

EUROPEAN COLONIALISM AND THE LEGACY OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Georges De Schrijver, S.J.

STATUS OF THE QUESTION

I delivered a paper on *Globalization and the Ethical Debate* in September 2004 at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium). The paper was presented as part of the research program on ‘*God Talk in Europe*’ with special reference to the European colonial past. I had chosen to write on globalization and not on European colonialism because I feared that writing on colonialism would merely catapult my audience into the past, making them unaware of the new challenges posed by economic globalization. Everyone, however, did not appreciate my stubborn option. Some saw in it a maneuver to divert attention from the dark pages of European colonialism which some interlocutors stressed had been carried out with the blessing of the European Enlightenment philosophers. Most of my colleagues know I am a son of the Enlightenment so much so that my feelings are hurt whenever the European Enlightenment is rejected ‘en bloc’. With Jürgen Habermas I believe in the Enlightenment as an ‘unfinished’ project, i.e., a project of ‘democratization’ to be rescued from the derailments of calculating and instrumental reason.

I concluded the above-mentioned article with a section on ‘The Legacy of the European Enlightenment’. In that section I dwelt on the injustice that is done to most of the ‘Third World’ countries when forced by foreign planners - the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization - to enter the neo-liberal global market. But I also made it clear that European citizens are, in a sense, not better off. “Here too, the financial world dictates what governments have to do to incorporate their economies into the global market. At this point an erosion of democratic institutions can be observed as well as the reduction of the role of the citizens to that of pawns on the chessboard of economic planning

and the consumer market. It is time, therefore, for conscientized citizens to stand up and protest against all sorts of attempts at using purely economic standards and norms to define what the 'good life' is about. They can hereby fall back on the European heritage. True, the *homo economicus* is an offspring of the European Enlightenment. The Enlightenment program cannot yet be reduced solely to the imposition of economic logic. It also, and perhaps more so, comprises the culture of open and public discourse on human values and norms. The European Enlightenment is also the cradle of the birth of democratic societies in which citizens discuss the social arrangements that must be made to guarantee the common good in an egalitarian society. It is this aspect of the European Enlightenment that nowadays continues to inspire all those who commit themselves to the emergence of an alternative 'globalization from below',¹ i.e., to the cause of a worldwide democratic rule.

**EUROPEAN COLONIALISM:
A BLUEPRINT FOR GLOBAL FINANCE CAPITALISM.
DELVING INTO THE MECHANISMS**

What is at stake in the economic globalization that we now see emerging is the democratic legacy of the European Enlightenment which is threatened to be aborted by the arrogance of the powerful financial centers who now dictate with increasing force the internal policies of the (erstwhile) 'independent' nation states. In 1996 at the meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, the president of the German Central Bank made it clear that political leaders must realize they will be subjected to the control of the financial markets in the future.

The crucial question to be asked at this juncture is: what has prevented the democratic legacy of the Enlightenment from meeting acceptance and recognition the world over? Must Europe not be blamed herself for this lack of reception? I am not asking this question at a purely academic level but with reference to the history of

1. Georges De Schrijver, "Economic Globalization and the Ethical Debate," (forthcoming publication).

European colonialism. Could it not be the case that European colonialism laid the foundation of what was later to become, in the context of globalization, the tragic divorce between the ruthless calculations of powerful financial centers and the citizens' participation in democratic processes? Or in more simple words: was colonialism not the gravedigger of the Enlightenment ideals on whose shoulders it stood?

To answer these questions with due nuances some historical research is needed. If not, one will easily conclude by leveling massive, black-and-white accusations such as the emancipatory ideals of the European Enlightenment were actually only meant for European citizens; whereas the Non-European peoples were regarded as subordinate aliens in the service of the European expansion. Or that the Enlightenment thinkers (Kant and Hegel) were apparently so convinced of the cultural superiority of Europe that they indirectly gave their blessing to European colonialism. True, these accusations contain a grain of truth. But some of the premises on which they are based are often ill-founded and part of a misconception.

In what follows, I will not dwell on the period of 'early modernity' in which, as Enrique Dussel has pointed out, the newly 'discovered' Americas (1492) became a periphery of Europe – more precisely of Spain, Portugal and the financial center Genoa.² Nor will I dwell on the way in which the Spaniards expanded this periphery to include the Philippines (1565-1850). I will rather focus on the 19th century, a period in which one must locate the apogee of the British cycle in the world system and the Scramble for Africa.³ It was also during this time that the European Enlightenment ideals of democracy and emancipation began to gain influence in the organization of the European nations.

A basic misconception that must be cleared up is the assumption that the 19th century European nations were engaged as monolithic blocs in the project of colonization, not in the least divided

2. See Enrique Dussel, *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y de la exclusión* (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 1998), 52.

3. I also leave out the Dutch cycle and the beginning of the British cycle and only look at the colonization that took place in the strict period of the European Enlightenment without paying attention to the grounding of the USA by the Enlightenment founding fathers.

by inner tensions and clashing opinions. In reality, the European powers were internally torn apart by a growing class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the common people. If the former urged their countries to engage in economic expansion through colonization, the latter still struggled to take part in general elections. The social history of Europe demonstrates that it took many generations of struggle before European citizens came to enjoy genuine democratic regimes in which all social classes, at least in theory, could participate. Such widespread participation as we know it today in Europe would never have been achieved without the pressure of leftist political groups and trade unions. One ought, moreover, not to forget that it was only possible to launch the European social security system, as we know it today, after the reconstruction of Europe in the post-Second World War period, at the precise moment when European countries lost their colonies.

Against this background I invite the harsh critics of European colonialism, as well as the critics of the European Enlightenment for that matter, to nuance their position. Instead of pointing a finger of scorn at the entire population of a country and decrying them as 'ugly colonizers', they should rather target the bourgeoisie of these countries: the European elites who became the engines of colonial exploitation while not being at all concerned with the dire plight of the proletariat in their own countries. The ideals of the French Revolution - liberty, equality and fraternity - had an impact on the social order of the European countries only very gradually and through painstaking effort and grassroots organizing and resistance. The Enlightenment ideals of democracy and participation came to be enshrined in the European worldview only after hard and tenacious social struggles. When Karl Marx made himself the mouth-piece of the proletariat in London, Great Britain had already laid claim to India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. But it still had no proper domestic laws to shield the rights of her workers back home.

In her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt analyzed the role the European bourgeoisie in France, Germany, and Great Britain has played in determining the foreign policies of their countries. The specific period she studied is that of the 'Scramble for Africa' (1876-1912) although much of what she described could already be found in previous stages of colonization. Think only of

the role played by the Dutch East-India Company and the British East-India Company in the seventeenth century. She carefully examined who the actors were behind the European ‘imperialist’ dream and came to the conclusion that the rise of ‘imperialism’ (the term Lenin used to refer to full-fledged European colonialism) must be linked to the *political* emancipation of the *bourgeoisie*.

The European bourgeoisie had already been emancipated for some time (which in 1789 led to the French Revolution) but had mostly remained aloof from political action. They initially distrusted politics because their sole objective was to have unfettered freedom in doing business without any state interference. They defended a free market system unhampered by state regulations. After some time, however, that same bourgeoisie understood that it was in the interest of their capitalistic enterprises to engage in politics and to dictate the foreign policy of their countries through lobbying. Hannah Arendt put it as follows: “the bourgeoisie turned to politics out of economic necessity; for if it did not want to give up the capitalist system whose inherent law is constant economic growth, it had to impose this law upon its governments and to proclaim expansion to be the ultimate political goal of foreign policy.”⁴ This explains why, in the period of 19th century imperialism, the governments of France, Germany and Great Britain wagered on their bourgeoisie’s dream of economic expansion and made inroads to the ‘dark continent’ of Africa.⁵

This adventure led to two regimes of colonization or at least to their consolidation: one French and another British. The French tried to integrate their colonies into the administrative patterns that were in vogue in France. They developed a policy of assimilation. In sub-Saharan Africa they appointed divisional chiefs as their local representatives in charge of tax collection and labor mobilization. It was incumbent on these chiefs to strike a balance between the laws of the colonizers and the local customs concerning community life.

4. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harvest/HBJ Book, 1979 [1951]), 126.

5. Although the European colonial powers had demarcated the borders of their colonies at the Berlin Conference (1884-1885), subsequent disputes among them became one of the elements that led to the slaughters of the First World War (1914-1918).

In the North-African possessions (Algeria, Tunis, Morocco), delegates of the indigenous populations were, as far as possible, given seats in the French parliament. The British colonists, on the contrary, opted for a different regime. They “settled on newly won territory in the four corners of the world and remained members of the same British nation, dispersed over the earth.”⁶ Wherever they lived, they behaved as British citizens with all the civil rights involved. For the newly conquered subordinates in the colonies, however, they worked out a system of ‘indirect’ rule. They ruled those they had colonized with the help of paramount local chiefs whom in turn they controlled through their administration. Hannah Arendt describes this indirect rule as follows: “The British left the conquered people to their own devices as far as culture, religion and local law were concerned” and “stayed aloof from spreading British law and culture.”⁷ This, of course, does not mean that they did not rule; they only did it indirectly. Their colonial administrators supervised the way in which local leaders interpreted and implemented the local customary laws and saw to it that this jurisprudence did not infringe upon the basic rules of European law.

The British way of colonial administration already set up in India was also the model adopted by Germany and the Netherlands.⁸ Commendable this system of ‘indirect rule’ might be at a first glance, it would create serious problems after independence. Even today the Muslim states in Northern Nigeria are fighting for the implementation of the shariah penal laws in their states instead of complying with the ‘modern’ judicial system that is mandatory in the rest of the country. Similar tensions exist in India. Here recently a clash arose between Hindu fundamentalists and Muslims. The radical movement *Hindutva* sought to abolish the ‘shariah’ courts of the Muslims and to replace them with their own Hindu traditional laws modified by western law.

At this juncture, a comparison of the colonial rule of the

6. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 128.

7. *Ibid.*, 130. This did not prevent the natives from developing national consciousness and from clamoring for sovereignty and independence though it may have somewhat retarded the process.

8. Hannah Arendt also includes Belgium although this is not quite correct (see below).

Roman empire to that of the Spanish crown is in order. The Roman conquerors consolidated their Mediterranean and Northern empire on the basis of a common law: the Roman law which was in force everywhere in the same way even with respect to granting privileges to Roman citizens abroad. A similar common pattern existed in the Spanish crown colonies from Peru and Mexico to the Philippines. Here the Spanish colonial law, patterned after Castilian civil law, was in force in the whole empire. This uniformity was meant to culturally and religiously cement the various distant regions together and to facilitate the introduction of the economically vital 'latifundia' system as it existed in medieval Spain. A special dispensation was given to the religious orders. It was incumbent on them to christianize the natives and to make them abide by the law. Intermarriage with the indigenous was legalized which gave rise to the emergence of mestizos. The role played by the viceroys was also important. "The viceroys were appointed by the king of Spain and the Council of the Indies from among noble Spanish families. Their official powers and duties were extensive: the collection and augmentation of royal revenues, the nomination of lesser colonial officials both civil and ecclesiastical, the enforcement of the laws, the protection of the Indians and their conversion to Christianity, and until the 18th century, the grant of *encomiendas* (grants of Indians for labour and tribute to certain colonists). The powers of the viceroys were, however, subject to various limitations; other important colonial officials were also crown-appointed and could thwart them by dealing directly with Madrid. Moreover, the home government's minute regulations on every aspect of colonial administration, though they were often ignored, tended to allow little discretionary power. The *audiencia*, a court that shared the viceroy's administrative responsibilities, often used its power to obstruct him."⁹

The new colonial empires of the 19th century, Arendt remarks, broke with this rule. Here the colonial administration was disconnected from the national institutions of the mother country although the executives of the latter were allowed to oversee the good functioning of the colonial administration. The colonial apparatus stood for a great deal on its own. For this administrative

9. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "viceroy."

separation of colony and motherland a two-sided motivation can be found. On the one hand, colonial administrators abroad looked with arrogance on the ‘backward people’ in the colonies whom they deemed not fit to be included in European institutions whose intricacies they would certainly not be able to understand let alone assimilate (think of the way Western intellectuals looked down on the oriental habits or ‘Orientalism’ of the Hindus). On the other hand, there was the motivation given by some Enlightenment thinkers in Europe “who felt that no nation had the right to impose its law upon a foreign people.” In the face of this two-sided motivation Arendt cannot help but speak of “a curious mixture of arrogance and respect” in the behaviour of the colonizers.¹⁰ This ambiguity obliquely shows the lack of unanimity in the colonial motherland. The political fractions in parliament could hardly reach an agreement as to how to properly rule the colonies. Pragmatism dictated that a separate rule for the colonies was the least bad solution, either in the mode of British indirect rule or in the mode of the French attempts at moderate assimilation.

A CASE IN POINT: THE NASCENT BELGIAN CONGO UNDER LEOPOLD II

One of the crudest examples of ‘separate rule’ is the creation of the Congo Free State in the 1880’s as a private holding of a group of European investors headed by the Belgian King Leopold II who reigned from 1865 to 1910. “In November of 1877 Leopold formed the Committee for the Studies of the Upper Congo (*Comité d’Études du Haut Congo*, later renamed *Association Internationale du Congo*) to open up the African interior to European trade along the Congo River. Between 1879 and 1882, under the committee’s auspices, Henry Morton Stanley, a Welsh-born American journalist and explorer, established stations on the upper Congo and opened negotiations with local rulers. By 1884 the *Association Internationale du Congo* had signed treaties with 450 independent African entities and, on that basis, asserted its right to govern all the territory concerned as an

10. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 131.

independent state. At the Berlin West Africa Conference of 1884-85, its name became the Congo Free State, and European powers recognized Leopold as its sovereign".¹¹ Various reasons were supplied to legitimize the notion that a region of the Upper Congo could be declared a state-in-formation under the auspices of a European king who would take care of its organization: "First, the land was a prey to the most revolting savage cruelties even to cannibalism; second, it was ravaged by ceaseless internecine wars and by the slave trade; third, it denied strangers the protection of the *jus gentium* or law of nations. In such a case the common good of mankind sanctioned the imposition of a state of order and security, and hence the creation of a civilizing power."¹²

Leopold II, who from then onward was concurrently the King of Belgium and the King of the Congo without the Congo belonging to Belgium, presented his colony as a private humanitarian venture aimed at exterminating the Arab slave trade in this region. Yet he had to finance this venture. He therefore divided his colony into three major parts: one-third of the territory became the national domain, administered by a council of six with the aim of gathering revenues for works of 'public utility' such as the construction of the important railway to bypass the rapids of the lower Congo river which was a crucial waterway for transport; one-ninth became crown domain, the private property of the King and the rest fell under the domain grounds to be given in concession to companies to allow them to create monopolies. The latter provision was consistent with the stipulations of the Berlin Conference that had insisted on free trade in the newly created state. It goes without saying that these companies, like the Anglo-Belgian India Rubber Company and the Antwerp Company, paid tax and tribute to the colonizer-king. As to the native population, they were allowed to cultivate the grounds they owned; but they were also subject to conscription. The annual contingent to be supplied was divided into two sections: one for the army and the other for laborers. The soldiers served for seven years while laborers served five in the copper mines and rubber plantations.

The arrangement resulted in a real regime of 'work-camps'.

11. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Congo Free State."

12. A.Vermeersch, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Congo," <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04228a.htm> (access 07.06.2006).

In addition to the requirements imposed on soldiers and laborers, non-conscripted natives could be required to work fourteen hours a month for the state or the companies as an equivalent of the taxes they had to pay. “To enforce the rubber quotas, the *Force Publique* (FP) was called in. The FP was an army, but its aim was not to defend the country, but to terrorise the local population. The officers were white agents of the State. Of the black soldiers, many were cannibals from the fiercest tribes of the upper Congo... Armed with modern weapons and the *chicotte* - a bull whip made of hippopotamus hide - the *Force Publique* routinely took and tortured hostages (mostly women), and flogged and raped the natives. They also burned recalcitrant villages, and above all, on the orders of white officers, chopped off and took human hands as trophies to prove that bullets hadn't been wasted. (As officers were concerned that their subordinates might waste their ammunition on hunting animals for sport, they required soldiers to submit one hand for every bullet spent).”¹³

Indignation grew among the missionaries and critical journalists who were eyewitnesses to these atrocities. Leopold II reaped fantastic personal gains from the exploitation of the Congo, much of which he spent on lavish public projects in Brussels such as the impressive Court of Justice, the Triumphal Arc, and the Colonial Museum in Tervuren. In 1904, Roger Casement, British Consul to the Congo, filed a devastating report on the atrocities he had witnessed. Under Leopold's reign, the Congolese population had shrunk from 20 to 30 million to only 8 million, more or less the population of Belgium whose territory is eighty times smaller than that of the Congo. Under mounting international pressure, Leopold was forced to

13. “Congo Free State,” in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congo_Free_State#Enter_L.C3.A9opold (access 07.06.2006). The scenes described in this wikipedia article were also broadcast in a BBC documentary on Leopold II entitled “White King, Red Rubber, Black Death” (2005). There, too, it was said that orders were given “to chop off the hands of dead fighters as evidence that the indigeneous soldiers did not use their ammunition to shoot game. It was also said that some of the victims' hands were cut off while they were still alive as a type of punishment” (Comment on the BBC documentary: <http://www.stefangeens.com/LeopoldII> (access 22.06.2006). The Encyclopedia Britannica is more vague on this subject and only mentions that “the Belgians introduced mutilation as a common punishment even for minor offenses.” See *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. “Congo Free State.”

transfer his power to the Belgian government in November 1908. This government annexed the Congo Free State which thereafter became the Belgian Congo. “It is said that Leopold, upon hearing that he would have to hand over the Congo Free State, said, “I will give them my Congo, but they have no right to know what I did there.”¹⁴ He burnt all the compromising documents he possessed concerning the administration of his colony.¹⁵

Leopold’s work camps were abolished in the Belgian Congo (1908-1960); slavery in any form was no longer tolerated. The Belgian government invested in basic projects like schools, hospitals and roads. “Though the Congo was run by a governor-general appointed by the Belgian government, the real rulers of the natives’ lives were the missionaries who, through the establishment of Western-style schools¹⁶ and churches, served to suppress the native way of life in a manner common to many former colonies around the world.”¹⁷ The Belgian Congo was characterized by a high degree of coordination between the three major sectors: the colonial administration (government), the Church (Roman Catholic) and private companies. “In all three sectors, the scale of the effort and the number of expatriate whites was unmatched outside South Africa.”¹⁸ The regime of the administration was similar to that developed by France, a policy of assimilation to the European institutions. The only difference was that the French intended to form a local intellectual elite whereas the

14. King Leopold II and the Belgian Congo, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A4429064> (access 07.06.2006).

15. A substantial part of Leopold II’s personal archives has, nonetheless, been preserved thanks to the care of M. Goffinet, the King’s assistant. These documents are known as the ‘archives Goffinet’ and are accessible. See <http://www.stefangeens.com/LeopoldII.pdf> (access 22.06.2006).

16. These schools also comprise the so-called ‘farm-chapels’. “The *fermes-chapelles* are rural schools where, under the guidance of certain picked pupils, the young Congolese are taught agriculture. The missionary who regularly visits these posts supplies the farm implements and the seeds; the chief who grants the use of his plot of ground still retains his title to the property; while the pupils, who form a sort of community around a little chapel, have the usufruct.” A. Vermeersch, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Congo,” <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04228a.htm> (access 08.06.2006).

17. “King Leopold II and the Belgian Congo,” <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A4429064> (access 08.06.2006).

18. Wallace Mills, “Belgian Colonial Policies,” http://husky1.stmarys.ca/~wmills/course317/5Belgian_Policies.html (access 08.06.2006).

“idea underlying Belgian policies in the Congo was to change and transform the masses rather than to produce an elite. Moreover, it is not too much of a distortion to say that the transformation they had in mind was to a ‘proletariat’. It also implies a view of African capabilities as being very limited. The Belgians were certainly *not* unique in these attitudes. What was unique was the systematic and exhaustive manner in which they went about implementing them.”¹⁹

Starting from the 1950’s, however, serious efforts have been made to invest money and personnel in higher education. In 1951 the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium) founded in Léopoldville (today known as Kinshasa) the University of Lovanium. Before independence in 1960 this university already comprised ten departments staffed by highly qualified professors from abroad.

THE QUESTION OF DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

This short historical survey makes one thing clear: no European colonizing powers ever made serious efforts to install a democratic parliamentary system in their colonies. The absence of democratic rule can be understood in the older Spanish and Portuguese empires since they originated in a culture that was still feudal. But it is harder to justify in the case of the colonial empires of the 19th century: none of them ushered in a democratic rule, the sole exception perhaps being France which made of Algeria a department of France. (The extent to which regular elections were being organized there should be investigated though). This means that one of the major fruits of the European Enlightenment, i.e., citizens’ participation in the government via their elected leaders, was never exported to the colonies. This fact had often been obfuscated by the success stories of the missionaries who largely contributed to the spread of the western critical mind without engaging in raising political consciousness. At any rate, the thorny task of grounding a democratic regime was left to the post-independence rulers. This enterprise ultimately failed in many countries especially in Africa. How could it have been otherwise, since the new political intelligentsia had only known a country ruled by a class of administrators who worked

19. Ibid.

in connivance with the big companies of the colonizing ‘motherland’?

The long-term desirability of bestowing some form of parliamentary representation on the subjected peoples was an issue that was often discussed in European parliaments and in the press. But this topic, Hannah Arendt remarks, was “resented by colonial administrators in all European countries with colonial possessions – whether England, France, Belgium, Germany or Holland.”²⁰ In the British empire, colonial administrators only appealed to the imperial government in London when they needed military help in their wars against insurrection or, as was the case in South Africa, in the war against the Boers. For the rest they were engaged in ‘business as usual’, making sure that companies from the motherland could go on growing specialized crops and producing manufactured goods for export, not to speak of the deals they made with diamond and gold traffickers. In the days of the gold rush in South Africa, Cecil Rhodes, the British colonial administrator, for example, boasted of the fact that “seventy-five per cent of the dividends paid to shareholders went abroad and a large majority of them to Great Britain.”²¹

THE LEGACY OF EUROPEAN COLONIALISM, ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION AND THE AMERICAN CYCLE

In this final section I will briefly comment on how the legacy of European colonialism still has a serious bearing on the desperate situation in which many former colonies find themselves in the era of globalization – an era which also witnesses the clout of the ‘American cycle’.

The Legacy of European Colonialism

I have already pointed to some unresolved problems the European countries left to the colonies after independence. There is, first of all, the inheritance of the ‘indirect rule’ which can still be felt in the ‘ethnic strife’ among clans and peoples who, in the days of colonization, were forced to unite in one ‘artificial’ country irrespective

20. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 133.

21. *Ibid.*, 203.

of the natural borders that earlier demarcated their territory. I already mentioned the upheavals created by the *Hindutva* movement in India and by the Muslim radicals in Nigeria. A great deal of other atrocities can be listed. One may think of the ethnic strife between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda which in the late 1990s led to a real genocide. Rwanda had been a German colony up to 1918 but it was then administered by Belgium until it became independent in 1961. A legion of examples may still be cited.

Second, the post-independent prime ministers and presidents in Africa are renowned for their corruption. One of the main reasons why corruption abundantly flourished is the absence of a democratic political culture. The 19th century imperial powers never set up a democratic system with an elected parliament that would exert control over state leaders. Ballots, if they exist at all in the post-independent nations, are mostly a farce followed by endless discussions about fraud. Furthermore, state leaders in the whole of Africa tend to perpetuate their mandate by changing the constitution either by postponing elections or by changing their status to that of a dictator supported by the military. Funds destined for development are surreptitiously used for purchasing arms and to install regimes of terror.

Third, to the extent that earlier colonial administrators used to force alliances with businessmen involved in the export of specialized produce or in the exploitation of gold mines, copper, diamonds or uranium, they left behind a model²² that was easily assumed by new African presidents and dictators in power. These new regimes used the models bequeathed to them by the colonizers to concentrate the wealth of their nations in their own hands, thereby merely replicating the pattern they ‘inherited’ from colonial past. It is a well known fact, for example, that the recent internal wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo are financed with money earned from clandestine traffic in diamonds and other precious merchandise. The new leaders of the nations prolong, in their own way, the colonization of their people. It is a lesson they learned well from their own colonizers.

22. In post-colonial Africa this model also includes the exploitation of oil fields, for example, in Nigeria and Angola.

Globalization

For clarity's sake I would like to draw a distinction between the American cycle and globalization. The globalization of finance capital is not strictly tied to a particular nation not even to the USA, although this country has a great deal of influence in the workings of the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO - institutions which propagate the total liberalization of the market in view of 'creating wealth for the nations.'

The crucial question that must be asked here is the extent to which the former European colonies really benefit from the funds they get from the IMF and the World Bank. Given the mechanisms of corruption I sketched above, it should come as no surprise to learn that the huge loans granted to the African countries have, in fact, been to no avail. The money was hardly used for development; it was redirected to other ends such as the construction of megalomaniac palaces and complexes, bigger salaries for ministers, bribes and warfare. What resulted was a growing indebtedness of the country. To pay the debts back in order to get new loans, the governments in question have no other choice than to cut financial support for schools and hospitals and to stop investing in the maintenance of roads and water and power supply. The list of grievances is well known. I quote what Laurenti Magesa from Tanzania relates about the situation: "There are also the IFM and World Bank credit, aid, or loan conditionalities which, in general, demand a reduction of the protection of local industries while promoting unsubsidized export commodities. They also undercut domestic policies designed to promote affordable education and health services for the majority of the people in any African country."²³

The American Cycle

I am of the opinion that the real 'heir' to European colonialism is the USA. This can be seen, for example, in the preparation for the Iraq war. This war was waged because American

23. Laurenti Magesa, "The Political Axis of African Liberation Theology", in Georges De Schrijver ed., *Liberation Theologies on Shifting Grounds: A Clash of Socio-Economic and Cultural Paradigms* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998), 139.

businessmen prompted the government to go to war and leave it up to them to carry out the ensuing ‘reconstruction’ of the defeated country. A deal was made with American enterprises having links with the government to make the oilfields productive again and to rebuild the infrastructure that was going to be bombed out as a consequence of the war.

The Americans have apparently learned a lot from the British cycle of the world system in which the financial elites had a strong bearing on the foreign affairs of the country. Especially in the 19th century, these elites dictated the policy of economic expansion and colonization. The same thing happens now in the USA but with a still greater brazenness and assurance than ever before. Just as the British used to ‘settle on newly won territory in the four corners of the world’ and behave in those territories in such a way that they came to be resented as unloved conquerors, so, too, and to a much higher degree, the sons of Uncle Sam have no scruples in laying hands on newly won territories and behaving there as ‘ugly Americans’.

CONCLUSION

In his *Encyclopedia of Philosophy as Science*, Hegel has this to say about the Africans: “The capacity for culture (*Bildung*) cannot be denied them, yet the negroes show no inner drive (*inneren Trieb*) to civilization.”²⁴ An utterance like this is avidly taken up in the post-colonial literature as proof that Hegel and his predecessor Kant were shameless racists because of their ingrained conviction that the Europeans and especially those living in the period of the Enlightenment are simply superior to all other races and all previous stages of human civilization. In this article I have not followed the above line of thought but have rather focused on the history of European colonization in the second half of the 19th century to include the ‘Scramble for Africa’. While it is true that conquerors must possess superior economic and political powers in order to be able to colonize peoples, this fact, however, does not necessarily

24. Georg F.W. Hegel, “Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse (1830),” in *Hegels Werke*, eds. Eva Moldenhauer, Karl Markus Michel, Helmuth Reinicke, vol. 10 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), 60.

lead to the conclusion that their aim of establishing an empire must be regarded as a superior humanitarian achievement.

I persist in my conviction that the rule of democracy belongs to the higher achievements of civilization and that the ideals of democracy and emancipation found a clear and compelling formulation in the writings of the European Enlightenment thinkers.²⁵ This assertion does not, of course, imply that these ideals, theoretically elaborated in the writings of Enlightenment philosophers, were simultaneously embodied at once and everywhere in the political organization of the European continent. In his political writings, Jacques Derrida often states that democracy is an 'impossible idea'. By this he means that we cannot help dreaming about an idea while knowing all the while that its realization will always be incomplete and truncated. That is the reason why he speaks of a 'democracy to come'. In his *Specters of Marx* he writes: "Even beyond the regulative idea in its classical form [there is] the idea, if that is still what it is, of 'democracy to come', its 'idea' as event of a pledged injunction that orders one to summon the very thing that will never present itself in the form of full presence."²⁶

Derrida is a postmodern author who is critical of the modern concept of the nation-state which in his eyes is very elitist since its organization is patterned after the needs and the aspirations of the bourgeoisie. In his dream of 'a democracy to come' he looks for a space to be given to outcasts - to the lower classes, to the excluded and the strangers- thus opting for a cosmopolitan ethics in the era of globalization. His criticism of the modern nation-state, however, remains within Enlightenment aspirations for freedom and

25. I am not making a unique claim here. Amartya Sen offers a Western program of emancipation. He perfectly realizes that a program which includes literacy, democracy and freedom of expression will erode the social and political fabric of Asian nations. He, therefore, devotes a whole chapter to a discussion of the allegedly authoritarian organization of Asian societies. For him, this autocratic bias ought to be rectified since there exists a greater diversity of intellectual movements in these countries than is generally accepted. For him, it is nonsense to play off Asian authoritarian values and the western idea of freedom against each other. Buddhism, for example, "has much room for volition and free choice." See *idem, Development as Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 234.

26. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 65.

democracy; he only broadens this perspective to include the whole of humankind not as a homogeneous bloc but as an interacting whole of heterogeneous entities. Multiculturalism is Derrida's main political concern.

Hannah Arendt did not go that far. But in a sense, she anticipated Derrida's criticism of the power and power abuse of the wealthy bourgeoisie in the modern nation-state. These 19th century wealthy elites prompted their governments to establish a colonial empire to reap more profit for their companies without being concerned at all either for the dire plight of the working class in their own country or that of the subdued people in the colonies. To change this state of affairs a 'second, socially committed Enlightenment' (Marx) was needed, one which challenged the bourgeoisie's usurpation of freedoms at the expense of the common people who were forced to expend themselves in order to increase the bourgeoisie's wealth. The effect of this 'second Enlightenment' can be seen in the modern social history of Europe during which leftist pressure groups and trade unions fought for a more egalitarian society. Democratic participation of all social classes in free elections of the country is one of the fruits of this struggle; another achievement is the gradual inscription of social rights in the United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* which, among others, include the right to decent housing, the right to just wages, the right to state-subsidized schooling and the right to social protection in the case of illness.

No wonder then that people formed in this tradition eventually began to resent the way in which their governments denied these basic democratic and social rights to their subjects in the colonies. In the same vein, leftist intellectuals in the West are, in retrospect, so critical of the humanitarian rhetoric that was used to motivate the 'civilizing' mission of the European nations. For them, this mission had only one objective: commerce and business as the history of the creation of the nascent Belgian Congo under Leopold II demonstrates. But there have been at the same time many honest people, missionaries among them, who were committed to the intellectual and spiritual advancement of the 'natives'. They certainly contributed to the formation of a critical intelligentsia that was later to clamor for independence.²⁷ Yet even then the scandal remains that in most of

the African post-independent states the governments continued to 'colonize' their own people just as the Europeans had done earlier. The capitalist legacy of the colonial way of doing business was apparently stronger than the democratic freedom-legacy of the European Enlightenment.

27. I am thinking of the Congolese intelligentsia in the 1950s. In 19th century Latin America and the Philippines it was also the enlightened intelligentsia (*los ilustrados*) that clamored for independence from Spain.