

## FOR REPARATIONS AND REPATRIATION

Lester Lewis  
pana-@yahoo.co.uk

Revisiting Walter Rodney's WEST AFRICA AND THE ATLANTIC SLAVE-TRADE

It was Kwame Ture who coined the slogan "No Reparations without Repatriation." Kwame related that while on a visit to North Vietnam during their war of National Liberation, Ho Chi Minh asked him when the Africans in the Diaspora would be going back to their homes in Africa since Africa is their home. Diasporan Africans have been repatriating to their homes in Africa over the centuries and increasingly, more and more Diasporans want to Repatriate.

In a survey carried out in London in September 2000, over two-thirds of the respondents said they would repatriate to Africa if the economic and social conditions were better. So it is the enormous poverty on the continent that forces Africans from the continent to travel to Europe and America in search of economic advancement that is also hindering the mass Repatriation of Diasporans to their home in Africa. But there is one big problem.

While the demand for Reparations from all those involved in the Atlantic slave-trade and in enslaving Africans, including the Jews and the Catholic Church is just, the current demand for Reparations is one sided. Europe and America will not take us seriously until the African ruling classes repair the damage done to African societies by their Ancestors who were involved in selling their fellow Africans into slavery.

Currently, the Reparations demand is concerned mainly with those who were taken away. It seems that no one, apart from the late Guyanese African historian Walter Rodney, has considered the sufferings of ordinary Africans who remained.

The negative changes to African society and culture made by unscrupulous African rulers during the period of the Atlantic slave-trade have borne negative consequences up to the present time and the untold sufferings of the African masses must be redressed. The current African ruling classes must make Reparations to the African masses by repairing the damage caused by their participation in the slave-trade.

Rodney shows that "The Atlantic slave-trade was possible because people were concerned only with profit. This includes the African ruling classes. They knew that they were taking part in evil practices, but they wanted European manufactured goods which were riches in a society that did not use money."

The current advocates of privatisation of state assets also know that the only motive for privatisation is profit, not meeting the needs of the people which must be primary at all

times. Once again, African rulers are entering into partnerships with foreigners against the masses of their own people. This is a continuation of the slaving mentality and the negative changes in African society and culture brought about as a consequence of their involvement in the Atlantic slave-trade.

Rodney wrote, "One of the most important things is to recognise the very painful and unpleasant fact that there were Africans who aided and partnered Europeans in enslaving other Africans."

During that period, tremendous damage was done to African societies by rulers who betrayed their fellow citizens as the late Rodney observed in his *WEST AFRICA AND THE ATLANTIC SLAVE-TRADE*, published by the Historical Association of Tanzania in 1967. This should be a must read for every one who seeks to understand why current African rulers adopt and implement policies sold to them by Europe and America that bring poverty and suffering to the masses of African people.

Rodney noted that prior to slavery, "Kings, Chiefs, Sub-Chiefs, Headmen, Nobles, Priests and Clan Leaders ruled on behalf of the people as a whole." "They administered justice, and enforced rules for the efficient economic and social functioning of the Community. Spiritually, they maintained the goodwill of tribal Ancestors, sought divine guidance for the people and protected them from evils such as witchcraft" which is magic done for evil purposes.

However, with the coming of the Atlantic slave-trade, it was noticeable that the rulers acted more like a separate class. In most of the states of the West African Coast, the rulers were unscrupulous in selling their own subjects to Europeans. According to Rodney, this class division was more fundamental than tribal divisions. An examination of the methods of getting slaves in West Africa reveals this to be the case.

While the overwhelming majority of peoples and nations of the earth accept that slavery was a crime against humanity, many people, not only Africans, were astonished when Senegalese president Abdoulaye Wade and Nigerian President Olesogun Obasanjo came out in opposition to this principle and against Reparations at the United Nations World Conference Against Racism held in South Africa last year.

However, while Obasanjo came out against the previously stated Nigerian position, Nigerian civil servants at the conference found a way of working around Obasanjo's position with the Black Caucus to get the conference to agree that slavery was indeed a crime against humanity.

Most people now also agree that the vast wealth of Europe and America is founded on the enslavement of Africans, on genocidal slave labour. Eric Williams, a former Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, wrote a book entitled *CAPITALISM AND SLAVERY* in which he shows how the surplus capital on which capitalism is founded, were the profits made from slavery and the slave-trade. Since there is no statute of limitation, Europe and America, the Jews and the Catholic Church owe Africa and the Africans

\$billions in Reparations.

It should not be surprising that neither Europe or America is taking the demand for Reparations seriously. A promise made to North American Africans during the American civil war to give forty acres of land and a mule to each family was not honoured. However, a powerful united Africa in which African rulers rule on behalf of Africans rather than as partners of Europeans and Americans will quickly force Europe, America and Arabia to meet just Reparations demands.

Instead, they continue to rule with the same type of mentality, with different ruling classes forming alliances with different European partners to maintain themselves in positions of power and privilege. NEPAD, the so-called new Partnership for African Development championed by Mbeki, Obsanjo and Wade moves this to a continental level. Europe and America are joyful since it would mean making the African Union a neo-colonial appendage of Europe and America in perpetuity.

One can not understand the problems in West Africa today if one does not understand the changes brought about by slavery. Rodney writes that "African rulers found themselves selling slaves to get guns to catch more slaves to buy more guns." Its modern equivalent is the debt crisis. Africa finds itself in a spiral of mounting debt. The ruling classes borrow and borrow and go deeper and deeper into debt. Interest and capital repayments mean that they are bereft of sufficient capital to transform the economy and the lives of the people through social policy.

So we have a country like Mozambique, described as a success by the IMF and the World Bank, spending 250 per cent more on debt and interest repayments than it spends on health and education combined. All that the rulers of Mozambique have succeeded in doing is to create more and more poverty.

Armondo Gabouza, destined to be the next President of Mozambique is described as being extremely rich. When we knew him as a "Freedom Fighter" fighting for the liberation of Mozambique against Portuguese colonialism, he was not known to have a lot of money. As happened during the days of slavery, the ruling elite in the FRONT FOR THE LIBERATION OF MOZAMBIQUE (FRELIMO) has formed a defacto alliance with imperialism against their own people.

So as the rulers grow rich, the ordinary people are deprived of health, education and social services by the implementation of IMF/WB programmes. The rulers of Mozambique need to make Reparations to the ordinary people of Mozambique. They need to repair the damage that has been caused by the implementation of IMF/WB programmes.

Implementing IMF/WB policies has brought increased suffering to the African masses. This has meant that the number of Africans living on less than \$1.00 (US) per day has risen from 242 millions to over 300 millions in the last 10 years. As one European writer has noted, "The more vigorously African governments apply policies demanded by

whites, the poorer people become." Specifically in the case of Zambia, another wrote: "Across Zambia, a decade of free market reforms have seen the roll back of social services and deepening poverty."

Some people make excuses for the former slavers claiming that they were forced into selling their own people into slavery. But during the whole period of the West Atlantic slave-trade, African rulers were in full political control of their territories. Europeans who built slave forts along the Atlantic coast did so with the agreement of rulers and paid rent for the land on which these slave forts were built.

Prominent among the African slavers were the Fulanis whose state of Futa Djalon became rich and powerful. The Fon slave-trading state which grew up in Dahomey (Benin) neglected agriculture and was reduced to famine. Does this have echoes in Africa today where famine rages over vast sections of the continent. How come these rulers do not plan for the future. After all, drought in Africa is cyclical. These rulers have the lesson of the African story told in the Bible of Joseph interpreting the Pharaohs dream to teach them that in good times, they must plan for hard times.

Among the Akan slave-raiders, the Asante Kingdom grew up as a powerful slave trading state. Their main business concentrated on supplying slaves to Europeans and this Asante Kingdom grew rich and powerful because of the European guns they received in exchange. Does this have any modern parallel in Africa today where guns imported from Europe and America are used to kill millions of Africans while the Euro-Americans grow richer and richer on the sufferings of Africans. Yoweri Museveni's failed attempt to build a Tutsi Hema Empire in alliance with America and Britain resulted in the death of almost five million Africans.

Recently, the modern Asante rulers held an audacious celebration of their three hundred years alliance with the Dutch. For most of that time, the purpose of the alliance was to capture Africans to be sold into slavery. The thinking and mentality of the Asante rulers have not changed. Who would have imagined or could have imagined modern day Africans celebrating their Ancestors selling their fellow Africans into slavery. Any African with a sense of pride in being African would hang his head in shame. But among the modern Asante rulers, there is no shame, steeped as they are in betrayal.

It is not surprising therefore to learn that these self same Asante rulers formed the main opposition to Kwame Nkrumah in his drive to liberate and unite Africa and to use Africa's vast resources for the benefit of Africans. Their opposition to Nkrumah was violent. They were involved in terrorist activities, exploding bombs and killing members of Nkrumah's Convention Peoples party. CPP members of the legislative assembly were forced into exile in Accra as the Asante rulers declared the Royal Kingdom of Asante a No-Go Area for Kwame Nkrumah in particular and the CPP in general.

When will the Asante ruling class, the dominant force in Ghanaian politics today, begin to give Reparations to the people of Ghana? When will they begin to repair the damage caused to Ghanaian society by their involvement in the slave-trade, their wrecking of the

noble ideals for which Kwame Nkrumah stood, and the barefaced manner in which they celebrate the evil deeds of their ancestors? In particular, why are the Asantes so violently opposed to Diasporan Africans Repatriating to Ghana.

Diasporan Africans are denied citizenship of Ghana no matter how long they are there. The right of abode is given after seven years. But non-Africans can gain full Ghanaian citizenship after only three years. Repatriated Africans report the spreading of negative propaganda against Diasporans from Jamaica and the USA in sections of the Ghanaian media.

On the other hand, they cover up the ill treatment of Ghanaians by non-Africans. For example, the Malaysian boss who spat in the face of his Ghanaian driver and described Ghanaians as animals; the boss from India who as a matter of routine, punched and kicked his Ghanaian staff; the Dutch construction supervisor who defecated in the drinking water of Ghanaian workers; the German tourists who make pornographic films with animals, using children; and the Swiss teachers at an orphanage running a paedophile ring. So when will the Ghanaian ruling classes begin to make Reparations to the masses of Ghanaian people by repairing the vast damage they have caused?

It must be noted that Africans voted Kwame Nkrumah the African Man of the Millennium. Every African politician who aspires to greatness now describe himself as a Pan Africanist. The one thing that they would not do is to implement Nkrumah's programme for a continental African government and for self-reliance in economic development.

In a recent speech in Namibia, the African Queen Winnie Mandela called on African women to return to Africa to fight neo-liberalism. She said, Let us call on all Africa's children in all parts of the world where they are dispersed. This call should be, return and make your contribution to the re-awakening of Kwame Nkrumah's African Giant." But Winnie Nomzamo Mandela has been under constant attack from forces both inside and outside the ANC from the time that she said, "We are not fighting against apartheid, we are fighting to get control of our land back."

If one takes a closer look at the damage the Fulanis have caused during the time they have been on the political stage, one would say that it is time that they were moved off the political stage. With their fellow Northern Nigerian Moslems, they form part of the kleptocracy who destroyed the vast potential of Nigeria to become a modern state driven by science and technology. They fed at the trough of the military bandits Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha. With all their ill-gotten gains, they showed no sympathy for the needs of the Islamic masses much less for the non-Islamic masses.

With the demise of Abacha and the coming to power of Obasanjo, the Fulanis, together with their fellow Northern Moslems, have sought to disrupt the Nigerian state so that their fellow Moslems could resume power. As one commentator states, "What is noticeable is that despite their long years ruling the Nigerian state, whether as civilians or in military clothing, the areas controlled by these Moslems are the most underdeveloped

parts of Nigeria." They failed to provide education, adequate health and social benefits to their masses who are the poorest people in Nigeria while they are exceedingly rich.

These Muslim rulers, who have shown nothing but contempt for the needs and welfare of the masses of Nigerians, are the instigators of the plot to unseat Obasanjo by impeaching him. This is a reflection of their slave-trading mentality. Their primary concern is to get their hands on the reigns of power again so that they can loot Nigeria again, big time. But are these power hungry Northerners the real author of the plot to unseat Obasanjo.

Obasanjo is playing a very interesting game. On the one hand, he is opposed to Reparations for slavery and colonialism and one of the promoters of NEPAD. On the other hand, he is at war with the IMF, has called for a second African liberation and has described globalisation as bondage for the Black race. Also notable, is the manner in which he has defied Britain, the United States and the European Union over Zimbabwe.

One should not be surprised that the Fulani-Northern Moslem kleptocrats are joined by other sections of the Nigerian ruling classes. In that part of Africa, various slave-trading cities grew up at several mouths of the Niger River and along its banks. Among the Igbo, the Aro used the Chukwu Oracle fraudulently to enslave thousands of their fellow Igbos. Rodney notes that "The Niger Delta was one of the biggest centres of the slave trade in West Africa." So what we are looking at here is the slave-trade mentality again.

Prior to the Atlantic slave-trade, in the Mano river region of Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone, "The coastal people were ruled by powerful secret societies." The highest officers of these secret societies were made up of "nobles, and chiefs who came from several kingdoms." But, "as the slave trade continued, these powerful and benevolent organizations lost their real purpose and were taken over by slave raiding chiefs."

Is it any wonder that the needs of ordinary people were neglected at independence. The fuel for the civil wars that rocked the region was the extremely high levels of poverty. Surely, the rulers of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, an extremely rich region, need to make Reparations to the masses of their people. They need to repair the damage caused by slavery and colonialism by reconstructing their society in such a way that the interests of all the people are taken care of, not just the corrupt elites.

Looking at Angola and the Congo where the Portuguese started the Atlantic slave-trade, one sees again and again local rulers in alliance with Europeans to sell their fellow Africans into slavery. Many local peoples were forced to flee from Portuguese and African slavers.

Rodney notes that "The Bapenda people who today live on the river Kassai in Congo (Kinshasha) once lived on the coast of Angola. He says that "new states were built in the interior of Angola which benefited from taking part in the Atlantic slave-trade.

Does this betrayal of the ordinary people explain the actions of the political forces which

joined the USA and Belgium in the assassination of Lumumba? Does this explain the alliance of Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni and the Rwandan military dictator Paul Kagame's alliance with the USA and Britain to dismember the Democratic Republic of Congo and in the process, killing over 4 million Congolese and looting the riches of the DRC?

Does this explain why the Marxist Professor Wamba dia Wamba was willing to have himself installed as President of the DRC when Kagame and Museveni launched their assault on Mzee Laurent Desiree Kabila? Does this explain why George Savimbi's UNITA armed and financed by the USA and the former apartheid regime in South Africa, could wreak so much havoc in Angola once the African Liberation Movement had defeated the Portuguese militarily?

The current MPLA rulers of Angola have not shown any people centred credentials. While some of these former Gguerilla fighters have grown extremely rich, the ordinary masses have suffered. Despite the \$billions earned in oil revenues, less than adequate provision was made for agricultural development. So people are starving. One wonders why the Angolan Government does not use some of the \$billions earned in oil revenues to buy food to feed the people rather than resort to beg for charity.

In Southern Africa, Robert Mugabe is making Reparations to the African masses by restoring the land taken by white colonialist settlers in their wars of colonisation in Zimbabwe. It was the war of liberation fought by Zimbabwe liberation fighters that defeated the settlers militarily and opened the doors for the land restoration process to take place. Although the whites defeated militarily, they were not defeated psychologically and that is what made them so arrogant. This third Chimurenga will inflict on them a psychological defeat from which they will never recover.

In the New South Africa, ANC governments led by Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki have shown that they are not prepared to give reparations to the Africans who were dispossessed of their land by European settler colonialists. The ANC made a deal with the Boers in which the white colonialist settlers would retain all of the land they stole from the Africans before 1913. Remembering that the 1913 Land Act gave 87 per cent of the land to the Boers, this deal was outrageous. No wonder the deal is unravelling.

In Zimbabwe where there has been a great hullabaloo over the land restoration programme, eleven white farmers have been killed in the past year. In the New South Africa where there has been no such hullabaloo, over 200 white farmers have been killed in the same period. The ANC has steadfastly resisted calls by Thami Ka Platjje, the General Secretary of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania for a change in the Constitution so that land taken by the Boers before 1913 can be restored to the rightful owners. They have also resisted Ka Platjje's call for a National Land Summit.

Now, Mbeki is under attack by the Boers, who, having seen the writing on the wall, are calling for a more equitable distribution of land between Blacks and Whites. The Boers now accept that the myth they created that Black people can not farm is not true. They

are in support of Ka Plaatjie's call for a National Land Summit. They have put forward proposals to give more land to the Africans while they will remain the dominant land owning class. This is an act of desperation on their part.

The ANC government is not making Reparations to the African working class either. It has created mass unemployment by instituting a Structural Adjustment Programme and is creating other hardships for poor people by privatising essential services such as water and electricity. This has led to friction within and a threatened break up of the ANC with the creation of a new party by COSATU and the discredited South African Communist Party. Despite the havoc that capitalism has wreaked on African economies, Mbeki's priority is to create a Black Business Class. So the needs of the African masses suffer.

Mbeki, a former Communist now wants to clothe himself in the mantle of Pan Africanism. But he spent most of his political life fighting Pan Africanists. Through the apartheid construct, the Africa Institute of South Africa, Mbeki and the ANC tried to organise the 8th Pan African Congress. The attempt seems to have collapsed as some noted Pan African intellectuals refused to have anything to do with it.

It was through the Africa Institute that the ANC government organised discussions and consultations around the African Union. While white scholars from Europe and America were invited to participate in these discussions, Diasporan Africans were conspicuous by their absence. It was one of these white scholars who raised the issue of Repatriation. This was brushed aside. So for anyone to claim that Muammar al Ghaddafi separated Africa from its Diaspora as one African intellectual has done is a claim too far. Nothing and no one on earth can separate Africa from its Diaspora.

Healing of African wounds caused by Transatlantic Slave-Trade demands that African Governments make arrangements so that those Diasporan Africans who wish to Repatriate to their home in Africa can do so without let or hindrance. Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere began the process. Sam Nujoma in Namibia has plans to resettle Diasporan Africans on lands to be expropriated from white settlers. This is part of the process of Reparations that will not go away.

Apart from Zimbabwe and Namibia, the only other government that is making reparations to its African citizens is that of President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela. 60 per cent of the population of this Central American country on the Caribbean coast are people of African descent. The others are Mestizos of Indigenous and Europe descent and Indigenous. So when over one million Venezuelans came out to demonstrate on the streets of Venezuela after a Regime change in an American authored coup, the majority of people on the streets were Venezuelan Africans.

In one of the largest oil producing countries in the world, 80 per cent of the people lived in poverty. When Chavez came to power, he instituted a poverty reduction programme, creating jobs, building new schools, roads and hospitals. He said that capitalism causes poverty and embarked on a non-capitalist path. Land has been made available to Black and Indigenous Venezuelans so that they can now engage in farming for the

first time for generations.

This African community in Venezuela is very African conscious. They publish a magazine called Africanias. The Venezuelan African community in Barlovento hosted the Second International reunion of the "Latin African Family" in 1999, and the Africans in Venezuela are now playing a prominent role on the international stage whereas previously, they were unseen.

So if Hugo Chavez, the President of Venezuela is making Reparations to the African population of Venezuela, one must ask the question of why the African ruling classes have so far failed to make Reparations to the African masses? Are they in effect, modern Black Slack Slavers and Plantation Managers as one African in exile describes them.

This generation of African Leaders owes a duty to the African masses to end their partnership with Europe and America. This partnership has brought nothing but misery to Africans at home and abroad. They need to make Reparations to the masses of African people. They need to reconstruct African society and manage it in the way it was managed prior to the slave-trade, for the benefit of all the people not just a few. Should they fail to do so, it is doubtful whether the Club of African Presidents they have constructed as the African Union will save them from the wrath of the African masses.

Lester Lewis

[pana-@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:pana-@yahoo.co.uk)