

Ecological Imperialism and Ecological Reparations¹

Franklin Obeng-Odoom

Ecological Crises

The Conference of the Parties (COP)27 in Sharm El-Sheikh made the point that the world faces a novel problem. The scale of socio-ecological

¹ This chapter has had a long journey. It was presented at the 'Ecological Imperialism and Ecological Reparations' Conference in Dakar, Senegal (25–28 October 2022). I especially thank Professor Jomo Kwame Sundaram for specific constructive criticism and other participants, notably Souad Aden-Osman, the Head of the Secretariat of the African Union High-Level Panel on Illicit Financial Flows from Africa, for their helpful comments. Next, I presented the paper in Italy at the 3rd ASTRA Summer School 2023 (5–16 June 2023), Free University of Brixen/Bressanone. Then, I published it as a more popular piece in a newsletter edited by Mr Amit Jain, Director of the NTU-SBF Centre for African Studies, Singapore, who offered me helpful feedback (Obeng-Odoom, Franklin (2022). The Case for Ecological Reparations in Africa. *NTU-SBF Centre for African Studies (CAS) Newsletter*. Accessible at: <https://www.ntu.edu.sg/cas/news-events/news/details/the-case-for-ecological-reparations-in-africa.>). The paper would subsequently be published in a handbook I edited myself (Obeng-Odoom, Franklin (2023). Ecological Reparations. In: Obeng-Odoom, Franklin (ed.)). *The Handbook on Alternative Global Development*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 352–361). I thank the publishers for supporting and permitting me to use the work for this current iteration, which returns the paper to its roots: Dakar. I thank the editors, especially Dr Ndongo Samba Sylla. He has been exceptionally kind and gracious with his grant of extensions to me and, as ever, informative in his feedback. I am responsible, of course, for the views and opinions expressed herein.

crises that afflict the earth is unprecedented. According to Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) assessments, these problems are worsening and will continue to do so. There is more than a 50% chance that global warming will reach or exceed 1.5°C in the near term.² The ramifications are certain, but uneven.³ Reversing rapid biodiversity loss has also eluded humanity since the first global agreement to do so by 2010.⁴ So, COP15 in Montreal, Canada, revisited the issue. This attempt to reawaken the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, ratified by every UN member state except the United States, is critical for the Global South.

Whether in terms of climate change or biodiversity loss, COP27 or COP15, the regions of highest exposure are Africa and elsewhere in the Global South.⁵ While the average North American is responsible for 14 tons of emissions per year and the average European contributes 7 tons per year, the average African is responsible for 1.1 tons of emissions per year.⁶ Yet, African suffers disproportionately. Not only do 3.6 billion people face existential outcomes but also many plants and animals risk total extinction.⁷ In *Extinction*, Ashley Dawson⁸ points out that in the last 20 years, 70,000 African elephants have been killed and the number of rare forest elephants in Africa has declined by 60%. We are all at risk of extinction. This is an emergency.

2 IPCC (2022). *Summary for Policy Makers*. Accessible at: https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGII_SummaryForPolicymakers.pdf.

3 Ibid., 14.

4 Ostroff, Joshua (2022). CBD COP15: Why the Whole World Will Be Watching Montreal This December. *World Wildlife Fund*. Accessible at: CBD COP15: Why the whole world will be watching Montreal this December - WWF.CA.

5 IPCC (2022), op. cit., 14.

6 Ibrahim, Mo (2022). Africa's Past Is Not Its Future: How the Continent Can Chart Its Own Course. *Foreign Affairs*. Accessible at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/africa/mo-ibrahim-africa-past-not-its-future>.

7 IPCC (2022), op. cit., 14–16.

8 Dawson, Ashley (2016). *Extinction: A Radical History*. New York/London: OR Books, 7–8.

Wrong Way

How to deal with this problem has become the thorniest issue in history. Mainstream economists propose the use of markets, private property rights, behavioural nudges, or climate clubs as solution.⁹ Heterodox economists and other social scientists make alternative proposals that range from 'limiting growth', designing circular economies, ensuring just transition, and phasing out fossil fuels. Many of these attempts are called 'nature-based solutions', but, in *How Natural Is 'Natural'*, Naa Afarley Sackeyfio¹⁰ points out that the Western concept of 'nature' that underpins most of the existing approaches is 'cosmetic [...] a verbal worship'. Mostly veiled attempts to make the Global South fix itself, these approaches – both left and right – recall the science fiction book, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. There, one character successfully, but surprisingly, makes his spaceship invisible. When asked how he did it, he said he had simply hidden it as 'somebody else's problem'.¹¹

That is evidently the case of demanding markets without restitution or 'phase out' without reparations. Many others are also highly populationist. Take 'limits to growth'. It is more commonly explained as a reduction in growthist and capitalist economic production, but it also entails induced limits to reproduction. As one advocate¹² points out, '[p]opulation stabilization is as fundamental [...] as a horse is to a horse race'. Kenneth Boulding suggested auctioning birth rights to

9 Obeng-Odoom, Franklin (2022b). Mainstream Economics and Conventional Environmental Policies. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 81(3), 443–472.

10 Sackeyfio, Naa A. (2000). *How Natural Is 'Natural'*. Comprehension Plus. Third Edition. Accra: Pedacons, 1–3.

11 Rutten, Lamon (2021). Carbon Pricing and Indonesia's Exports. *The Jakarta Post*. Accessible at: <https://www.thejakartapost.com/paper/2021/08/19/carbon-pricing-and-indonesias-exports.html>.

12 Czech, Brian (2022). *A Steady-State Approach to Immigration*. *Steady State Herald*. Accessible at: <https://steadystate.org/a-steady-state-approach-to-immigration>, 4.

limit reproduction.¹³ Jorgen Randers,¹⁴ the co-author of *Limits to Growth*, favours an even more controversial approach: promoting polyandry. This would entail pairing one woman with as many men as possible and locking the unmatched women in monasteries. In *What's Sex Got to Do with It? Darwin, Love, Lust and the Anthropocene*, Heather Remoff¹⁵ describes the inability of white male scientists to appreciate female choices as 'comic blindness'.

Ecological Imperialism

A different starting point is needed. Ecological imperialism is one step forward. The *poiesis* of John Hobson, Vladimir Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, and Karl Kautsky, the usual imperialism theorists, can help us to understand imperialism generally. But to appreciate 'ecological imperialism', Alfred Crosby's book *Ecological Imperialism*¹⁶ offers a strong foundation. It is centred on how the control of nature by force and fraud aided the expansion of the West and generated disproportionate socio-ecological crises for the rest.

Three extensions are needed.¹⁷ First is the consideration of historical power imbalances, institutionalised political-economic inequalities, and socio-ecological stratification centred on land. A second extension

13 See, for a discussion, Obeng-Odoom, Franklin (2022a). *Global Migration beyond Limits: Ecology, Economics, and Political Economy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 4–6, 66–68.

14 Randers, Jorgen (2022). *Where Are the Limits? Tiedekulma*. Accessible at: <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/helsinki-institute-sustainability-science/helsus-events/where-are-limits>.

15 Remoff, Heather (2022). *What's Sex Got to Do with It? Darwin, Love, Lust and the Anthropocene*. London: Shepheard Walwyn, 4.

16 Crosby, Alfred W. (2009 [1986]). *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

17 Obeng-Odoom, Franklin (2022c). Editor's Introduction: Rethorizing Ecological Imperialism. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 81(3), 417–441.

is to emphasise resource autonomy; and the final is to stress the centrality of ecological reparations. J.K. Boyce¹⁸ has shown that communities, cities, counties, and countries that are unequal to face more severe environmental problems. Such harms are also disproportionately borne by the marginalised, often black poor, who typically contribute the least to the problem. Internationally, such dynamics are at play, too. The greater inequalities persist, the more environmental problems intensify, as powerful transnational corporations and imperial states advance their interests by dumping their waste in Africa. As these entities compete to maintain status, the world development agencies impose conditions on Africa to catch up¹⁹). The science of, and decisions about, sustainability, ecology, and the environment follow a similar pattern. Olúfémí O. Táíwò²⁰ has called this dynamic 'elite capture'.

The Global North, the place most strongly complicit in driving the current ecological crises, is also the moral and ecological high ground. It is characterised by dominant scientists, decision makers, and activists who lecture the rest on what to do, usually devaluing the science and alternatives from the Global South.²¹ These imperial, monopolistic, and exclusionary dynamics need to end for a more sustainable and inclusive world, but without ecological reparations, no alternatives can address

18 Boyce, James K. (2021). The Environmental Cost of Inequality. *Special Edition Scientific American* 30(3), 100–105.

19 Obeng-Odoom, Franklin (2019a). The Intellectual Marginalisation of Africa. *African Identities* 17(3–4), 211–224; Obeng-Odoom, Franklin (2020). Teaching Sustainability: From Monism and Pluralism to Citizenship. *Journal of Education for Sustainable Development* 14(2), 235–252; Obeng-Odoom, Franklin (2021a). Oil Cities in Africa: Beyond Just Transition. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 80(2), 777–821.

20 Táíwò, Olúfémí O. (2022). *Reconsidering Reparations*. New York: Oxford University Press.

21 Masood, Ehsan (2018). Battle over Biodiversity. *Nature* 560, 423–464; Nagendra, Harini (2018). The Global South Is Rich in Sustainability Lessons That Students Deserve to Hear. *Nature* 557, 485–488; Obeng-Odoom, Franklin (2019b). The Intellectual Marginalisation of Africa. *African Identities* 17(3–4), 211–224.

the ecological crises. This inevitably raises the questions: Why are reparations needed? What is their proposed design? And how might they be redesigned? To address these questions, the works of black scholars and activists can be taken more seriously. Among these works, those by Stella Dadzie, Sylvianne Diouff, Wangari Maathai, Hilary Beckles, William Darity Jr, Julian Agyeman, and Olúfẹmí Táíwò are particularly relevant.

The Foundations of Reparations

Based on these works,²² three broad arguments could be made for advocating ecological reparations: underdevelopment, ecological imperialism, and the need for an ecological remaking of the world. These reflect, but they are not reducible to, slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism. Indeed, these are interlinked and are compounded in their intersections. Take underdevelopment. Not only is it linked to slavery; it is yoked together with the enrichment of the Global North. In *Britain's Black Debt*, Sir Hilary Beckles²³ argues that Britain owes black debt because slavery was illegal from the start. It disproportionately enriched the British economy, and it damaged black economies. This dynamic has persisted to this day.

Financial outflows from Africa remain substantial. Between 1970 and 2018, the amount of such outflows and their resulting interest amounted to \$2.4 trillion. This drain is three times higher than the odious debt owed by the same countries that experience this capital flight, but rent theft is at the heart of the problem either way.²⁴ Others include 'overpricing exports to Africa, underpricing imports from

²² See, for a more systematic review, Obeng-Odoom, Franklin (2023a). Reparations. *The Review of Black Political Economy* 51(3), 458–478.

²³ Beckles, Hillary McD. (2013). *Britain's Black Debt: Reparations for Caribbean Slavery and Native Genocide*. Mona (Jamaica): University of the West Indies Press.

²⁴ Ndikumana, Léonce & Boyce, James K. (2022). Introduction: Why Care about Capital Flight? In: Ndikumana, Léonce & Boyce, James K. (eds.). *Capital Flight from Africa: The Takers and the Enablers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3; Shaxson, Nicholas (2022). Angola: Oil and Capital Flight. In: Ndikumana, Léonce &

Africa, interest rate manipulation, lopsided contracts, and other unfair trade, investment and labour practices, coercive, manipulative and monopolistic transactions'.²⁵ These questionable transactions have been estimated to amount to at least \$30 trillion.²⁶ Together, these illicit financial outflows weaken African economies and, reflexively, strengthen the urban and metropolitan economies of the Global North. The capital flight from Africa today builds real estate markets in London, Paris, New York, and Lisbon. But this is not new. Consider London, Liverpool, and Bristol. Their prosperity today can be traced to their trade in slaves, slave institutions, and the labour of enslaved workers, the extraction of rent from enclosed land, and the private appropriation of socially created value. In *A History of the British Empire*, Caroline Elkins²⁷ notes: '[c]ities including Liverpool and Bristol had been built on the trade of enslaved peoples and the empire's consumable goods'.

The Industrial Revolution was buoyed by black enslavement, as Walter Rodney demonstrates in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.²⁸ Urban planning as a field developed to address the ecological costs of this structural change in the Global North. But cities in the Global South could be given more attention. Then and now. For instance, not only did the enslavement of people in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, damage the city's economy; the use of land for palm plantation helped to supply palm oil for Britain's industrial needs.²⁹ Then, through the extractivism of British oil major Shell, Port Harcourt continued to be drilled and drained of its fossil fuels for the development of London. With Shell as essentially

Boyce, James K. (eds.). *Capital Flight from Africa: The Takers and the Enablers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 75.

25 America, Richard F. (2023). Introduction. In: America, Richard F. (ed.). *Accounting for Colonialism: Measuring Unjust Enrichment and Damages in Africa*. Cham: Springer Nature, 6.

26 Ibid., 3.

27 Elkins, Caroline (2022). *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 643f.

28 Rodney, Walter (2011 [1972]). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Baltimore: Black Classic Press.

29 Obeng-Odoom (2021a), op. cit.

the municipal government, monopolist, and municipal landlord, the resulting ecocide in Nigeria has been devastating. The French state and French oil firms like Total have pursued ecological imperialism with major socio-ecological consequences: spatial segregation, destruction of the commons, undermining Indigenous agriculture, and deforestation, as the work of Ambe Njoh³⁰ shows.

Transnational corporations have created 'ecocide' at home, too, and as in Africa, black marginalised populations have suffered disproportionately. In *From Here to Equality*, William Darity Jr and A. Kirsten Mullen³¹ note about the United States that 'Blacks are [...] likelier than whites to live in communities located near hazardous-waste sites and to suffer from nitrogen dioxide exposure and [...] more likely to lack potable water and sanitation'. Mainstream Western economists and interests justify these experiences. In one example, Lawrence Summers,³² then Chief Economist of the World Bank, noted: 'shouldn't the World Bank be encouraging MORE migration of the dirty industries to the least developed countries? [...] I've always thought that underpopulated countries in Africa are vastly UNDER-polluted'.³³ The future must be different, but this is not an argument for a just transition, limits to growth, or fair exchange.

30 Njoh, Ambe J. (2022). French Ecological Imperialism: A Postcolonial Approach. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 81(3), 581–619.

31 Darity, William A. Jr. & Mullen, A. Kirsten (2020). *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 235.

32 Summers, Lawrence H. (1991). The Lawrence Summers World Bank Memo (excerpt). *New York Times*. Accessible at: summers-memo-1991--nytimes.pdf (uiuo.no).

33 For a discussion of this quotation, see Obeng-Odoom (2022b), op. cit., 444.

Just Reparations

It is an argument for what Frantz Fanon³⁴ called 'just reparations'. Pivotal to these payments are ecological reparations. Existing green climate funds and proposals for clean energy are inadequate. Declarations for clean energy and green markets, including those contained in the so-called Nairobi Declaration, UN Secretary-General's SDG Stimulus to Deliver Agenda 2030, and the UK Government's statement about supporting reforms of the international banking system and mobilising resources from the spaces of the British Investment Partnerships for energy transitions and infrastructure³⁵ hide the central issues. Green funds are much less than existing estimates of economic reparations, ranging from US\$15 to US\$20 trillion in the United States,³⁶ and some US\$9–10 trillion in the Caribbean,³⁷ to some US\$100 trillion in Africa.³⁸ But even these estimates require substantial adjustments. The *Brattle Report*³⁹ estimates that Britain's debt to the Caribbean is at least US\$20 trillion at a conservative interest rate of 2.5%. One recent analysis adjusted Osabu-Kle's estimate to £302 trillion, if the compound interest rate is 3% or £16

34 Fanon, Frantz (1961). *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 102.

35 See, for example, Guterres, António (2023). Secretary General's Opening Remarks at the Climate Ambition Summit. *United Nations*. Accessible at: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2023-09-20/secretary-generals-opening-remarks-the-climate-ambition-summit>; UN (2023a). *World Leaders Adopt Sweeping Political Declaration Reaffirming Commitment to Achieve Sustainable Development Goals, as Summit Commences*. Accessible at: World Leaders Adopt Sweeping Political Declaration Reaffirming Commitment to Achieve Sustainable Development Goals, as Summit Commences | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases (un.org); African Union (2023). *The African Leaders Nairobi Declaration on Climate Change and Call to Action*. Accessible at: Microsoft Word - Nairobi Declaration 06092023.pdf.docx (afdb.org).

36 Darity & Mullen (2020), op. cit., 265.

37 £7.5 trillion in Beckles' account: Beckles (2013), op. cit., 170–171.

38 Osabu-Kle, Daniel T. (2000). The African Reparation Cry: Rationale, Estimate, Prospects, and Strategies. *Journal of Black Studies* 30, 344f.

39 Brattle (2023). *Report on Reparations for Transatlantic Chattel Slavery in the Americas and the Caribbean*. Boston: Brattle, 44–48, 80f, Tables 34–35.

quadrillion if the compound interest rate is 4%.⁴⁰ At issue are ecological, not simply economic, reparations. Olúfémí Táíwò's book *Reconsidering Reparations*⁴¹ advances the case that reparations should be paid to enable the marginalised in the world to more resiliently face the future.

Apology and prevention are critical: historical and ongoing rent theft must be compensated. What William Darity Jr calls the racialised wealth gap could be one basis to estimate the amount.⁴² The resulting compensation could be used to address broader developmental challenges, both to decarbonise and to delink. So, reparations might also be demanded in terms of infrastructure, cash payments, capability investments, and rights to access and control the commonwealth,⁴³ for example, through what has been called 'climate asylum'.⁴⁴ Formulating ecological reparations, then, could be viewed as a roundabout. Claims may be made from different places and from different times, but they envision the same destination, to use an analogy by Sir Hilary Beckles.⁴⁵ The 2022 Dakar Declaration embodies this spirit of just reparations.

We have to tackle historically persistent inequalities rooted in the emergence and global expansion of the capitalist system. We also need a global reparations agenda to address in a fair manner the multifaceted ecological crisis. We must seek to elaborate this agenda

40 Craemer, Thomas (2023). Forensic Analysis of Reparations to Africa for Depredations under European Colonialism. In: America, Richard F. (ed.). *Accounting for Colonialism: Measuring Unjust Enrichment and Damages in Africa*. Cham: Springer Nature, 264.

41 Táíwò (2022), op. cit.

42 Craemer, Thomas; Smith, Trevor; Harrison, Brianna; Logan, Trevon; Bellamy, Wesley & Darity, William Jr. (2020). Wealth Implications of Slavery and Racial Discrimination for African American Descendants of the Enslaved. *Review of Black Political Economy* 47(3), 218–254.

43 Wamai, Njoki (2022). The Real Story – What Next for the Commonwealth? BBC. Accessible at: BBC World Service - The Real Story, What next for the Commonwealth?

44 Souter, James (2022). *Asylum as Reparation Refuge and Responsibility for the Harms of Displacement*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

45 For a discussion, see Obeng-Odoom (2022c), op. cit.

technically, legitimize it, advocate it, defend it, and implement it. We support the efforts of our African American and Caribbean sisters and brothers in their specific labors for reparatory justice. (Editors, 2023, Point 8)

The message is clear, but it must be emphasised. As Ndongo Samba Sylla and Jamee Moudud⁴⁶ point out, neoclassical economics is incapable of guiding this vision. Political economy is much better suited for that purpose. But can a business-as-usual political economy do the job? It seems even political economy must go beyond business-as-usual.

Frontiers of a Just Ecological Political Economy

Olúfémí Táíwò's⁴⁷ engaged black philosophy of 'climate reparations' is a helpful start, precisely because of his insistence that reparations are not reactionary but a multi-pronged, multi-scale strategy to remake the world. But we need to go beyond 'climate' to consider addressing ecological problems more broadly. Ecological crises are not reducible to emissions. It is possible to decarbonise and be deprived of resource autonomy and face biodiversity loss, dispossession, displacement, extinction, and ecocide. Ecological reparations must be paid for all these, to Africans both on the continent and in the diaspora. There is the straightforward case of African migrants all around the world who tend to live in 'sacrifice zones' – impoverished spaces 'where poor black residents lack political power', as Naomi Klein puts it.⁴⁸

These so-called economic migrants hold little land and control even less value. Forced African migrants, including the descendants of slaves, have also continued to experience these problems everywhere, including in Colombia, the Dominican Republic, and Brazil. In the United States,

46 Sylla, Ndongo S. & Moudud, Jamee (2023). Introduction: Symposium on the 2022 Dakar Declaration. *Journal of Law and Political Economy* 4(1), 606–609.

47 Táíwò (2022), op. cit.

48 Klein, Naomi (2014). *This Changes Everything*. Toronto/Vancouver: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 310.

African Americans have been dispossessed of their land by force and fraud.⁴⁹ For the same land, black people can receive only 58% of the value given to white families.⁵⁰ Similar comments apply to the experiences of black people in Australia. In South Africa, apartheid shifted black wealth to white South Africans.⁵¹ Tembeka Ngcukaitobi⁵² shows that black people, who constitute 81% of the South African population, hold only 4% of the land. White South Africans privately appropriate value that has largely been created by black South Africans. So, the economic advancement of black South Africans has stagnated, or increased slowly, while that of white South Africans has surged. This social stratification has had dire consequences for black lives, disproportionately harmed by floods, cyclones, and other ecological disasters. Black South African scholars are correct to label this dynamic ecological apartheid.⁵³ Delinking from this model is crucial, academically, economically, and ecologically. Academically, we need a new science of black political economy in development studies and beyond. Ecologically and economically, greater inclusion could minimise the global rat race for ecologically destructive growth linked to maintaining status and better enable Black communities to adapt.

49 Hinson, Waymon R. (2018). Land Gains, Land Losses: The Odyssey of African Americans since Reconstruction. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 77(3–4), 893–939.

50 Kamin, Debra (2022). Home Appraised with a Black Owner: \$472,000. With a White Owner: \$750,000. *The New York Times*, 18 August 2022.

51 Price, Gregory N. (2003). South African Apartheid, Black–White Inequality, and Economic Growth: Implications for Reparations. *South African Journal of Economics* 71(3), 611–630.

52 Ngcukaitobi, Tembeka (2021). *Land Matters: South Africa's Failed Land Reforms and the Road Ahead*. Cape Town: Penguin Books, 110.

53 For example, Matamanda, Abraham R.; Mphambukelib, Thulisile N. & Chirisa, Innocent (2022). Exploring Water–Gender–Health Nexus in Human Settlements in Hopley, Harare. *Cities & Health* 8, 44–58.

The Single Tax Unlimited

Much has been written about asset repatriation and redressing illicit outflows, among others, to increase financial resources in Africa. The African Union has benefitted from the tireless effort of advocates like Souad Aden-Osman, the Head of the Secretariat of the African Union High-Level Panel on Illicit Financial Flows from Africa. Aden-Osman co-ordinated the preparation and adoption by the African Union Assembly of the Common African Position on Asset Recovery (CAPAR).⁵⁴ Under CAPAR, 'Some African countries have succeeded in recovering some of their stolen assets from foreign jurisdictions, including Ethiopia, Nigeria and Mali, and more are at different stages of the return processes'.⁵⁵ The academic scholarship on the issue is vast. It oscillates between a mainstream that emphasises the corruption of Africans and a more progressive body of work that accepts the corruption literature ('push') but includes a more global twist ('pull'). In *Capital Flight from Africa*,⁵⁶ Léonce Ndikumana and James Boyce adopt this 'push' and 'pull' framework. Although not their approach, they inadvertently suggest an individualised, rational choice model, much like the push–pull framework utilised by mainstream migration economists.⁵⁷ More fundamentally, this body of knowledge on capital flight and illicit financial flows tends to be more economic than ecological political economy.⁵⁸ It is some-

54 Common African Position on Asset Recovery (2024). *Secretariat*. Accessible at: <https://codafrika.org/secretariat/>.

55 African Union (2022). *African Union High-Level Panel on IFFs Discusses Achievements on Recovery of Stolen Assets*. Accessible at: <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20220225/african-union-high-level-panel-iffs-discusses-achievements-recovery-stolen>.

56 Ndikumana & Boyce (2022), op. cit., 2–3.

57 For a detailed discussion, see Obeng-Odoom (2022a), op. cit.

58 Zagaris, Bruce (2022). International Environmental Enforcement and Illicit Financial Flows. *International Enforcement Law Reporter* 38(2), 41–45.

times grounded in repatriation analyses,⁵⁹ but rarely built on the case for reparations and scarcely within ecological reparations.

Even so, it is well-known that ‘illegal wildlife trade is valued at anywhere between \$7 and \$23 billion per annum’ and ‘that Africa is one of the world’s richest suppliers of IWT [international wildlife trafficking]’.⁶⁰ Existing economic approaches to repatriation overlook reparations and reparations efforts sometimes overlook or narrowly define repatriation to exclude capital flight. Similar comments apply to biodiversity and tax justice arguments.⁶¹ They are based narrowly on unequal ecological exchange – trade to be specific⁶² – not more broadly on ecological imperialism.⁶³ Moralistic frameworks neglect ecological political economy; so does the ‘reparation ecology’ literature.⁶⁴ Demands for ‘cultural artefacts’ are necessary. Currently, ‘over 90% of the material cultural legacy of sub-Saharan Africa remains preserved and housed outside of the African continent’.⁶⁵ More work is needed in expanding the basis of such claims

59 Signé, Landry; Sow, Mariama & Madden, Payne (2020). Illicit Financial Flows in Africa: Drivers, Destinations, and Policy Options. *Policy Brief*. Africa Growth Initiative at Brookings.

60 Zagaris (2022), op. cit., 41.

61 Demsey, Jessica; Irvine-Broque, Audrey; Bigger, Patrick; Christiansen, Jens; Muchhala, Bhumika; Nelson, Sara; Rojas-Marchini, Fernanda; Shapiro-Garza, Elizabeth; Schuldt, Andrew & DiSilvestro, Adriana (2022). Biodiversity Targets Will Not Be Met Without Debt and Tax Justice. *Nature, Ecology and Evolution* 6, 237–239.

62 Hornborg, Alf & Martinez-Alier, Joan (2016). Ecologically Unequal Exchange and Ecological Debt. *Journal of Political Ecology* 23, 328–333.

63 Frame, Mariko L. (2022). Ecological Imperialism: A World-Systems Approach. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 81(3), 503–534; Frame, Mariko L. (2023). *Ecological Imperialism, Development, and the Capitalist World-System: Cases from Africa and Asia*. London: Routledge

64 For example, Lampis, Andrea; Brink, Ebba; Carrasco-Torrontegui, Amaya; dos Santos, Agni Hévea; Solórzano-Lemus, Estuardo & Vásquez-Arango, Claudia (2022). Reparation Ecology and Climate Risk in Latin-America: Experiences from Four Countries. *Frontiers in Climate* 4, 1–23.

65 Sarr, Felwine & Savoy, Bénédicte (2018). The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics. *UMR 7220 (CNRS–ENS Paris Saclay–Université Paris Nanterre) and Ministère de La Culture*, N°2018-26, Paris, 3.

from 'culture' to ecological political economy. This would entail repatriating the artefacts, of course, but also considering other mechanisms.

Much has been written about climate finance, net zero, and climate justice.⁶⁶ The trope of equity in green finance persists. Climate mitigation trust is one of them. This is an IMF-run trust that gives 'developing countries' below-market rate loans to deal with climate-related disasters. Other ideas include the suspension of debt repayments for Global South countries that are struck by disasters.⁶⁷ It is within this context that the additional fund created at COP27 in Sham El-Sheikh in Egypt to address 'loss and damage' can be placed. The Loss and Damage fund is important. The decision to create it⁶⁸ and the many resulting discussions⁶⁹ emphasise the point.

To summarise, Loss and Damage within the context of COP27 is an aggregator fund that is aimed to address all other climate loss and damage for which adaptation is ill-equipped. But it seems the principles of the fund emphasise the needs and vulnerability of the Global South, not the responsibility of the Global North. Where it suggests responsibility, it is understood⁷⁰ as a global 'polluter pays' principle. Loss and Damage still reflects that the elites, particularly in the Global North, get to dictate or shape the form of liberation that they prefer or that makes them feel

66 For example, Omukuti, Jessica; Barrett, Sam; White, Piran C.L.; Marchant, Robert & Averchenkova, Alina (2022). The Green Climate Fund and Its Shortcomings in Local Delivery of Adaptation Finance. *Climate Policy* 22(9–10), 1225–1240; Fankhauser, Sam; Smith, Stephen M.; Allen, Myles; Axelsson, Kaya; Hale, Thomas; Hepburn, Cameron; Kendall, J. Michael; Khosla, Radhika; Lezaun, Javier; Mitchell-Larson, Eli; Obersteiner, Michael; Rajamani, Lavanya; Rickaby, Rosalind; Seddon, Nathalie & Wetzer, Thom (2022). The Meaning of Net Zero and How to Get It Right. *Nature Climate Change* 12, 15–21.

67 The Economist (2022). Frozen Out: How the World Is Leaving Europe Behind. *The Economist*, 26 November 2022, 53–54.

68 UNFCCC (2022). *Decision -/CP27 Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan*. Advance Unedited Version. Accessible at: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cop27_auv_2_cover%20decision.pdf.

69 Harvey, Fiona (2022). COP27: What Can the UN Climate Conference Realistically Achieve? *The Guardian Weekly*, 22f.; *The Economist* (2022), op. cit., 53f.

70 See, for example, The Economist (2022), op. cit., 53.

good. Loss and Damage is based on a mainstream/neoclassical theory of adaptation.⁷¹ In any case, Loss and Damage estimates are based on the amount of emissions, not on the historical and continuing underdevelopment of the Global South. This is quite problematic because it leads to a list of polluters dominated by Global South countries like China, Brazil, and Indonesia.⁷² The beneficiaries are not necessarily 'developing countries', but rather 'developing countries that are particularly vulnerable'.⁷³ In any case, beyond climate-related loss and damage, other ecological losses are not covered.

Most of these mechanisms create markets, the conveyer belt of greater instability. Taxation could help to socialise these markets, harmonise the environment, and tax the rents extracted from marketising nature.⁷⁴ This political economy would not simply be about implementing an unlimited number of taxes, however. In any case, many existing taxes are highly problematic. Consider value-added tax in Ghana. Placed on the fruits of labour, researchers⁷⁵ have recently shown that it has evolved from being progressive to regressive. It hurts the poor, falls heavily on female-headed households, and disproportionately exempts the wealthy.⁷⁶ VAT, then, has become a punitive tax for the poor. Mainstream economists challenge the effectiveness of taxes on other

71 For a review of the mainstream economics approach, see Obeng-Odoom (2022b), *op. cit.*

72 See, for example, Chen Y, 2022; 'How Has Ecological Imperialism Persisted? A Marxian Critique of the Western Climate Consensus', *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, vol. 81, issue 3, 473–501.

The Economist (2022), *op. cit.*, 54, see figure entitled 'Sins of the Fathers and Sons'.

73 UNFCCC (2022). *Decision -/CP.27 Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan*. Advance Unedited Version. Accessible at: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cop27_auv_2_cover%20decision.pdf, 2.

74 Stilwell, Frank (2011). Marketising the Environment. *Journal of Australian Political Economy* 68, 108–127.

75 Andoh, Francis K. & Nkrumah, Richard K. (2022). Distributional Aspects of Ghana's Value-Added Tax. *Forum for Social Economics* 51(4), 394–414.

76 *Ibid.*, 394.

grounds. Arthur Laffer⁷⁷ provided the classic challenge. More and more taxation not only kills business, but fiscal revenues also decline. So, taxation becomes a lose–lose tool that not only fails to realise its aims but also creates more problems.

Similar comments apply to property taxes: they penalise effort and reward the speculation of the ‘property alliance’.⁷⁸ Or they are too low to make a difference. While the Laffer Curve⁷⁹ suggests that low tax rates lead to high fiscal revenues, in Africa, this inverse relationship is not empirically verifiable.⁸⁰ Low rates have been accompanied by low revenues. In *The Economics of Welfare*,⁸¹ A.C. Pigou recognised the critical nature of the environment in economic processes. So he proposed a tax to address environmental problems. Yet this tax – now regarded as the ‘Pigouvian Tax’ – a ‘polluter pays principle of environmental regulation’, is understood and promoted as an attempt to address market failure.⁸² Yet such ‘social costs’ are central – the rule, not marginal or an exception – to price and value theory.⁸³ Legalistic approaches also overlook ecological political economy, while political economy frameworks neglect rent theft, the centre of gravity of the case for both ecological reparations and repatriation.⁸⁴

77 Laffer, Arthur B. (1981). Supply-Side Economics. *Financial Analysts Journal* 37(5), 29–43; Laffer, Arthur B. (2004). The Laffer Curve: Past, Present, and Future. *The Heritage Foundation*, 1765.

78 Obeng-Odoom, Franklin (2020). Teaching Sustainability: From Monism and Pluralism to Citizenship. *Journal of Education for Sustainable Development* 14(2), 235–252.

79 Laffer (1981), op. cit.; Laffer (2004), op. cit.

80 Moore, Mick; Prichard, Wilson & Fjeldstad, Odd-Helge (2018). *Taxing Africa: Coercion, Reform and Development*. London: Zed Books.

81 Pigou, Arthur C. (1938 [1920]). *The Economics of Welfare*. London: Macmillan and Co.

82 The Economist (2022), op. cit., 53f.

83 Kapp, K. William (1971 [1950]). *The Social Costs of Private Enterprise*. New York: Shocken Books, 8.

84 Obeng-Odoom (2021a), op. cit., Obeng-Odoom (2022a), op. cit.; Obeng-Odoom (2022b), op. cit..

Another way not only to increase inflows but also to redistribute wealth, keep Southern economies inclusive, and make them autonomous and sustainable is not only possible but also desirable. Redefining reparations could be done by implementing a single tax unlimited, as Georgist political economists propose. Some consider this proposal to be implementing one tax – land value tax – and abolishing all other taxes. But Henry George contended that, while the single tax unlimited indeed refers to one tax, it entails, more importantly, a broad programme of redistribution, not merely a tax reform.⁸⁵ Son the Single Tax Unlimited is about one tax, but it is not defined by that tax alone.

Many cities in Africa, for example, implement land tax policies, of course, but they are egregiously problematic. Often placed on land or buildings, they penalise the maintenance of urban housing, reward speculation, encourage urban sprawl, pillage, and pollution, and compensate absentee landownership.

James Tobin famously proposed what is now called a 'Tobin Tax'. A tax on the rents from trading in foreign currencies, it is typically seen as a revolutionary tax. Not only would it tax away the rents from speculating on currency exchange, but it would also challenge free-market globalisation speculation and generate revenues to be channelled into developmentalist agendas. But as Tobin himself clarified in an interview with *Der Spiegel*,⁸⁶ Tobin meant this tax to primarily address the problem of speculation and only secondarily as a fiscal tool to generate additional income. He never intended his proposed tax to fundamentally challenge the global stratified order. In his words:

I had proposed that the revenue be put at the disposal of the World Bank. But this was not what concerned me. The tax on foreign

85 George H, 1889, 'The Single Tax: Limited or Unlimited

Henry George', *The Standard*, August 17.

86 Spiegel (2001). James Tobin: 'The Antiglobalisation Movement Has Hijacked My Name'. Accessible at: https://web.archive.org/web/20050306201839/http://www.jubilee2000uk.org/worldnews/lamerica/james_tobin_030901_english.htm.

exchange transactions was devised to cushion exchange rate fluctuations. The idea is very simple: at each exchange of a currency into another a small tax would be levied – let's say, 0.5% of the volume of the transaction. This dissuades speculators as many investors invest their money in foreign exchange on a very short-term basis. If this money is suddenly withdrawn, countries have to drastically increase interest rates for their currency to still be attractive. But high interest is often disastrous for a national economy, as the nineties crisis in Mexico, South East Asia and Russia have proven. My tax would return some margin of manoeuvre to issuing banks in small countries and would be a measure of opposition to the dictate of the financial markets for me raising revenue is not really the most important thing. I wanted to put a break on the foreign exchange trafficking; fiscal income for me is a by-product.⁸⁷

So, a Tobin Tax would not address the rent theft from the *seigniorage* paid to central banks in the Global North from *controlling* the printing or minting of money in Africa. A Tobin Tax would not address the odious debt arising from past, present, and continuing monetary and currency servitude that has drained Africa of so much of its resources, as systematic research by Ndongo Samba Sylla and his colleagues.⁸⁸ shows. A land value tax, on the other hand, could address all these problems. As one advocate notes:

A shift in the burden of taxation from the 'makers' to the 'takers' would generate a much healthier economic environment in which to produce, invest, and innovate. This in turn would reduce the need for carbon-intensive transportation infrastructure and energy consumption, as well as reducing or eliminating the direct taxation of decarbonizing capital goods. An economic justice tax-shift would therefore also be a green tax-shift which would help make possible

87 Ibid.

88 See, for example, Pigeaud, Fanny & Sylla, Ndongo S. (2020). *Africa's Last Colonial Currency: The CFA Franc Story*. London: Pluto Press; Gadha, Maha B.; Kaboub, Fadhel; Koddenbrock, Kai; Mahmoud, Ines & Sylla, Ndongo S. (eds.) (2021). *Economic and Monetary Sovereignty in 21st Century Africa*. London: Pluto Press.

a sustainable future by enhancing rather than restricting economic and social freedom, and by removing the distortions resulting from the private monopolisation of land rent.⁸⁹

Fundamentally, a land value tax is *primarily* aimed at socio-spatial and ecological justice. It is only *secondarily* aimed at expanding the fiscal space. It is, in this respect, antithetical to a Tobin Tax, which is *principally* aimed at taming markets, *never* at justice, and *secondarily* at raising revenue from markets to enhance marketisation. Rooted in Georgist political economy,⁹⁰ such a tax would discourage urban and regional inequalities, national, and international inequality.⁹¹ For instance, as such a tax helps to prevent hoarding of housing from the market, reduce landlords' power to extract excessive taxation, and release more land for sustainable housing and production, there would be less pressure to live far away from urban and regional centres. Long urban commutes that arise from rent-induced urban sprawl would diminish. The tax could also be designed in such a way that its incidence includes rent theft from mining and drilling, and from minting and printing money.

The link between land, taxation, and money is not only theoretical; it is also empirical and historical. This is a rather long and complex history, but it is well documented.⁹² Briefly, money emerged not from free and

89 Kerr, Gavin (2020). Rent-Extraction, Economic Injustice, and the Environment: Land Value Taxation as an 'Eco Tax'. *Land and Liberty* 1251, 11.

90 Obeng-Odoom, Franklin (2016). Sustainable Urban Development: A Georgist Perspective. In: Allen, Adriana; Lampis, Andrea & Swilling, Mark (eds.). *Untamed Urbanisms*. London: Routledge, 191–203; Obeng-Odoom, Franklin (2023b). Rethinking Development Economics: Problems and Prospects of Georgist Political Economy. *Review of Political Economy* 35(1), 316–333.

91 For a detailed exposition, see Obeng-Odoom (2016), *op. cit.*

92 See, for example, Forstater, Matthew (2005). Taxation and Primitive Accumulation in Africa. In: Forstater, Matthew (2005). *The Capitalist State and Its Economy: Democracy in Socialism*. Leeds: Emerald Group Publishing, 59f.; Forstater, Matthew (2023). Taxation and European Colonial Accumulation: The Disruption of Economic Livelihoods in Africa. In: America, Richard F. (ed.). *Accounting for Colonialism*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 339–354; Obeng-Odoom (2020), *op. cit.*; Obeng-Odoom, Franklin (2021b). *The Commons in an Age of Uncertainty*:

equal relationships of barter, but from bondage and debt during oppression. Consider slavery, colonialism, and land. Where land was plentiful, the slaver could not get labour. People wanted to work for themselves. Enslavement and dispossession would unsettle this order. Slave uprisings, riots, wars, and advocacy would eventually end slavery. Succeeding colonial and so-called 'legitimate' relations included the enslavement of the free using 'rent theft'.⁹³

Under colonialism, Africans did not want to hire themselves out as cheap labour. They preferred to work on common land. As the coloniser needed labour, they imposed taxes on *land*. This mechanism triggered widespread indebtedness and the loss of land. These social problems, in turn, generated the conditions to create money, to need money, for the authorities to create money, and for the Africans to work for money. As demonstrated by Henry George in *Social Problems*,⁹⁴ the abolition of slavery was replaced by enslavement of freed people and others by developing private property in land. Without any land, freed people were forced by economic circumstances to hire themselves out to landowners, most of whom were slavers or colonisers or benefited from that system. Landlords could extract even more from the so-called free world and free society. Many Africans everywhere, including African Americans in the US, after slavery, hired themselves out at slave wages. With this history that shows the intricate relations between land and money, a land value tax, then, can certainly be designed to address the 'rent theft' of *seigniorage* originally defined as 'that which is due to the Lord' of the land.⁹⁵

The additional revenues from such a tax could bring in revenue that offers the potential to liberate workers from shouldering more and more taxes for doing hard and useful work. On privatised land, that would entail taxing rent or land value created by the entire society.

Decolonizing Nature, Economy, and Society. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 32–34

93 Obeng-Odoom (2021b), op. cit., 204f.

94 George, Henry (1966 [1883]). *Social Problems*. New York: Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 148–160.

95 Glover, R. (2019). *Seigniorage: The Sovereign's Dues*. *Land and Liberty* 1248, 12.

The resulting revenues could be put to public, social, economic, and ecological purposes. This strategy could also set up a disincentive structure to prevent land monopoly, speculation, sprawl, and 'absentee land ownership', all key axes of ecological imperialism. Holding land as commons in this way and using common resources collectively without the control of the world development agencies, transnational corporations, or the state might be another way to think about Samir Amin's vision of 'delinking'.⁹⁶ If, as the Brundtland Report put it, '[t]his inequality is the planet's main "environmental" problem',⁹⁷ then this alternative is the main ecological solution. Mobilising around this solution is desirable. Although difficult, it is possible. In *Africa Uprising*,⁹⁸ Adam Branch and Zachariah Mampilly show that across Africa, urban social movements yearn for political-economic alternatives.

Outside Africa, support for reparations has increased. Between the early-to-mid 2000s and 2021, the percentage of white Americans who would support reparations increased from 4% to 14% and then to 29%.⁹⁹ Courts around the world are increasingly giving decisions that support ecological repair. Even the rulings of the conservative-dominated Supreme Court of the US suggest that a specific, concrete case for reparations could be upheld by the Court.¹⁰⁰ When reparations are paid, revenues from land value tax are collected, illicit revenues are returned, and African artefacts are repatriated; income tax could become redundant. The only tax needed would be the single tax.

96 Amin, Samir (1990). *Delinking: Towards a Polycentric World*. London: Zed Books.

97 World Commission on Environment and Development (1987). *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Section 17.

98 Branch, Adam & Mampilly, Zachariah (2015). *Africa Uprising: Popular Protest and Political Change*. London: Zed Books.

99 Dawson, Michael C. & Popoff, Rovana (2004). Reparations: Justice and Greed in Black and White. *Du Bois Review Social Science Research on Race* 1(1), 62; Obeng-Odoom (2022c), op. cit., 436.

100 For a fuller discussion see Obeng-Odoom, Franklin (2024). Capitalism and the Legal Foundations of Reparations. *Journal of Law and Political Economy* 4(1).

Conclusion

The world has reached a critical moment. At the heart of the global development challenge are global institutional inequalities and social stratification. It is crucial to challenge these systems and address the foundations of the problem. Analytical delinking is central. Stratification economics, developed by black political economists, could contribute to this agenda. Designing and demanding reparations are central to this school of political economy, as the authoritative survey of the field by its pioneering exponent, William Darity Jr, shows.¹⁰¹ Stratification economics can focus even more on ecological imperialism. Similar comments apply to Georgist political economy, intersectional feminist political economy, and other avenues of reconstruction. The goal is to build a just ecological political economy,¹⁰² wider and deeper approaches, central to which is the study and redress of inequality and power imbalances, including ecological imperialism, to pave the way for prosperity, sustainability, and progress. Frantz Fanon's 'just reparations'¹⁰³ is given full form in Malcolm X's poignant conceptualisation:

If you stick a knife in my back 9 inches, and you pull it out 6 inches, that is not progress. If you pull it all the way out, that's not progress. The progress comes from healing the wound that the blow made.¹⁰⁴

Progress is badly needed. But without ecological reparations and 'just reparations' more broadly, no amount of alternative development, 'lim-

¹⁰¹ Darity, William A. Jr. (2022). Position and Possessions: Stratification Economics and Intergroup Inequality. *Journal of Economic Literature* 60(2), 15.

¹⁰² Obeng-Odoom F, 2024, 'Just Ecological Political Economy: A Radical Anti-Thesis of Environmental and Ecological Economics' in Meramveliotakis G, ed, *Re-Reading Sustainable Economic Development: Political Economy and Economic Pluralism*, Routledge, London, Chapter 7.

¹⁰³ Fanon (1961), op. cit., 102.

¹⁰⁴ Assensoh, A.B. & Alex-Assensoh, Yvette M. (2021). The Political Economy of Land and Reparations: The Case of Reparations for African Americans in the 21st Century. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 80(2), 715.

its to growth', 'post growth', 'degrowth', 'no growth', 'fair exchange', 'circular economy', or 'just transition' will be sufficient to address ecological imperialism. We need change, but that change cannot be just a change, it must be a just change.