Report on the International Network of Scholars and Activists (INOSAAR)

Prepared For the Expert workshop on Reparations, racial justice and equality

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Introduction

The struggle for reparations for the trafficking, enslavement, and colonization of African people, with their attendant legacy of racial oppression, has a long and varied history. Early on, John Locke mentions it in his Second Treatise (Sec. 10):

Besides the crime which consists in violating the law, and varying from the right rule of reason, whereby a man so far becomes degenerate, and declares himself to quit the principles of human nature, and to be a noxious creature, there is commonly injury done to some person or other, and some other man receives damage by his transgression: in which case he who hath received any damage, has, besides the right of punishment common to him with other men, a particular right to seek reparation from him that has done it….

In the North American colonies, Thomas Jefferson also engaged the subject of reparations. He suggested making reparations to enslaved Blacks through the provision of land, his thinking having been heavily influenced by Locke’s concept of Natural Rights. His proposal was to “confiscate enslaved children” from their parents, and put them in school to be educated and taught a trade. (Constitutional Rights Foundation, “Declaration of Independence and Natural Rights”, <http://www.crf-usa.org/foundations-of-our-constitution/natural-rights.html>.

The 18th century Quaker journalist, John Woolman, wrote of his “heart [being]affected with sorrow” because of the “injuries committed against these Gentiles [enslaved Africans] and against their children born in captivity.” He continues with a pointed question: “Had the active members in civil society when those injuries were first attempted united in a firm opposition to those violent proceedings […] how much better had it been for these American colonies and islands?” (The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman. ed. Phillips P. Moulton (ed.). New York: Oxford University Press, 1971. Online).

However, perhaps the most famous, perhaps, was the suit against Issac Royall  brought before the General Court of Massachusetts by Belinda Sutton (Royall) in 1783. Subsequently, there were a number of other high profile attempts:

-Declaration of the National Anti-Slavery Convention, 1833

-William T. Sherman’s Field Order # 15 (or the “40 Acres and a Mule”) of 1865

- Pap Singleton’s Great Black Exodus of 1879

-Callie House “National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty & Pension Association,” 1897

-Paul Robeson and the “We Charge Genocide” petition, 1952

- Dr. Martin Luther King’s Lincoln Memorial address of 1963,

 invoked the words of the Declaration of Independence as

 “promissory note” on which the nation had defaulted.

-the Republic of New Africa’s (RNA) proposal, 1968

-James Forman’s “Black Manifesto,” 1969

- Rep. John Conyers’ "Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African

 Americans Act" (**H.R.** 3745) first introduced, January 1989

- The Abuja Proclamation: Pan-African Conference on Reparations For African

 Enslavement, Colonisation And Neo-Colonisation, sponsored by The Organisation Of

 African Unity and its Reparations Commission April 27-29, 1993, Abuja, Nigeria

- CARICOM’s Ten-Point Plan for Reparatory Justice, 2014

-The United Nations’ Declaration of the Decade of People of African Descent, 2015 –

 2024 (General Assembly Resolution 68/237)

Background of the INOSAAR

Two international scholars of reparations, Dr. Nicola Frith and Dr. Joyce Hope Scott met at a conference on Reparative Histories at the University of Brighton in 2014. It was this chance meeting on that occasion and their discussions on reparations and cognitive justice that led to plans for establishing a larger forum for more extensive dialogue on this topic. Thus, On 5–7 November 2015, Professor Joyce Hope Scott (Wheelock College/Boston University) and Dr Nicola Frith (University of Edinburgh) coordinated a major international conference entitled ‘Repairing the Past, Imagining the Future: Reparations and Beyond...’. at the University of Edinburgh. The purpose of this conference was to mark two important dates in the abolitionist calendar: the two-hundred-year anniversary of the first international agreement to abolish slavery during the Congress of Vienna of 1815; and the 150th anniversary of the Thirteenth Amendment through which slavery was formally abolished in the US. These two anniversaries provided an important socio-political context in which to discuss the subject of reparations from a range of disciplinary backgrounds, while exploring the different national contexts in which social movements linked to reparations are operating.

 Importantly, the conference featured Sir Hilary Beckles, President of CARICOM, and Dr. Verene Shepherd, Professor and Director of the Center for Reparations Research at the University of the West Indies. However, also present at that time were a number of UK-based activist groups who voiced concerns about the asymmetrical power relations at work when academics, operating within elite institutions, engage with reparations. They called upon academics not only to acknowledge these power imbalances, but also recognize the existence of a grassroots International Social Movement for Afrikan Reparations (ISMAR) and therefore to commit to a non-extractive process of ethical scholarship that promotes egalitarian knowledge exchange and collaboration. This call lies at the root of our current INOSAAR project to unite the efforts of scholars and activists in our combined quest to contribute positively to advancing the question of reparations for African enslavement.

Birth of the INOSAAR

Drs. Frith and Hope Scott wrote a proposal in hopes of advancing the concerns raised at the 2015 Edinburgh conference. They were successful in receiving a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council of the UK (AHRC), and in October of 2017, the United Kingdom became the site of the historic launch of the International Network of Scholars and Activists for Afrikan Reparations (INOSAAR) in Brixton. This was a collaboration between the University of Edinburgh, Wheelock College (Boston University) and the Pan-Afrikan Coalition for Reparations in Europe (PARCOE). The launch of the INOSAAR represents an unprecedented move to unite the efforts of scholars and activists around the world, while addressing the need for scholars to engage with the African heritage communities in which they originated and to which they are ultimately accountable.

INOSAAR’s Purpose

The purpose of the INOSAAR project is to create an international network dedicated to reparations and other forms of transitional justice for the enslavement and genocide of peoples of African descent, including the subsequent oppression and deformation of African identity. We aim to explore reparations through the rich variety of research specialisms within both the arts and humanities and the social sciences in collaboration and consultation with grassroots activist groups invested in seeking external and internal repair and government-linked groups capable of influencing social change.

Through a series of workshops and seminars, culminating in a major international conference held in Benin in West Afrika, we have explored the challenges of building solidarity around reparations in multiple ways, concluding in favour of the need to: expand our collective definitions of reparation to incorporate cultural, spiritual, environmental and psychological approaches (in addition to legal and economic arguments); encourage cross-community collaborations that are rooted in the praxis of cognitive justice (or the equity of all knowledges); and promote the importance of Afrikan knowledge systems for conducting reparations-related scholarship and activism.

Activities under the INOSAAR

On March 17, 2018, the INOSAAR held its second session, an international, interdisciplinary workshop called “Reparation for Afrikan Enslavement:

Beyond National Boundaries, Toward International Solidarities.”

On June 03, 2017, a second event (a “pre-colloquium”) was initiated by INOSAAR’s West African colleagues and held in the grand salon of the Musée da Silva, Porto-Novo, Republic of Bénin, a facility established by a returning Afro-Brazilian who also funded the conference. It was hosted by Our collaborators in Bénin, the Pan African Association for a Global Reparation for Slavery (APRGE).

 There were aproximately 150 people in attendance including 4 traditional kings, one from Guadeloupe, descent of captives from the Kingdom of Allada. Local kings were His Majesty Kpoto-Zounme HAKPON III of the Kingdom of Porto-Novo and their majesties, King Onikoyi and King Kokpon of Sakété. These Honorable crown heads all gave communications as well as several professors from the university and other local public officials. Participating also was the National Theatre Company which presented a performance in remembrance African enslavement.

There was then a summary panel of scholars who engaged in a dialogue on the meaning and proposed direction of the reparations movement for Africa who finished by generating some resolutions for future directions. A Summary of Outcomes from the Pre-Collogue was generated. These **included: (A)**

1. Recognition by all member states of the United Nations of all persons of African descent
2. Emanating from that recognition will be the affirmation by each member state of the UN of a politic that will address the concerns of persons of African descent
3. A proclamation from each member state of the free circulation of persons and goods notably of descendants of Africa throughout each state of the African Union
4. effectiveness of the enjoyment of rights, of respect, and of obligations stemming from the free movement of persons and goods through the granting of nationality, the abolition of passports and visas, facilitation of integration into the socio-economic, political, and cultural life of returning persons of African descent to countries of their choice within the African Union

5. The massive transfer to technological knowledge
 and know-how from the countries of return by delocalization

6. the establishment within each state of a joint committee, a person of African descent plus three persons, an activist, a researcher, and a member of APRGE.

**(B) Projects Proposed as Outcomes of the pre-colloque**

1. Erection of a wall commemorating the Protests and Resistance Against Slavery

2. Creation and or re-enforcement of a network of activists and scholars within each African state on reparations for slavery

3. Creation of a tourist circuit for the Gateway of no Return (in Ouidah)

4. Appropriation and acceleration by all activists and by all means a process of retrocession of property stolen, ripped off or taken away

5. financing of agriculture through renewable energy

6. Creation of apprenticeship centers in art, dyeing, indigo and other

7. Project of decolonization and Africanization of knowledge

8. Creation of an International Institute of Boology

A final international colloquium that was organized in Porto-Novo, Benin on behalf of the INOSAAR and in collaboration with the Association panafricaine pour une réparation globale de l’esclavage (APRGE). The colloquium was attended and supported by delegates and officials from Benin, including His Majesty Kpoto-Zounme Hapkon III, King of Porto-Novo, members of the Beninese government and other prominent persons. It was also supported internationally by speakers, participants and visitors from the Caribbean, Europe, America and West Africa, representing both activist and academic voices. The event was preceded by the pouring of libations, offerings to the ancestors, and prayers in the various temples, while the conference was framed by several cultural interventions, including a specially composed song, dance and theatrical production.

**Importantly, the conference resulted in the issuing of the Porto-Novo Declaration, which was signed by his majesty Kpoto-Zounme Hapkon III of Porto-Novo,** calling upon ‘Afrikan states and their diplomatic leadership to join with civil society in order to formulate policies and establish operational committees, in order to institutionalize and advocate the claim for reparatory justice from those countries that implemented the criminal globalization of chattel enslavement of Afrikans, according to the principles of international law and the provisions of the United Nations within the International Decade of People of African Descent’. A copy of the Declaration can be found on the INOSAAR website: <https://www.inosaar.llc.ed.ac.uk/en/activity/porto-novo>.

* Movement building: solidarity between Afrikans living in the Diaspora and Afrikans living on the continent, including rematriation/repatriation initiatives. Remembering the role of the Arts and humanities and the role of language, while connecting with existing decolonizing agendas; Spiritual & Cultural regeneration: Importance of grassroots activitism; Pan Africanism and planetary repairs.

INOSAAR PRINCIPLES OF PARTICIPATION

The central purpose of the INOSAAR is to assist in the consolidation of a growing Afrikan global reparations movement by uniting activists and scholars, and developing a strong youth-led base to ensure the sustainability of this movement. We do so in full cognisance of the history of these movements, most notably with reference to the pan-Afrikanist struggle and its desire to unite the Afrikan continent, to unify Black people and to bring an end to racism, as well as the Abuja Proclamation of 1993 which calls ‘upon the international community to recognize that there is a unique and unprecedented moral debt owed to African-descended people which has yet to be paid’.

Our nine stated aims and objectives are as follows:

1. To develop a more coherent research agenda for understanding reparations across disciplinary boundaries and address the inadequacy of scholarship outside of Afrikan- American and nation-centred contexts;
2. To improve the recognition of knowledge-production partnerships between scholars and activists working on Afrikan reparations and to establish a partnership that is enduring and international;
3. To provide opportunities for researchers and activists to engage in a process of bilateral knowledge exchange, with the longer-term view of contributing positively to the work of grassroots and activist organisations and the building of the ISMAR in link with the PRIM;
4. To support the development of youth and student engagement, involvement and proactivity, notably through the creation of a youth-led auxiliary fellowship of the INOSAAR, popularly named in short as RepAfrika, and through the establishment of a related mentorship scheme;
5. To build the INOSAAR in order to support the work of activists and scholars by providing global legitimacy and visibility to the broad spectrum of viewpoints in the reparations debate and the diversity of their exponents, particularly as state and non-state actors;
6. To support the struggle for the voluntary rematriation/repatriation for peoples of Afrikan descent to any Afrikan country of their choice, with due respect for indigenous communities and their own reparations interests, through the granting of citizenship, the removal of visa and customs requirements, and the creation of socio-economic, political and cultural reinsertion programmes in harmony with those already domiciled in such countries;
7. To establish a recognisable network consisting of registered participants with a commitment to adhering to its rules, principles and obligations;
8. To impact positively upon public and political (mis)conceptions about reparations (for example, the false idea that reparations are some kind of ‘paycheque’) by providing academically rigorous outputs of use to academic and non-academic audiences, and by supporting the development of decolonizing curricula of reparatory justice;
9. To ensure that each of the three inaugural events organized through INOSAAR and its partners, starting in London, Birmingham and finally Porto Novo in Benin, form one continuum in our collective efforts to advance the question of reparations.

Network Members

The INOSAAR is intended to be a growing network and we are seeking to expand our membership with active participants who adhere to our mutually agreed ‘Principles of Participation’. During the initial grant-writing phase, the PI and Co-I approached activists and academics based in the UK, France, West Afrika, the Caribbean, US, Latin America and India who are known to be engaged in the struggle for reparations. After winning the AHRC Research Networking Grant, additional members and interested parties were added to the distribution list. The construction of the website map (see below) will lead to the addition for further contributors to the INOSAAR.

Decision-Making Processes and Consultation

Each of the workshops completed were collaborative efforts between different partners. At each stage, decisions were made either through face-to-face or interactive meetings. Wider consultations with the INOSAAR are conducted through a dedicated email address (inosaar@ed.ac.uk). Key items for consultation with partners and/or the INOSAAR include: principles of participation; website content and construction; workshop content and creative ideas for presentation; written reports that follow each of the four events, and the final report summarizing our collective findings---which is now in completed draft form.

**Communicating and Disseminating Our Collective Work**

In order to produce work that is of use to activist and grassroots organizations, and contribute to changing public perceptions about reparations, we have created a website and will be compiling a downloadable public report.

The website provides an important virtual space in which communities and members can actively participate in discussions and upload presentations prior to, during and after the events. More broadly, it will serve as an educational tool to combat public and political misconceptions about reparations, and an archival space to showcase past and present reparation movements across the world, as well as the work of the INOSAAR. It will also include a fully searchable map with information about researchers and centres, and activist organizations in operation today.

A final report has been written. It provides a historical overview of the diversity of reparation movements and outlines practical strategies for moving beyond theory and towards the implementation of reparative strategies and solidarity building. Based on outcomes and recommendations from participants at the four INOSAAR events, it will broaden the case for reparations. Developed in collaboration with academics, activists and government-linked groups to support their social and educational work and political campaigning at national and transnational levels.