

David S. Boateng
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What was the relationship between humanitarianism (in practice and/or in rhetoric) and imperialism in Africa? Be sure to include specific examples.

Why did Europeans feel the need to justify their mission to Africa as humanitarianism? To be exemplars of Christ? Avoid apprehension about spending the country's resources? Or could it be, that Europeans felt this was a golden ticket to heaven? Maybe Europeans saw themselves as the Good Samaritan written about in the book of Luke,¹ who helped a stranger that had been robbed and restored back to good health. However, in their tale, Europeans covered up the fact, that they too, were the robbers. The devastating period of history following Europeans entrance into Africa illustrates the exemplary execution of three laws from the *48 Laws of Power*.² In particular, **Law 3**: Conceal your intentions. **Law 4**: Always say less than necessary. **Law 7**: Get others to do the work for you, but always take the credit. **The relationship between humanitarianism and imperialism is that they were used in conjunction to create a covert power play to exploit the rich resource continent of Africa.** With this in mind, let's examine the events and extrapolate the essence of their actions.

To Begin, the scramble for Africa was no more than a game to gain access to Africa's most prized game: Its people and resources. Europeans already viewed Africans as inferior and

¹ Luke. 10:25-37 NIV

² Robert Greene, *The 48 Laws of Power* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016) ix-x

beasts of burden³. Therefore, the abuse dealt to them in collecting ivory and rubber was just a necessary measure to shake their idleness as King Leopold II once opined.⁴ Furthermore, the Berlin Conference, served as the starter pistol that shot off the declaration to “Let the games begin” for European domination of Africa. King Leopold II of Belgium was swift in making numerous deals to secure top rank. In the intricate tapestry of European colonialism in Africa, the establishment of a right-of-first refusal deal⁵ with France serves as a stark illustration of the calculated manipulation of humanitarian ideals for imperialistic gains. While Article 6 of the General Act of the Berlin Conference, 1885,⁶ ostensibly advocated for the preservation of native interests, European powers masterfully concealed their ulterior motives behind a veil of benevolence. This strategic convergence of humanitarianism and imperialism wasn’t a mere coincidence; it was a deliberate ploy to justify exploitative actions under the façade of noble intent. The European powers, driven by insatiable thirst for resources and territorial control, adeptly followed the principles outlined in the laws of power, concealing their true intentions and leveraging local dynamics to their advantage. In this context, the right-of-first refusal deal was a crafty maneuver that belied its true nature, a calculated effort to manipulate native preservation in order to further their self-serving colonial agendas. Selling land that was already settled to by natives was in no part an attempt to promote the welfare of the Congolese. All the participants at that horseshoe

³Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost* (Boston, MA: Mariner Books, 1998) 121

⁴ Ibid., 118

⁵ Ibid., 84

⁶“General Act of the Berlin Conference on West Africa, 26 February 1885.” Accessed November 1, 2020. <https://loveman.sdsu.edu/docs/1885GeneralActBerlinConference.pdf>.

table knew that the smokescreen of humanitarianism was the perfect ploy to commit treasonous acts of terrorism. It was an exhibition to hunt and capture Africans.

To adventure and explore beyond the expected was a next level opportunity to access everything in Africa and build a strong base. And whomever could declare superiority first in colonizing would have the strongest base to dictate future expansion into the continent. It was a win-win situation for Europeans at the end of the day. If things went awry, ongoing conflicts would be perceived as African issues. After all, everyone else was in the dark about the dark continent. Except the philanthropic powers claiming to bring light to it. Europeans knew they would be admired for their charity work good or bad because the latter would bolster the image that Africans are ungrateful despite all that they were “given”. They could pawn the whole thing off with a impish statement like “We tried. But, you know you can’t reason with animals. That’s why they need controlling.” The conniving snickering that ensued shortly after.

European elites clearly had a long endgame envisioned as the introduction of concession companies furthered their imperialistic goals. Concession companies were used like franchises by European governments to develop their territories and build markets⁷. Places such as French Equatorial Africa had 41 private companies⁸. But never did these companies reinvest in the communities they were pillaging. Humanitarianism only came in the form of what Africans could afford themselves from their own hard work. For example, cocoa farmers of the Gold Coast spent their earnings on building houses, roads, and bridges, and schools. None of which the colonial government provided.⁹ Which was much of the case everywhere else people were

⁷ Shillington, *History of Africa*, 369

⁸ Ibid., 371

⁹ Ibid., 374

getting murdered for not collecting enough rubber or whatever Europeans felt they needed so badly at the time.

As the old proverb goes, what is done in the dark will be brought to light. An indeed, with the *Open Letter*, George Washington Williams sought to achieve just that. For he witnessed the fraudulent claims of humanitarianism when he visited the Congo.¹⁰ Unfortunately, for the people of Africa those who had done the darkest of things had vanished into the blinding astonishment of the atrocities committed by the time news reached the free world.

Europeans were crafty in decontextualizing their imperialist advancements under the guise of promoting human welfare. Ultimately, it was their own welfare they intended to promote at the expense of Africa and its people. They believed they were doing God's work in the name of humanitarianism by cultivating Africans from the dark soil beneath the Sahara. Their intent was to breed and domesticate Africans into a race that would serve as permanent livestock for forced labor. Ultimately, as the backbone to economic elitism for Europeans. Right or wrong, Europeans were going to claim to be the best thing that happened to Africa. Their humanitarian activities were investments in their eyes. Gains (King Leopold II's fortune amassed to about \$1.1 billion US Dollars)¹¹ and losses (10 million lives in the Congo)¹² were just part of the game. Oh, the evil that men do, a haunting remind of the atrocities committed.

¹⁰ Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 109.

¹¹ Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 277.

¹² Ibid., 233