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Africa's Second Liberation An Overexploited Continent

by GARIKAI CHENGU

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On Monday many African Government offices, businesses and banks grind to a halt in order to commemorate Africa Day. In schools up and down the continent, little children are taught that heroic Africans liberated the continent from racist white colonial regimes and various events and parades are held to celebrate the occasion.

Colonialism in Africa is remembered as one of the worst crimes against humanity of the modern era. The exploitative economic system that underpinned colonialism remains alive and well today.

Africa's liberation was from racist, colonial government. If this was to be the first stage of liberation, than the second stage must involve freeing Africa from the current white minority, who controls the majority of African land and resources.

True African liberation involves three stages: first, the redistribution of land and natural resources from the white minority to the black majority; second, the rejection of the IMF and World Bank's counter-developmental neoliberal policies; and third, development of mineral refinement capacity.

Under Gaddafi, Libya was a shining example of how Africans can liberate themselves from Western exploitation and enrich its own people.

In 1967 Colonel Gaddafi inherited one of the poorest nations in Africa; however, by the time he was assassinated, Gaddafi had used the three stages of true African liberation to turn Libya into Africa's wealthiest nation. Libya had the highest GDP per capita and life expectancy on the continent. Less people lived below the poverty line than in the Netherlands.

Gaddafi practiced the redistribution stage of liberation by nationalizing oil wealth to sustain progressive social welfare programs for all Libyans. Prior to Colonel Gaddafi, King Idris let Standard Oil essentially write Libya's petroleum laws. Mr. Gaddafi put an end to all of that. Money from oil proceeds was deposited directly into every Libyan citizen's bank account. Under Gaddafi's rule, Libyans enjoyed not only free healthcare and free education, but also free electricity and interest-free loans.

Gaddafi's greatest crime, in the eyes of NATO, was his desire to put the interests of local labour above foreign capital by adhering to the second stage of liberation and rejecting IMF and World Bank neoliberal policies. In fact, in August 2011, President Obama confiscated \$30 billion from Libya's Central Bank, which Gaddafi had earmarked for the establishment of the African IMF and African Central Bank.

Gaddafi was assassinated by the West at a time when he was embarking on a continental mineral refinement program that would have dramatically shifted the economic balance between Africa and the West.

Gaddafi was willing to financially support any African governments that desired to undergo the redistribution stage of liberation.

The World Bank estimates that a staggering 65 percent of Sub-Saharan Africa's best arable land is still controlled by white settlers or multinational corporations. The World Bank also estimates that as much as 70 percent of the net wealth in Sub-Saharan Africa is owned by non-indigenous Africans or foreigners.

Nowhere is this racial disparity more acute than in Africa's richest nation. South Africa is the continent's most powerful nation, however, it is also the continent's most economically colonized nation.

The American investment bank, Citigroup, recently ranked South Africa as the world's richest country, in terms of its mineral reserves, worth an estimated \$2.5 trillion. South African Whites and Western foreigners own a staggering 80 percent of this wealth.

Zimbabwe is a prime example of how redistributing African wealth and land is not only desirable in theory but also possible in practice.

At Independence, a staggering 42 percent of Zimbabwe's land area was owned by just 4,000 white farmers. Today, that land has been divided and redistributed amongst 413,000 Black households. This economic and political shift benefits over 1,000,000 people.

Land redistribution is now possible in all African countries after Zimbabwe's successful example.

African ownership of African resources is important but exposing and dismantling the financial imperialism, which prevents African economies from thriving is the crucial second stage of African liberation.

Financial imperialism involves Western capitals using the IMF and World Bank to overburden African economies with debt and force their governments to enact neoliberal, counter-developmental policies, such as privatization, austerity and structural adjustment that put the interests of foreign capital over local labour.

Through debt and neoliberalism, the IMF and World Bank exert de-facto control over the economies of many African States. The World Bank and IMF control most African currencies, determine macro-economic policy, and national budgets. The indebted African State is thus left with just its judicial functions and above all, the maintenance of internal public order. This is one crucial State function the Western creditors want nothing to do with.

As Ghana's founding father Kwame Nkrumah, pointed out, the essence of financial imperialism is that, "the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside."

According to a recent UN Africa Progress Report, Africa loses 63 billion dollars, each year, through foreign multinational corporations' illegal tax evasion and exploitative practices. This figure surpasses all the money coming into the continent through Western aid and investment.

In Africa, poverty and underdevelopment are the symptoms; debt and neoliberalism are the cancer. The cure is a long-sustained dose of industrialization through mineral refinement.

Mineral refinement is the final stage of true liberation and the much-needed bridge between poverty and industrialization, and therefore, it has the capacity to transform Africa into a developed continent.

Africa is being systematically underdeveloped and overexploited by the West. From oil to gold and diamonds to tobacco, the Western scramble for Africa's resources has always caused problems rather than created prosperity. Minerals taken from African soil by Western-owned corporations are shipped to Europe or America, where they are turned into manufactured goods, which are then resold to African consumers at value-added prices.

Nigeria imports almost all of its fuel needs; however, it sells its crude oil to “developed” nations, only earning \$9 per barrel on their mere royalty fees. Then, Nigeria imports refined gasoline, diesel and kerosene made from its own oil resources for hundreds of dollars per barrel.

Nigeria is the African continent’s largest oil producer. At least \$400 billion of oil revenue has been stolen or misspent by Western multinationals, since Independence in 1960, according to estimates by the former World Bank vice president for Africa, Oby Ezekwesili. That is 12 times the country’s national budget for 2014. Nigeria should be wealthy, and its people the envy of Africa; if not the envy of the entire developing world. Instead, 90 percent of Nigerian people live on less than \$2 per day.

Zimbabwe is known for producing the best quality tobacco in the world and last year it earned \$650 million from the sale of raw tobacco. Industry experts illustrate how Zimbabwe could have earned \$6,5 billion instead of \$650 million if they had processed the crop into cigarettes, rather than exporting tobacco as a raw good.

The nation earned on average \$3,50 per kilogram of raw tobacco but could have achieved \$7,30 per kilogram had the tobacco leaf been threshed or processed into cut rag.

If Zimbabwe had further processed the tobacco into cigarettes, it would have earned between \$30-60 per kilogram.

Another example of neocolonial resource exploitation of Africa is that of the diamond industry.

Africa produces the bulk of the world market for rough diamonds, which is currently valued at \$19 billion annually; while the retail diamond jewelry industry, based in Europe, is estimated to be worth \$90 billion.

A rough diamond mined in Africa costs about \$40 per carat, and a diamond cut and polished in Europe increases to \$400 per carat. The same stone fetches around \$900 per carat when it reaches the consumer.

The global value chain of the diamond industry includes exploration, mining, sorting, polishing, dealing, jewelry manufacturing, and ultimately retail. Africa is able to conduct the first three stages but Western multinationals do their utmost to systematically prohibit African nations from mastering the other four value addition stages.

Clearly, Africa is not under-developed; she is over-exploited. From slavery to colonialism to present day neo-colonialism, Western policies have always been that of aggression and exploitation towards Africa. The African continent needs a second liberation to economically empower its indigenous majority who have been marginalized by Western capitals and corporations for centuries.