africa itself. Imperialism and gunboat diplomacy were part of the ugly side of globalization. Raw

## The Black Commentator – The West's Debt to Africa – An Argument for Reparations

materials for Western manufacturing industries became a major temptation."

Professor Mazuri further observed, "Each step in Africa's contribution to the development of the West was itself a stage in the history of globalization." Thus, a pretext of African countries' unwitting, misguided, unfortunately corrupt fall from the grace of wealth and prosperity is belied by the concrete processes of capital accumulation and marginalization promulgated upon Africa by the systems of Europe in their colonial engagement with Africa.

"The slave ship helped to export millions to the Americas to help in the agrarian revolution in the Americas and the industrial revolution in Europe simultaneously," wrote Mazuri.

The processes of resource extraction – money, people and material – has entered a new phase in a neo-liberal scheme designed for Africa by G-8 interests. The cycle has led from colonialism to failed IMF and World Bank policies ensnarement in a debt-trap and in cases, to the failed states that oblige the West to recognize that in their own self-interest, Africa's debt problem has to be addressed. It was Lord Palmerston who is said to have commented to the effect that: "Britain has no friends, only interests." British Prime Minister Tony Blair does not echo the words but it surely is no leap of insight to notice that hardly anything has changed.

Historically, French, Portuguese, German, British and other European actions in Africa mirror the Belgian conduct. The world's first concentration camp was established by Britain against the Boers and Africans in South Africa. Germany under the Kaiser between 1904 and 1925 slaughtered some 80,000 Herero people in Namibia. Cecil Rhodes' conquest of Matabele land established Rhodesia – now Zimbabwe – and left a legacy of dislocation of Africans from their lands. Later in the Lancaster House Agreement in London, a resolute and un-principled Britain refused to deal once and for all with settlement of the land question. In what should have been a comprehensive context of independence negotiations, the perhaps most divisive issue was fudged. Those issues haunt Zimbabwe today. Prime Minister Thatcher and President Reagan knowingly prolonged the life of the apartheid South African regime under the guise of a policy of "constructive engagement." The overall picture is one of deliberate efforts to stall and indeed cripple Africa's advancement at every turn.

Africa's historical reality cannot neatly be severed from contemporary experiences of wealth extraction by Western multinationals, terms on which Africa borrows and the terms of trade with the former colonial masters within the G-8. The word "aid" itself masks an elaborate process of having consultants paid from the aid given, "recommended" policies for implementation and ultimate avoidance of any responsibility when poorly conceived policies are declared to be failures of the recipient country. The US and EU recommend free market policies for African countries, set out to privatize sub-Saharan health care and water supplies, demand social services expenditure cuts and other policy dictates. Yet, EU and US agricultural subsidies are generously given to their farmers, protectionism against African agricultural produce is widely practiced and the world's largest debtor nation with the largest deficit is the United States of America.

Macro-policies, that are oftentimes externally dictated, impact Africa at the village level. What is seen at the domestic African level is the ineptitude and/or corruption of national or local leaders, but it is harder to discern the greater and debilitating impact of corruption in aid structures, foreign investors' business practices and the ineptitude in the policy designs of Western nations that themselves cripple and adversely affect African development.

### ***The Role of Militarism***

The statement that Prime Minister Blair made at the G-8 Gleneagles conference that the state of the African continent is a "scar on the conscience of the world" is not even given satisfactory cosmetic surgery in the G-8's proposed debt relief. It is an actual further blight on Africa to offer an increase in development aid

## The Black Commentator – The West's Debt to Africa – An Argument for Reparations

spread out to 2010. There is then a deceitful announcement of a doubling of aid from 2004 levels. It has been estimated that for the cost of two Stealth Bombers, the entire sub-Saharan Africa can receive full primary education. However, militarism is of far greater priority for the G-8 than is the timely pursuit of policies for sustainable growth in Africa.

Militarism is a major contribution of the West to African under-development. Militarism runs conjunctively with western colonial engagement in Africa, as it does in contemporary economic engagements between Africa and the West. The Kenyan Noble Laureate, Wangari Maathai, has said, "There is a lot of poverty in Africa, but Africa is not a poor continent." South Africa and Zimbabwe having 98% of the world's chrome reserves; the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia having 50% of the world's cobalt reserves; Central and Western African oil supplies will in the immediate future account for one in four barrels coming onto the global market; chrome, cobalt – indispensable for the production of jet engines – industrial diamonds and other mineral reserves abound in Africa. It is the structural arrangements for the extraction of Africa's latent wealth, as it is the structures of so-called "aid" that serve to ensnare Africa in processes that indebt, impoverish and insult Africans in their efforts to advance and develop African human potential. The processes that award or deny properly structured support for African advancement arise inside and significantly outside Africa.

The US has increased its expenditures on arms from 2004 by about 12%, amounting to about \$455 billion. The UNDP target for contribution to development aid from G-8 countries is a paltry 0.7% of national income. The US has steadfastly resisted this target, while its current aid bill is about 4.1 % of its total arms bill. Factor into these realities, the institutions that guide Africa's balance of payments and developmental aid such as the IMF and World Bank. Such institutions stipulate, direct, approve, assess, monitor and govern the financing of projects and the terms on which economies operate. Despite African compliance with stipulations of devaluations and high interest rate policies under IMF structural adjustment programs, there are a series of abysmal failures arising from these policies within and outside Africa. Minus 2% growth in Zambia and 0% growth in Nigeria, as complemented by IMF failed policies across the globe, hardly explains Africa's plight solely as attributable to home-grown African corruption.

With China and India growing in economic strength, there is an increasing global demand for oil. Iraq's conflagration is in truth, an "oil war" for a scarce commodity. Africa's ability to supply the world with increased amounts of oil will inevitably attract Western attention for increased sales of arms in states that earn significant amounts of oil revenue. In Southern and East Africa there is an increase in military expenditures. China has sold arms to Sudan, and it is unlikely that the same oil motivational factor will not propel the West to do much as it has done with arms sales in the Middle East, as Africa's economies grow.

Militarism serves a purpose for Western economies in transferring revenues, while distorting the purchaser's economies. The Middle East and North Africa represent about 33% of global arms sales. Sub-Saharan Africa is roughly a mere 2.1 % of global sales. However, diversion of funds to arms sales in a highly indebted poor country (HIPC) impacts far more significantly the opportunity cost by diversion of funds from health and education to arms sales, than in wealthier countries. There are some 41 HIPC's around the world and over 30 of these countries are in sub-Saharan Africa.

In 2001, President Bush withdrew from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty with the former Soviet Union. This move sparked tensions within the club of nuclear nations. North Korea when contrasted with Iraq, demonstrates that aggression by way of increased armaments becomes desirable when the rule of international law is abandoned for the rule of international force. Africa, as potential buyer of Western arms from the G-8, will find its rationale for arms purchases in the concept of "security" in an era of terrorism. Not that the logic holds, but the sellers' motives thrive in situations of conflict and strife.

### ***Bush, Blair and Odious Debt***

Debt, development and the arms trade are linked in a cycle where the majority of the world's HIPC's are not exempt from being a lucrative market for conventional arms sales from G-8 sellers.

Militarism will be bequeathed Africa as it develops, unless Africa itself devises ways of developing in peace for prosperity. Libya's coercion from the US to abandon the pursuit of nuclear arms for peace and prosperity, can find its equivalent in sub-Saharan Africa adopting a comparable peace policy for conventional weapons. The difficulty of Africa's pursuit of such a policy will be the loss to the G-8 of a growing market for arms sales.

Prime Minister Blair and President Bush could not have announced to their respective electorates in 2002 that they had decided to invade Iraq for its oil. There had to be a plausible humane excuse to present to the world. Both leaders knowingly deceived their electorates and the world about WMDs being the reason for the invasion of Iraq. The human cost of the action of "war criminals" in contravening Article 2 of the UN charter, has its equivalent in the West's approach to Africa.

Musician Bob Geldorf and well-intentioned persons around the world are emotionally moved to "save" Africa when they become aware of the horrendous human tragedy which present-day Africa represents. There is the horror of an HIV/Aids epidemic across Africa. There are 45% of all child deaths in the world occurring in Africa. Africa's child mortality rate is rising: 4.8 million children in sub-Saharan Africa will die before they reach the age 5. Yet, Bush resolutely resists the UN's millennium goal set for 2015, and rejects the 0.7% international aid target of his country's national income for necessary aid. Blair's monetary contribution to Africa is wholly inadequate for the "scar" he now openly recognizes exists on the world's conscience. Total debt cancellation has to be the way forward. However, it seems that as Geldorf has alerted the world by his musical performances for Africa, Blair's response to Africa ultimately moves little beyond "conspicuous concern" in service to his sinking political image at home.

Africa itself will have to take its case for debt cancellation forward with intensified global political action, assisted by demands within international legal fora.

### ***Justice for Africa***

International law has a concept of "odious debt" – an unjust debt accumulation under circumstances in which it would be iniquitous for the debt to be repaid. In point of law, invocation of this concept can relieve this international debt. The apartheid era debt is such a case. An injustice does accrue where a successor regime, as in the instance of the African National Congress, is required to repay the debts accrued when the Apartheid regime breached UN sanctions and unlawfully obtained loans to perpetuate its racist and oppressive rule. The ANC had fought as victims and the debts that were accumulated in the Apartheid era opposition were odious and illegal debts.

Why should unlawful, immoral, and odious debts be repaid when such repayments deny investments in needed education, health, and other social services?

Likewise, in defending against apartheid's extra-territorial incursions, the front line states of Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, bore an element of this "odious debt." These should be cancelled. When the US decided that there was a practical need to either cancel or re-schedule Iraqi debts, this as a matter of political will was granted expeditiously. Is the substantial humanitarian crisis in Africa a less worthy cause than the US cause in Iraq?

Several billions are in Western banks stolen and deposited there either by direct theft of corrupt African

leaders, or by collusion in receipt of bribes from Western multinationals. International efforts have been advanced by the West in anti-money-laundering legislation. It is likewise feasible to rely on already existing laws to trace and retrieve funds that have been stolen, or illicitly obtained by bribes for subsequent return to the people of Africa for assistance with their developmental needs.

### ***Solutions for Resolving the West's Debt to Africa***

International law has as its handmaiden, the treaty. As with money-laundering, it is possible to implement a range of treaties that serves well, Africa's needs. An anti-arms proliferation Treaty (cf. the Ottawa Treaty against land mines), an anti-corruption/bribery Treaty, a pro-restoration of funds law in the G-8 countries – are all feasible practical measures for the redress of African poverty that the West in a timely and constructive manner can assist in implementing. Such suggestions go well beyond the mere symbolism of singing to "save" Africa at Gleneagles, toward practical measures of ensuring that funds are retrieved, and will be a resolute signal sent to leaders that further corruption in Africa will be internationally condemned in an effective manner.

A major effort for a treaty for Africa, should be a declaration in a legally effective form that Africa is an "arms-free zone." The West itself is best suited to do the humanitarian thing and curtail the sales of conventional weapons to Africa. This indeed would then save African lives. This would give operational viability to the concern professed by the G-8 at Gleneagles.

All the above are measures that with political will can be advanced and implemented for Africa's welfare.

### ***Conclusion***

The G-8 countries have yet to demonstrate in tangible form their concern about Africa's suffering. There is insufficient real evidence of use of available means by the West to assist Africa. Africans themselves must become stake-holders and be involved in the decision-making processes for Africa's future. It is racist and an insult to pretend that the West's historical involvement with Africa confers any right of moral or administrative superiority over African developmental policies. For the vast majority of failed polices were designed by the West.

It is necessary to strengthen systems of accountability in Africa. It is likewise imperative that democratic processes are integrated for Africans at the communal level via policies designed for Africa's sustainable development. The alternative designs from the West have been tried and have consistently failed. Valid argument can be made for the people themselves being best suited to order priorities in expenditures for their development and welfare through democratic processes.

The West bears a substantial historical responsibility for Africa's current crisis. The West also owes a debt, not merely for the historical misdeeds of decimating a rich continent, but for more recent policy failures that have increased dependency and expanded poverty across the African continent.

*Courtenay Francis Raymond Barnett is a lawyer who has argued human rights and public interest cases. He lives and works in the Caribbean and can be reached via email at [courtenaybarnett@yahoo.com](mailto:courtenaybarnett@yahoo.com) or via his website at [www.ar-africare.com](http://www.ar-africare.com).*