

Laetitia Mugerwa (PhD)
Executive Director
Empowerment Initiative for Women and Youth Uganda
Country: Uganda
Theme: Reparations and sustainable debt and economic justice

Every human society has a history and a form of culture, and this includes Africa. Africa is the home of mankind. The human being came into existence on the African continent nearly two million years ago, and human society and culture reached great heights in Africa before anywhere else on the planet. And yet, we have consistently been forced into the invidious position of proving our humanity by citing historical antecedents. Historical myths have been implanted in the minds of black people, and those must be uprooted.

We can never forget, and must not forget that between 1492 and 1870, Africa's pool of involuntary, victimized labor, a wide range of intellectual, technical, scientific, and cultural resources were violently kidnapped, huddled, terrorized, and forced from their homes, lands, and families to be bundled onto ships to build industries, farms, roads, and factories in Europe and America. With the Portuguese first, then the Spanish, French, Dutch, Danes, Norwegians, Swedes, Americans, Germans, all of them were not to be denied their share of this lucrative Transatlantic Trade of Africans (TTA). Official Slavers records indicate that 15 million sons of Africa were exported and 30 million were dislocated.

The falsehoods in white supremacy and sentimentalism are quick to whitewash history and forget that it was their "divide and conquer" tactic that pitted one African tribe against the other and forced Africans to participate in this inhuman business. In 1778, one Reverend Thomas Thompson wrote a PhD thesis titled "The African Trade for Negro Slaves shown to be consistent with the principles of humanity and the laws of Revealed Religion." And Thomas Hobbes and John Locke agreed that the slave trade of Africans was lawful and moral. To them, the trading of black people was consistent with freedom and the social function of the state. But we resisted. We revolted. In a 1999 database compiled on the TTA by Eltis and David Richardson et al contains references of 382 shipboard revolts, two-thirds of which took place at the port of lading.

Roots of economic injustice to the black Africans remained even through the abolition era. After the 1781 Zong massacres where over 133 African captives were thrown overboard in the middle crossing, insurance companies compensated Captain Luke Collingwood and slavers for their lost 'supplies'. In the case of the British in the Caribbean, enslavers received a subvention from the imperial government, the sum of 20 million pounds to compensate their loss of property rights in blacks at the passage of the Emancipation Act of 1833. France imposed a demand of 150 million gold francs to Haiti (Colony of Domingue) as compensation for her loss of property when in 1804 Haiti provided automatic freedom and citizenship for every enslaved black person who reached the island. France refused to recognize Haiti's independence, so did the Americans, Dutch, Germans, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish, Norwegians, and Danish.

Without turning the chapter on horrors of colonialism, and imperialism as evidenced in horrific events such as the 1940 French Pact for continuation of colonialism, the Commonwealth, and American hegemony, let's fast forward to the 1900s. Israel, Japan, Vietnam, Greece, Netherlands, Poland, Yugoslavia, all these countries have been paid reparations for the horrors their people endured. Why is it so that when it comes to Africa, every perpetrator is silent in her guilt, and out of their cultural egocentrism chooses to solve the injustice by ignoring it.

The reparations movement will never die! The programme of Activities (POA) for the UN International Decade for People of African Decent and the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA), Clause 158 recognized that “historical injustices have undeniably contributed to the poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization, social exclusion, economic disparities, instability, and insecurity that affect many people around the world.” Reparations and decolonial justice must be made to countries that have suffered the ravages of slavery and colonialization before the country is expected to face up to the problems of the 21st century.

Dudley Thompson was right “The debt has not been paid, the accounts have not been settled” Reparation is a right to redress and repair, not an act of begging. “Rights are to be taken, not requested; seized not begged for,” noted Jose Marti. There must be no false distinction between reflection and action because the conquest of power in the form of economic justice is our immediate goal, and the African at home and abroad should be in arms on every front in demand for reparations.