

of many modern Western values such as democracy and sexual equality, I take issue with Ferguson because he is as guilty of a dehumanising arrogance as were the slave-owners and nineteenth-century Western imperialists (and all imperialists, of course). He does not regard the Africans and all the people who, in his opinion, could benefit from American colonisation, as human beings capable of deciding and doing what is good for them. He might not be a slavery supporter, but it was the slave-owners' conviction that only slavery was good for some individuals that made them commit all kinds of atrocities against their fellow humans. He might not want to admit it, but it is his Western ancestors' inhumane decision to disregard the natives' wishes, and group them like cattle into artificial states, that explains why so many African countries are currently torn apart by bloody civil wars.

The arbitrary delimitation of their countries' frontiers is no less than a permanent catastrophe for almost all sub-Saharan. In many states, the forced co-existence of various people lacking the ethnic, religious, cultural, or linguistic homogeneity often found in other territories subjected to Western colonisation will remain a potential incendiary bomb for generations. Worse, in several countries, Western imperialists have blatantly favoured some groups over others, thus creating an explosive climate of hatred. This was, for instance, the case in Liberia and Rwanda. In the former, the shameful mistreatment of African Liberians by African-American Liberians was actively supported by the USA for over a century; in the latter, the Tutsis were viewed and treated as superior to the Hutus by the German and Belgian colonisers. Only the development of a common sense of national identity is likely to secure lasting peace and political stability in many sub-Saharan states. I am sure Ferguson's intimate knowledge of the blood-soaked history of Great Britain will

Italy. If he were not so blinded by his imperialistic bias, Ferguson would find it neither surprising nor peculiar that in states created about four decades ago, people often lack the patriotic consciousness necessary to subordinate the interests of their own communities to those of the entire nation. There is no doubt that black Africans have a lot to gain from the elimination or, at least, reduction of corruption in their own countries. Time, not Western recolonisation, will inevitably enable them to achieve it. However, the part played by corruption in the current poverty-stricken condition of most sub-Saharan states is derisory in comparison with that played by the unfair World Trade Organisation policies. Black Africans, of whom an overwhelming majority are small farmers, suffer almost exclusively from the drastic loss of income triggered by the rich countries' monstrous greed.

Ferguson, like his forefathers, is totally convinced that he knows what is good for black Africans, and wants Westerners to use brutal force and any other means necessary to give it to them. He cites the reconstruction of Japan and Germany after 1945 to prove that American colonisation could also be successful in other countries, including the sub-Saharan ones, if the Americans were less reluctant to settle abroad and sustain a long-term imperialistic commitment. Once more, Ferguson overlooks the specificity of black African nations' socio-historical background. Unlike the sub-Saharan, the German and Japanese peoples were powerful, aware of the offensive role played by their defeated leaders in the Second World War, skilled and, above all, willing to embrace the socio-economic reforms prescribed by the victorious Americans as the only way of recovering their shattered national pride. Furthermore, while the Americans were eager to boost the economic development of Germany and Japan because of their strategic importance in the fight against communism, they, like the previous Western imperialists, have never attempted to encourage the

transformation of African states into anything other than suppliers of cheap natural resources. As Julius O. Ihonvbere puts it in his excellent *Africa and the New World Order*,

The truth of the matter is that the state in Africa was never structured or composed by imperialism to promote growth, development, peace, stability, harmony, or law and order. It was structured to continue the imperialist project of class domination, exploitation, and elite collaboration with foreign capital as part of the international capitalist order. In this project the African state has been a huge success.⁵

In other words, the appalling situation of most African states nowadays is the logical consequence of Western colonisation by proxy of Africa. As a stout supporter of Western imperialism, Niall Ferguson should rejoice because the West has never lost its hold on this continent. Far from tightening it, the direct recolonisation he

Despite their Christianisation, most contemporary black Africans can no longer be forced into submission by the fallacy that as children of Ham, they are bound to be the whites' slaves forever. On the contrary, they are more likely to misuse Christianity in order to harass Western neo-imperialists. For instance, there are currently many warlords in Ivory Coast claiming that Jesus Christ has ordered them to kill or oust all Frenchmen and women, allegedly, the instigators of the civil war.

In the past, the incomprehensible military superiority of Westerners led almost all black Africans to regard those "ghost-like" beings as immortal gods. Nowadays, they tend to view them as mere human beings who, despite their military might, can be killed or even defeated by former colonised peoples such as the Vietnamese or Somalis. They certainly admire their technological supremacy and economic prosperity. Nevertheless, they rightly attribute them to a progressive evolution achievable by all humans.

Ferguson probably disregards or fails to see the intrinsic racism of his contention that a superpower such as United States should "do a great deal to impose its preferred values on less technologically advanced societies."⁶ In fact, he implies that the people who possess the world's most successful economy are superior to those whose economy is less successful. Why else would he condone the forced imposition of American and, therefore, Western values on "less technologically advanced societies"? The unavoidable consequence of this pernicious attitude is the dehumanising arrogance mentioned earlier. Western imperialists, utterly convinced of their racial, intellectual, and moral superiority in comparison with non-Westerners, often treat them like despicable sub-humans whose lives and dignity are worthless. In doing so, they generally tend to transform both themselves and the people subjected to their domination into insensitive beasts capable of committing the most barbaric acts.

Anybody who doubts this should take a close look at everything that has happened in Iraq since its invasion by the Americans and their allies in March 2003.

The argument that despite its numerous drawbacks, colonisation “is *good* for colonisers and colonised,” previously very effective in winning the support of Western masses, can no longer be so nowadays—not because they are less racist than their forefathers, as the current popularity of Niall Ferguson demonstrates, but because of the impact of modern media. Unlike their ancestors, present-day Western imperialists can no longer conceal their worst imperialistic atrocities from the great majority of Westerners and non-Westerners, and this will always tend to erode

to argue that it was America's lack of genuine imperialistic commitment that led to the early 1990s debacle.

I will advise Ferguson to imitate his forefathers and go on an exploratory trip in one of the territories he might want to recolonise, for example, Mali. In theory, this country is ideal for anybody advocating the intervention of "liberal" imperialists in "less technologically advanced societies." It is one of the world's poorest nations; many of its inhabitants subsist on foreign aid; several of its presidents have been toppled by military coups and, despite the adoption of democracy about ten years ago, nobody can guarantee that this will never happen again.

If he were to follow my advice, Ferguson would be received at Bamako, the capital, and other major Malian cities, by cheerful and hospitable officials. They

us what a worthy child of your prejudiced and racist forefathers you are. As for us, we have the past glory of our ancestors to remind us that we are neither half-witted nor

cry explains why Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and Laurent Gbagbo of Ivory Coast are still in power despite their odious flaws. Unfortunately, present-day calls for Western recolonisation of black Africa do nothing to lessen it.

Instead of advocating the establishment of a Western “liberal” empire in sub-Saharan Africa, a venture bound to be disastrous and bloody, Ferguson should advise Westerners to try and win the trust of the sub-Saharanans by treating them with justice and respect. If they persist in mistreating and scorning them as they have always done, nothing, not even brutal force, will prevent them from turning their back on the West and looking Eastwards.¹⁰ Nevertheless, given that most Easterners’ perception of sub-Saharan Africa and its people comes from their former Western colonisers, it is evident that for black Africans, the fight against colonial prejudices will remain an unfinished business for centuries.

Notes

¹ Chinua Achebe, “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*,” *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays 1965-1987* (London: Heinemann, 1988), 2.

² Niall Ferguson, “Yankee, Don’t Go Home,” *Times Weekend Review*, 24 April 2004: 10. “In short, what the British Empire proved is that empire is a form of international government that can work—and not just for the benefit of the ruling power,” Ferguson also wrote in *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), 362.

³ White Africa, usually viewed as part of the Middle East—the recolonisation of which is also recommended by Ferguson—is discussed at length in my book *WMD: The Weapons of My Disappointment* (Insch, Scotland: Lipstick Publishing, 2004).

⁴ Kamran Kousari, “Deep-Rooted Commodity Trap Lies behind Africa’s Poverty,” *Guardian* 15 March 2004: 25.

⁵ Julius O. Ihonybere, *Africa and the New World Order* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 5. The constant formation, armament and financial support of black African warring factions by Westerners is widely discussed in this book.

⁶ Ferguson, *Empire*, 367.

⁷ Samory Touré (1830-1904), ruler of, among many other territories, the south of present-day Mali, offered a fierce resistance to the French invaders.

⁸ Mansa Musa, king of the Mali empire from 1312 to 1337, and Sunni Ali, king of Songhay (the empire that replaced the Mali) from 1464 to 1492, enjoyed worldwide fame and respect. I quote the *THW* because, unlike me, it cannot easily be dismissed as biased:

A number of African kings, among them Mansa Musa and Sunni Ali (of Songhay), enjoyed renown throughout Islam and Christendom for their wealth, brilliance and the

artistic achievements of their subjects. Their capitals were large walled cities with many mosques and at least two, Timbuktu and Jenne, had universities that attracted scholars and poets from far wide.

(*Times History of the World*, 1999 ed.), 140.

⁹ In 1991, lieutenant-colonel Touré led a successful coup against the cruel dictator Moussa Traoré. But he ceded power to a civilian, thus allowing the subsequent democratisation of the Republic of Mali. It was only when he was democratically elected in May 2002 that he became president. He is as popular with his compatriots as Nelson Mandela with the South Africans.

¹⁰ And that is only the most optimistic scenario. For, as I argue in *WMD: The Weapons of My Disappointment*, there is a real risk that an aversion to the West like that of the Middle East will develop in sub-Saharan Africa.