REPARATIONS TO AFRICA: AN ARGUMENT FOR EQUITY AND ALTERNATIVE FINANCING STRATEGY IN A COMPETITIVE WORLD

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INTRODUCTION:

“The beginning of wisdom is to know who you are. Draw near and listen. Long before slave-days we lived in one huge village called Africa. And then strangers came and took some of us away … Today we are scattered so widely that the sun never sets on the descendants of Africa. The world is our village, and we plan to make it more human between now and the day after tomorrow”.

- Ali Mazrui (in his BBC & PBS lecture series in 1986)

“ … The Truth is that the legacy of the past weights too heavily on the present and casts a shadow on our future capacity to develop our economies …”.


Africa today is associated with several ‘rs’ and ‘ds’ such as decolonisation, destruction, disunity, deprivation, disarmament etc and in class of ‘rs’ the principal matters revolve around reconstruction, rehabilitation, reconstitution, renewal etc.

The emergence of these terminologies and Africa’s role in the global system is better appreciated from the historical development of African States. The continent went through an agonizing slave trade and colonization. Intelligent men cannot fail to notice the existence of causality and regularity in human affairs and so the relationship, as observers are moved to indicate, between the degree of destitution of peoples of Africa and the length and nature of exploitation they had to endure is evident. It is palpable that the persisting problems confronting Africa and Africans, including those in Diaspora, could be substantially traced to the evils of slave-trade, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Africa was the theatre of sustained savagery, perpetrated by European conquerors, slave dealers and colonial plunderers. Settled societies were disintegrated by force of imperialist arms so as to build what is now the most advanced economies in the world. Consequently, the continent remains marked by the crimes visited on her by imperialists and up to now her potentialities are restricted by under-development typified by both the debt-trap and the inequitable terms of trade which conspire to hold the continent down.
For how long, as J. F. A. Ajayi once lamented, would Africa remain an object of charity and a pawn of international diplomacy? (1)

The position adopted in this work stresses the need for the reversal of the status quo in favour of development through deliberate international efforts in recompensing Africa for all the ills visited on her

**THE EMERGING PERSPECTIVES.**

The paper sets to show that the inherent exploitative linkages that bind Africa to the global system has, among other reasons, kept the continent at the bottom of the global hierarchy with resulting consequences of overwhelming political, economic and social problems that have roots in the earlier centuries. In the beginning Africa societies, from its historical background, constituted the cradle and home of human civilization and the continent developed at a pace favourably comparable to the fastest growing regions in the world. In a number of spheres of human life, some African societies far our-paced the best in Europe of the time but came slave trade and colonialism: they reordered and changed the prevailing situation and distorted Africa’s steady march to progress.

As this paper contends, understanding the true nature of the encounter with Europeans and its impact on the fortunes and potentialities of Africa is at the heart of the case for reparations. The crusade for restitution, as Ade Ajayi observes, is an answer to the call to seek to understand the African condition is depth, to educate the Africans and the non-Africans about it, to seek an acknowledgement of the wrongs which have impaired the political and socio-economic fabric of Africa. (2) It is, therefore, worthwhile to reveal the happening of the past in order to be able to apply the accumulated experiences of the African to the solution of the problem as they arise. Consequently, concerning the challenges to the survival and development of Africa peoples, it is not only logical but urgent that there is a renewed appreciation of the roots of the process of their subordination and of the magnitude of the debt owed them.

For a peaceful world order and a global economic system that will benefit both the North and the South, reparations to Africa must assume the status of an urgent imperative as there are “logical, historical and moral grounds” to believe that Africa can be compensated for the ills visited on her. Reparations as a deliberated public policy is a convenient way of assuaging those concerned of guilt. This is not a time for charity
outlets because it has been understood that however high-minded, charity in some ways diminishes both the giver and the receiver. As Robert Moore would say, charity reminds the recipient of helplessness and the donor of guilt. (3) It is not a substitute for justice. (4).

A momentous, novel issue of reparations to Africa from the West would definitely raise pertinent questions. Some analysts have queried whether Africa, given its poor power base in the international system, would be able to make any meaningful impact in a project of this nature. The liberal position is also quick to urge Africans to let bygone be by-gone, arguing that Africa’s major problems are largely the handiwork of its ruling elite. Others argue that some social problems, such as the ones Africa experiences, do not have technical solutions. Others equally wonder aloud what criteria of damage and suffering would be appropriate for such an assessment. The position is stressed further that slave trade was a trade relations between two equal parties conducted on equal terms; that it is not the present generation of Africa that were wronged, and not the least by the present generation of Europeans and finally that slave trade and colonization were not entirely negative for Africa in terms of their impact. It is also the contention that the West has done and is doing so much for Africa.

This paper argues otherwise because history is unambiguous in relation to the violent nature of European intrusion into Africa and it must be emphasized that nothing under the regime of slavery and colonialism was deliberately put in place to benefit the Africans. The rich and powerful imperial nations of Europe created a mystique that justified and secured their overlordship; a mystique, Moore which observes, that sustained domination without explaining it; it gave mastery to mystery and couched in all these were their seeming unapproachable and invulnerable positions. (5) The reverse is becoming the case. The position is that if the needs of both sides of the hemisphere continues to be frustrated consistently in favour of the other, it will make the world a tinderbox. S. Ramphal had graphically pointed out that “not just the poor but all the world will be poorer if there is no peaceful change in the present international order” (6)

In the crusade for reparations Africa has to persuade itself that there is a fighting chance to achieve results. The experience of the last couple of years are instructive, especially in the historical experience of the collapse of the Cold War; the collapse of apartheid and the unification of Germany. The Africans basic instincts, their
understanding of events and the unfolding dilemma of Africa’s multiple ills, makes it imperative that reparations to Africa are centuries overdue and the continent must look at reparations as the new approach for financing Africa’s development. Indications of opposition may manifest because in some circumstances of the world, compensation and reparation may seem rational and few people regard the concept of reparation itself as absurd until it is applied to the black experience. Why should what is compelling to Jews, Koreans, Japanese – Americans become comic for the Blacks? (8)

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Since the first phase of intercourse with Europeans as from 1444AD, there has been a sustained campaign and misinformation about Africa and the first popular idea about Africa equally become the first major misconception of the continent. (9) Africa was described as the Dark Continent; an idea which gained currency because Africa was the last of the continents, as Oliver and Fage noted, to be opened to the gaze of European world and because it was “the last to experience that full impact of European people, ideas and techniques which was so marked a feature of world history from the 16th Century till the early 20th Century”. (10) There began a sustained campaign and misinformation about Africa as primitive European chroniclers wrote and bards sang of great achievement of their superiority and valour over Africans to inspire their young men to equal their elders in their adventures. Ignorance and stereo-typism became the principle features of the social relations with Africa, and these two destroy clarity and objectivity. In the late 19th Century Richard Burton, an explorer, who had several contacts with the African, sadly enough was blinded by the pessimistic variety of cultural and intellectual arrogance. He described the Africans as “being in a perfect hopeless state when left to themselves” (11) Within the said period in history, Rudyard Kipling’s exhortation in 1899 aggressively spelt out the mission statement of the Europeans in what was styled “The White Man’s Burden”. This much celebrated poem urged the whites to:
"Take up the White man’s Burden
Send forth the best ye bred
To bind your sons to exile
To send your captives’ need
To wait in heavy harness
On fluttered folk and wild
Your new caught, sullen peoples
Half-devil and half-child."

Even as late as 1963, a renowned British historian, Trevor Roper, was to boldly proclaim that Africans had no history to teach the English students who were agitating to learn it. (13) This level of intellectual and cultural arrogance and ignorance simply portrayed the thoughtful prejudice that has been pervading among the Europeans over the centuries. Only recently one Paul Johnson, writing in Sunday New York Times Magazine in April 1993, urged that the “civilized powers”, as he called wealthy Western nations, subject the emerging countries of the Southern hemisphere to formal ‘recolonisation’ for a period of roughly 50 to 100 years (more). Some people, he explained ‘are just not fit to govern themselves.’ (14)

It is important to point out that gone are the days when the European world created some mystique that justified and secured their overlordship with an overhanging power of immutability. They has been history as they affected it, not as a process of which they were merely part. Most of Africa’s past has now been excavated from ignorance and error as researches have revealed civilizations that had been beyond Europe’s reach and so beyond her recognition, not even to talk of the more recent ‘flashes of foreign penetration’. Most of these discoveries of the past are much more than African moment as they enrich human experience all over the world. The continent of Africa had its own rich sweep of events when we come to face the fact that the era of European dominance is short even within the thin margin of human history. As Oliver and Fage noted, “while the centers of European culture flourished, decayed and sprouted in their turn, empires in Africa rose, ruled, resisted and succumbed; scholars studied and disputed in Timbuktu as in Paris, and what Italians accomplished with pigment, the artists of Benin achieved with bronze” (15) A number of distinguished archaeologists, anthropologists, paleontologists and ‘pre-historians’ now believe that human life first developed in Africa. Professor L. S. B. Leakey had authoritatively asserted that the
critics of “Africa forget that men of science today are, with few exceptions, satisfied that Africa was the birthplace of man himself, and that for many hundreds of centuries thereafter Africa was in the forefront of all world progress”. (16)

Black men were in the vanguard of these momentous developments from the very inception. In Western Sudan, before the appearance of Europeans, well organized, predominantly Negro states had flourishes, which at the apogee of their expansion and development were reputable empires. They existed during the period known to Europeans as the Middle Ages. For instance, when, in about the second half of the 11th Century AD, William of Normandy invaded England, Ghana empire was the most powerful kingdom in West Africa with a buoyant economy. By 1346, the year of the battle of Crecy, Ghana was no more but Mali succeeded it. The most remarkable account of that empire could be gleaned from Ibn Batuta of Tangier’s records. He was one of the greatest writers of Islam and the most enterprising of the medieval Arab travelers and he had already visited India, Indonesia and Turkestan which placed him in a proper comparable ground of assessing the states. Ibn Batuta arrived Mali capital of Niani in June 1353 and was there for eight months. He gave a vivid description of the court ritual as reproduced in part by Roland Oliver: (17)

“the Sultan’s usual dress is a velvety red tonic … he is preceded by his musicians, who carry gold and silver guitars … As he takes his seat the drums, trumpets and bugles are sounded:

He stated further:

“… The Negroes possess some admirable qualities. They are seldom unjust, and have a greater abhorrence of injustice than any other people … there is complete security in the country. Neither Traveler nor inhabitant in it, has anything to fear from robbers or men of violence. They do not confiscate the property of any white man who dies in their country, even if it be unaccounted wealth”.

As Kwame Nkrumah observed, “could as much be said for our European contemporaries of that time?, Europe was then passing into its renaissance; it was awakening from the social torpor of medievalism and divided into petty and quarrelsome kingdom”. In the words of Thomas Hodgkin, “such a judgment could hardly have been passed an cotemporary France or England”. (18)
The society of the Guinea states was equally urban in character with the people’s economy based on agriculture and trade with patterns of settlement being compact ones around the houses of chiefs or kings and elders. There existed a network of trade routes linking towns and villages which made it possible for the operation of Mande, Ashanti, Benin, Yoruba and Hausa merchants to be truly international. Such organized trade could only have evolved in connection with the existence of effective policies and economic systems. Trade and the concurrent wealth that went with it brought radical changes to the economy and balance of power. An English trader and writer, John Duncan, had been so impressed with Dahomean law and order that he wrote (19).

“During my stay at Abomey, I was never asked by any individual for an article of even the most trifling value, nor even lost anything, except what was stolen by my people from the coast. The Dahomean laws are certainly severe, but they have the desired effect”.

A Dutch writer also observed of Benin in 1602 that:

“the town seemeth to be very great; when you enter it, you go into a great broad street, not paved, which seems to be seven or eight times broader than the Warmoes street in Armsterdam ... The houses in this town stand in good order, one close and even with the other ... The King’s court is very great, within it having very great four square plains ... (20).

In the East and Central African region putative civilizations also flourished which have kept historians wondering at their prodigy. The great wall of Zimbabwe stands as a living testimony. Skill, creativity and artistry went into the construction and Walter Rodney reported that “when Cecil Rhodes sent in his agents to rob and steal in Zimbabwe, they and other Europeans marveled at the surviving ruins of the Zimbabwean culture and automatically assumed that it had been built by white people”. (21) The development in the East African Coast could have seemed no less civilized than what existed in Portugal or Spain at the time. Basil Davidson noted, from authentic records of the time, on the kind of cities and people the Europeans met on the East African Coast, the flourishing life and thriving economy:

“They (Portuguese) anchored in havens that were thick with ocean shipping, they went ashore to cities as fine as all but a few they could have known in Europe. They watched a flourishing maritime trade in gold and iron and ivory and tortoise shell, beads and copper and cotton cloth, slaves and porcelain; and saw that they had stumbled on a world of commerce even larger, and perhaps wealthier than anything that Europe knew ... In the matter of wealth and knowledge of a wider
world it must have seemed a great deal more civilized … They found themselves repeatedly disregarded as strange and uncouth …” (22).

That was the Africa these predators found; an Africa of fair and thriving cities whose inhabitants accorded the Europeans unimpeded entry, but they went denouncing and labeling, in corporate sense, everything African as primitive, in the most pejorative sense of the word. This is because, as Davidson observed, the Europeans:

“ … Schooled in the bitter rivalries of Europe fell upon these tolerant ad easy-going civilization of the Indian Ocean with a ferocity and violence that were like nothing seen through the centuries … They were better armed. They were trained to ruthlessness. They wanted more than a single monopoly of trade, ruinous though that would be for the coastal cities. They wanted loot as well. African warfare, like Indian warfare, was designed to minimize casualties, not to maximize them. These invaders had no such care”. (23)

Europe with much of its political vaunting cannot hide from the veritable notes of historical realities. Parker Thomas Moon provided some visible accounts on this. According to him, the domination of the world by European powers is in reality one of the most astonishing paradoxes of history. During long millenniums while powerful empires and civilized cities were rising and falling in Africa and Asia, most of Europe was savage wilderness. Only towards the very close of ancient history did Greece and Rome, in contact with Africa and Asiatic civilizations began to play any conspicuous role in the world. With the decline of Rome, Europe once more fell into weakness and again became subject to colonization and conquest by Asiatic powers – into Spain came the Moors from North Africa; into Southern Europe came the Asiatic Turks. At that point Europe veritably seemed destined to be the footstool of other continents. (24) Europe’s rise to world power, Moon elaborated, became evident about the time of the crusades when Christendom sent its armies to invade Asia and when Italian city States such as Venice, Florence, Genoa and Pisa, established their warehouses in cities of Asia minor. This commercial expansion into the near East was the prelude to, and the economic reason for, the epochal 15th Century European voyages of discovery.

Economy then was, as ever, the core factor in the subjugation of Africa by Europeans. Western capitalist penetration should be seen as the totality of processes and procedures, structures and linkages put in place by the colonizers in order to effectively accomplish the self-serving transformation of pre-colonial political economy into a form
of capitalist nature. The Western capitalist penetration is also seen as the process by which pre-colonial political economy lost its internal dynamics and independence. Through this it could equally be explained how African societies were turned away from self-directed development and made appendages of western capitalist societies. It is thus an account of how pre-colonial African mode of production had the capitalist mode forcibly super-imposed upon it. (25)

As Busari Adebisi explained, the western capitalist penetration thesis seeks to explain the root of the African situation today. After assessing the pre-colonial African situation, before the penetration of western capitalist system, the following could be said of the Africa societies in line with Busari Adebisi’s analysis:

- that African states and societies had developed, in most parts of the continent, political order and economic systems that provided adequately for their members without reliance on external assistance.
- that each African polity and political society represented an organic and homogenous unit, economically and culturally.
- that African societies had, on the eve of European penetration developed an important technological standard that served their needs in the productive process.
- that the pattern of exchange among pre-colonial societies was dictated by real needs of the people.

The consequences of western penetration on the African, and Third World societies, are horrendous. It must be stressed that a penetrated society cannot be said to retain all its characteristic features once the business of penetration is in full swing because certain discontinuities are bound to occur since the penetration or penetrating agent is at the same time a transformer with a set of objectives in mind. (26) Since the external prime-mover takes charge of the entire society by exercising multi purpose dominance, the internal dynamics of the penetrated society is externalized and the penetrated society becomes a shadow of itself. It is along this thesis that Africa’s underdevelopments has now delivered incontrovertible evidence for the role which western capitalist penetration played in conditioning African underdevelopment.
Two principal factors made the satelisation and destruction of African societies possible: they are the slave trade and colonialism. These two are significantly identified as having the most profound negative impact on the African socio-political landscape and highly desirous of atonement. They served, as analysts hold, to truncate the developmental process of the African peoples, and by so doing constructed “a solid foundation for present state of underdevelopment characterized by disease, ignorance, poverty, industrial stagnation and acute political instability”. (27) Centuries of brutal exploitation and subjugation experienced under the slave trade regime transformed the heroic African into a submissive one. The traumatizing, dehumanizing processes involved in the slave trade business could only be better imagined. This degree of barbarity was unprecedented. It involved the severance of families, culture and institution and the destruction of ones personal sense of identity.

When Europe turned its gaze upon Africa for the second time after the awful slave trade, Africa again sank under the burden of fundamental changes that distorted and disarticulated its structures and institutions beyond repair. African societies moved from being solely the traders’ frontier to being fronts for diverse aggressive exploitation. Colonialism involved two dominant characteristics: one, the subject territory became an estate of the colonizing country and secondly, it engaged the subject nation into complete subordination of the occupying power. In that light, as Ade Ajayi observed, colonialism turned out, like the slave trade, to exploit the resources of Africa for the benefit of the outside world and left Africa comparatively weaker. (28) Worst still, the colonial phenomenon was founded on the same basis of racism and inhuman exploitation as the capitalist slave trade. This is why Walters stressed that:

“While the economic cost of the subordination of the African by Europeans is acknowledged to be incalculable, the totality of the damage done to African civilization by the contact of total domination is of historical monumental import” (29)

Walters also discussed the arguments that may be made for the residual effect of the domination which is that it “accomplished the contact of Africans with European civilization and its attendant benefits”. His argument, in opposition, is that it is veritably clear that: (30)
“The essential direction of this contact was to exercise domination over Africans in order to achieve European material objectives. The level of dependency it galvanized is significant because as long as the direction of the activity performed under colonial domination was structured narrowly to the benefit of Europeans, it prevented the achievement of the broader social development of Africans by Africans in line with their own requirements for that period of history and for its future”.

This involved, as Walters perorated:

“not only the ‘objectives’ of European States in the most narrow sense, but also the attachment of the subordinated peoples to a dominant state made them party to the political and economic dynamics affecting that state. This is the very direction of dependency”.

In conclusion the primary role of colonialism was to create conditions for capitalist accumulation and to ensure steady and cheap source of raw materials and expanding markets for finished product. For Africa, as traditional industries gave way, forcefully, to European ones, the economies of Africa became disintegrated, restructured and integrated vertically into the European economic system. Consequently, Africa experienced a sharp dramatic break with its past.

CONSEQUENCES OF SLAVE TRADE AND COLONIALISM.

The emerging argument is that the state of underdevelopment of Africa and the Third World today is neither traditional or natural. The validation of this thesis rests on the fact that growth and development being endemic to all human societies were not absent or unknown in African societies before the advent of Europeans. As stated earlier, in a number of spheres of human life, some African societies were well ahead of the best in Europe of the time. As Mimiko rightly pointed out, slave trade and colonialism, however, combined to re-order and change this prevailing situation and distorted Africa’s steady march to progress. (31)

The slave trade depopulated Africa and resulted in total disruption of family and community life. As from the 18th Century that export trade began to have revolutionary effects on the African population scene. Historians are not in agreement on the number of human loss to Africa as a result of the slave trade and the fact is appreciated that anything approaching absolute certainty as to the number of loss to Africa is impossible.
However, estimates vary quite widely, ranging from 14 to 15 million, although a writer like Philip Curtin seems to be saying that the total number of Africans that reached the New World over the whole period of export trade is unlikely to have been more than about 9.3 million.\(^{(32)}\) From the African point of view, the implications are much more important going into mere statistical estimation and figures. The spate of ‘population dehydration’ devastated African economy and social life. Agriculture, pastoralism and initiative for local manufacturing were stunted and the rural areas were the most badly hit. Without the slave labour, the West would not have been able to keep up the aristocratic way of life and build what is now the most advanced economies of the world. Eric Williams, a historian and former Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, made this clear when he wrote:

“Liverpool in England, Nantes in France, Rhode Island in America prospered in the slave trade. London and Bristol, Bordeaux or Marseilles, Cadiz and Seville, Lisbon and New England waxed fat on the profits of the trade in the tropical produce raised by the Negro slave. Capitalism in England, France, Holland and Colonial America received a double stimulus from the manufacture of goods needed to exchange for slaves, woolen and cotton goods, copper and brass vessels and the firearm, handcuffs, chains and torture instruments indispensable on the slave ship and on the slave plantation. The tiniest British sugar island was considered more valuable than 13 mainland colonies combined. French Guadeloupe, with a population today of a mere 300,000 was once deemed more precious than Canada and the Dutch cheerfully surrendered what is today New York State for a strip of Guana Territory”.\(^{(33)}\)

Late Sir Winston Churchill could not hold his breathe when he testified that:

“Our possession of the West Indies gave us the strength, the support, but especially the capital, the wealth, at a time when no other European nation possessed such a reserve, which makes us to come through the great struggles of the Napoleonic Wars, the keen competition of commerce in the 18\(^{th}\) and 19\(^{th}\) centuries, and enabled us not only to acquire this appendage of possessions which we have but also to lay the foundation of that commercial and financial leadership which when the world was young, when everything outside Europe was underdeveloped, enabled us to make our great position in the world”.\(^{(34)}\)

Slavery marked the first act of penetration of the African sub-system while colonialism marked the most important phase in the incorporation of all colonial peoples into the global economic system dominated and controlled by the industrial capitalist states of the West. The colonial phenomenon was founded on the same basis of racism
and inhuman exploitation as the capitalist slave trade and they thrived on cultural superiority, arrogance and exploitation. Based on these terms, early eurocentric historical works were aimed at proving the inferiority of the African. Pictures of the ‘five races’ of man almost always showed the African at his most primitive. Professor Harold Isaacs indicated that in contrast to

“the Emersonian whiteman in his study, the Japanese aristocrat, the Malay nobleman and the Indian Chief all obviously selected to depict the highest social ranks in each case” the African appeared as a “prehistoric figure of a man, naked, stepping out of primeval ooze, carrying an ante-deluvian club and shield”. (35)

The doctrine of civilization arising out of the consequences of slave trade and colonialism reveals the assumptions of absence of any kind of civilization worthy of recognition in Africa and thus question of racial superiority of white people deriving from the superiority of the Caucasian culture. This, as Busari Adebisi contended, forms the root of white racism because if one allocates a subordinate class to other people as the doctrine does, one will develop a contempt for them and consequently discriminate against them on the basis of their race. (36) It is important to quickly point out, as Adebisi rightly noted, that it is impossible to have a human collectivity, on any large scale, without its own culture and therefore a civilization.

African economies have been stagnating or regressing since the colonial days; real incomes are very low, health prospects poor, and even poorer and malnourishment is widespread. (37) Many have pointedly noted that political conditions in Africa are the greatest impediments to development in the continent but to understand the phenomenon of the political condition as been impediments to development and the emergence of relevant and effective development paradigm and process one must begin with colonialism and its political legacy. In Africa, unlike the colonial experiences of the Americas, Europe and Asia, the power of the colonial state was not only absolute but arbitrary. (38)

The sum total of what is been argued is that the issue of economic inequality as a basis for analytical framework in the African countries is entirely important as it tends to reproduce itself endlessly in a series of other inequalities. Is it then surprising that today available statistics on poverty rate demonstrates that the incidence and degree of poverty
in sub-Saharan Africa are among the highest in the world. By the turn of the 20th century, the region’s share of the global poverty doubled from 16 to 22%. Within this dismal economic framework is the pitiable ‘debt necklace’ around the emaciated necks of most African States. Africa’s external debt by the end of 1999 was estimated at US $ 563.2 billion, a figure approximately equal to the region’s entire GDP and equivalent to about 370% of the total export. The total annual debt of African countries for the last five years in million of US dollars stood as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Debt (in million)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>322,220.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>338,510.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>328,320.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>332,423.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>563,167.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** *African Development Report 2001 (ADB 2001)*

Apparently perturbed by the complexity of the causes of the debt burden experts fear that the repayment of Africa’s debt is becoming a near impossibility. The debt servicing framework is even more asphyxiating. Continuing with such arrangement amounts to telling a ‘bloodless man to donate blood’ which of course is meant to kill him. Africa is too significant to the world to be administered the euthanasia pill of debt and depth servicing.

Within this poverty scenario is the plague called HIV-AIDS. Statistics indicate that 80% of the World’s 34 million HIV-positive people, and 95% of AIDS orphans live in Africa. (40) The contention that poverty is a major factor in the prevalence of AIDS in Africa is essentially correct, although poverty is not a direct cause of the disease. Societies dogged by illness and characterized by an atmosphere of doom, as Tunde Obadina revealed, (41) are likely to produce the innovators, creators and economic risk takers that Africa desperately needs.

**EARLIER ATTEMPTS TO FINANCE DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA.**

Any intelligence person who holds that the past has no direct bearing on the present and future denies knowledge its rightful contribution. The structural defects in a nation’s life is like a physiological instability in a living person. This is why medical experts discus a patient’s medical history before prescribing drugs or offering surgical
operations to offset an ailment. The position has been established that slave trade and colonialism had far-reaching, principally, negative effects on the African continent and their consequences have conspired to hold Africa back from rising to its historical place in the international system.

For too long the western world has, through the media, been struggling to convince the world that Africa’s lack luster place in international scheme of things is as a result of its own deficiencies. For this reason there has been no convincing, concrete approach to readdressing Africa’s peripherality. The 20th century is replete with half-hearted measures at scratching the African problem and the irritating thing about it all, as Thomas Sowell noted, is from those in the West whose whole vision of the world depends on seeing poverty as victimization and themselves as rescuers. (42) Many of such people assume a stance of being partisan of the poor. But to be an effective partisan of the poor, in the words of Sowell, one must first be a partisan of the truth. (43) Very often, for the African and Third World conditions, much prescriptions rest on the issue or extension of foreign aid. By Sowell’s analysis, the very phrase ‘foreign aid’ which has become so familiar through repetition, is one which “disarms criticism, prejudices the effects of the policy and also obscures its realities and results”. Using the phrase “foreign aid”, Sowell rightly contends, is no more justified \textit{a priori} than calling it “foreign hindrance”.

At the end of the Second World War, Europe and Japan had the privilege of benefiting from the United States financed Marshall Plan for the reconstruction, rehabilitation and industrialization of war torn Europe and Japan. The emergent nation-states of Africa were denied such a programme that would have similarly led to modernization and industrialization. Instead what Africa and the other formerly colonized regions of the world got, as Luke Uche revealed, was an export model of a modernization strategy from western intellectuals and bureaucrats in the form of the dominant paradigm of development, based on the diffusion of Anglo Saxon culture. (44)

In the early 1980’s, the West realizing its failed disposition to issues of the South began to listen to suggestions for dialogue to ensure a peaceful world order by fashioning a New International Economic Order (NIEO). The debate had been on for a long time but what gave it a reasonable appraisal was the Willy Brand Report. NIEO was first
concerned as a strategy for global economic development and then as a slogan for change. NIEO produced little except ‘sumptuous frustration and deepening cynicism’ in North-South relations. Other efforts emerged by mid-1980 when the United Nations Programme of Action for Africa’s Economic Recovery and Development (UNPAAERD) was put in place. This comprehensive plan adopted with great confidence and a shared sense of achievement, had direct antecedents in earlier multilateral declarations, including Africa’s Priority Programme for Economic Recovery 1986-1990 (1985) and the Lagos Plan of Action (1980). Regrettably, the accumulations of paper generated by all these efforts far exceeded the extent of progress towards any of the major objectives. Today both UNPAAERD and the continent it sought to redeem are in serious trouble. (45)

In another vein, African states have severally requested international finance institutions and clubs since the late 80s to consider debt remission as a way of helping them assuage the awful problem of development and governance confronting the continent. A country like Nigeria believes that it could continue to discuss with the G.8 and its trading partners about the virtue of debt remission. Creditor nations and bodies have remained adamant on this matter, an indication that they are not one inch committed to alleviating Africa’s problem. Instead, even a programme likely the Heavily Indebted Poor Country Initiative tended more to resolve the problems of the creditors than to help the people of the poor heavily indebted countries. Only recently the United States of America enacted the African Growth Opportunity Act (AGOA), which provides:

“duty free and quota-free access to the US market without limits for apparel made in eligible Sub-Saharan African Countries from US fabric, yarn and thread”. (46)

AGOA also encourages the American Business Community to take full advantage of the privatization of state-owned enterprises in Africa through whole acquisition or in partnership with African continents. From every indication, this smacks of imperialism and portends greater danger to the African economy. It could then be appreciated that imperialism is a highly adaptable phenomenon; it destroyed the basic industrial technological base of the nations of Africa and has continued the maintenance of such suppression in favour of goods from the West. Roped around this is the ‘bogey of globalization’, which is imperialism couched in a new term. (47)
But what of the role of the Bretonwood institutions? The World Bank and the IMF unobtrusively create enabling environment for imperialism which has held Africa hostage in terms of development. Even more, a programme like the Poverty Reduction Strategy is an instrument used by the World Bank to pose as the defender of the poor but that is not the intention as most annalists of developing countries conclude. The manifestations give away the underlying contradictions which is that it is a strategy to reposition the capitalist world to maintain its hegemony. After almost three decades of OAU, African states, appraising their crossroads between collapse and redemption came together in Nigeria in 1980 to adopt the Lagos Plan of Action intended as a blueprint for checking the rising crises in Africa and to overcome the persistent problems of underdevelopment. Shortly after, the World Bank issued the infamous Berg Report which set the stage for the imposition of orthodox, neo-liberal SAP on African countries. Measures in this package essentially complicated Africa’s economic problems. These, including the ‘Washington Consensus’, were deliberate attempts to hold Africa responsible for its dilemma. SAP was a jettisoning of heterodoxy to more narrow orthodoxy. It brought reversals in all sectors with overall decline in the well being of Africans.

In the ruthlessly competitive world of globalization and liberalization, some African leaders have realized that cooperation and integration offers the only chance to be relevant and to speak with one voice in international negotiations. This initiatives have culminated in the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and the Syrte Declaration that paved the way for progressive movement to African Union. What is now required is a radical rethink and an African initiated global agenda on reparations for combating poverty and underdevelopment and the establishment of the structural and economic conditions that will enable the nations of Africa to develop and grow. In this regard, reparations is aimed at ‘transforming global relations’ for the better.

**REPARATIONS: THE NATURE AND PROCESS**

Some commentators are easily moved to argue that reparations is only discussed in the context of war and there is a possibility that the demand by Africa for reparations may wake up more than it would possibly solve. But it could be quickly retorted that the
plunder of Africa by imperialists, colonialists and neo-colonialists, was even more horrendous on the continent and its people (along with those in Diaspora) than the effects of some wars. We cannot then solely rest our operational tools on the classical definition which holds that reparation is “levy on a defeated nation, forcing it to pay some of the war costs of the warring countries”. A more usable analytical tool emerges from the following definitions: reparations been generally considered as recompense, restitution or atonement to an aggrieved people by the perpetrator(s) on the basis of their grief; a means of ‘putting into good condition again’ or ‘being so repaired; a righting of wrong; something done or paid as compensation for a wrong.” (48) Implied in these definitions is a suggestion of an initial state of disrepair desirous of rehabilitation – ‘thus to repair’; ‘to make whole again’ (49) As Ade Ajayi observed, reparation, in international law, is linked with the concept of crime, and equated with “compensation exacted for past injuries” (50) Accordingly Mimiko, citing Ian Brownlie, exposed the legal perspective more aptly when he defined reparations as all measures which a plaintiff may expect to be taken by a defendant state which includes: payment of compensation (or restitution), an apology, the punishment of individuals responsible, the taking of steps to prevent reoccurrence of the breach of duty and any other form of satisfaction. (51)

Reparation in International law, as Gye Wado indicated, may be discussed in two available forms: (52) the institution of specific performance or damages. Such injured person should be compensated in such a manner that should not be seen to have lost anything at all. This argument, as Wado noted, is generally derived from the logic of unjust enrichment. He, however, points out that the logic of specific performance hardly has any relevance to the African condition because it is virtually impossible to return all the slaves. The other form of reparations (damages) known to international law may be more relevant to the African experience. This form of reparations, as Wado submitted, entails the payment of appropriately negotiated award for the injury caused. These two forms of compensation known to intellectual law do not foreclose the employment of any other form of compensation. Thus, for the purpose of our position, reparation is conceived in its expanded yet specific sense as compensations demanded by the past and present generations of Africans from western European and North American nations for
what the Africans regarded as the misdeed, exploitation, despoliation of and atrocities perpetuated against Africa. (53)

At independence, the emergent states of Africa and the Third World expected that a new world order would follow the end of empire and expected that the old nations would willingly help the new ones to their feet in the interest of a stable world. For development, the states of Africa went for aid and to their dismay aid did not prove the elixir it was sponsored to connote. In that moment of truth, which most states realized too late, it dawned on them that to secure even a little of what they needed they had to offer substantial *quid pro quo*. This is why radical scholars contend that aid to Africa from the West, literally put, is like saying profit accrues to a shop owner in which a burglar spends half of the loot he stole. This is also why it is being argued that financing development in Africa must be more creative, purposefully and courageously demanded through reparations. The struggle for black reparations in reality is not based on western guilt but on western responsibilities to the world.

It must be emphasized that reparations is not only for the slave trade. It is far more than that; nor can we say that since the events in Africa and on Africans happened in the past they should be forgotten. The damage of enslavement and colonization does not lie in the past. As the Mazrui asserted, “the damage is here, the damage is now”. (54) Reparations to Africa cannot also be expected only in monetary terms and even that, calculating the exact amount due to Africa for five centuries of western subjugation remains problematic. But we can rest on history to inform us. Europe did not hesitate to hold German to cough out $ 6,600 million dollars in 1921 as reparations after the First World War; and for only six months occupation, Iraq was required to pay some 300 million dollars to Kuwait. In the Far East, North Korea demanded five billion dollars from Japan for the latter’s 35 years of its forceful occupation. By late 1980s Americans had agreed to compensate Japanese – Americans for five years internment during the Second World War. A total of 60,000 Japanese – American survived the detention camps and the compensation amounted to approximately 20,000 dollars per person and a total of 1.2 billion dollars. (55) The testimonies out of the Second World War are not too faint for us to recall. During that War Nazi Germany took its ideology of white supremacy to the ultimate in the savage extermination of million of Jews in the gas chamber of their
concentration camps. Far from trying to forget, as Ade Ajayi noted, the Jews believed that they own the responsibility not to forget, or let the world forget, so as to ensure that such a crime does not happen again to themselves or others. \(^{56}\) Thereafter massive reparations have been paid to the state of Israel in the name of Jewish people at large. It is interesting to note that the state of Israel was not even in existence when the Nazi Germans perpetrated the holocaust. As summarized above, history is replete with concrete evidence of reparations demands and payment and suffice it to say that the few cases above strengthen the African case.

On the basis of the length of period of 500 years of abject treatment, damages and destruction occasioning from slave trade and colonialism, an analyst like Chinweizu calculated the amount of reparation due to Africa at $2,000 billion. He insisted that the interest payable on this payment at the rate of 5\% for the past 250 years since slave trade ended should be $200 billion. \(^{57}\) Chinweizu’s conservative estimate was like Bishop Henry McNeal Turner’s reparations figure in the 1880s. the Bishop tried to get the Federal Government of the United States to pay reparations of some 40 billion dollars to blacks, “estimating 100 dollars a year for two million dollars a year could be projected to 100 million blacks for 200 years. Along this line of calculation, Chinweizu’s conservative calculation of 4 billion dollars a year for the 500 years of destruction of Africa, to be paid, across board, installmentally for the next fifty years by which time the African economy and political life would have greatly stabilized. By 2050 the West would have paid a total direct financial reparation commitment of 5,000 billion dollars.

However, more creative strategies must be initiated at the level of the OAU/AU where a Reparation Commissions should be set up. The Commission will institute broad based campaign which must first get the west to acknowledge and apologize for the ills of slave trade and colonialism. The Commission will establish an effective Research and Documentation Unit to develop and nurture strong constituencies in Europe and America. Thereafter, reparations demand will include skill transfer and global structural reforms involving the UNO and its agencies. A New Cultural Order, instituted after official public apology to African by the West, should be established in which a ‘New Peace Covenant Initiative’ will flourish.
A major segment of the reparations demand is the issue of capital and debt relief. The debt overhang places severe constraints on economic recovery and achievement of sustained growth. Continuing with it amounts to destroying Africans forever. The western nations must be pressured to outrightly cancel Africa’s debt as an approach to financing development in the continent. Getting the western nations to accede to all these would be a daunting task and African leaders must develop a new spirit of partnership in their development efforts for a strong economic base that will give them a strong voice in the international system. As President Ibrahim Babangida of Nigeria noted in early 1990s ‘demanding reparation is not meant to build a world racial exclusivity but a partnership built on mutual respect”.

NEPAD AND REPARATIONS

A ray of hope sparks off in first reading of the introductory segment of the NEPAD documents, especially the statements in paragraphs 5, 6, and 7 on the African Condition. Paragraph 5 states:

“The New Partnership for African Development calls for the reversal of this abnormal situation by changing the relationship that underpins it. Africans are appealing neither for the further entrenchment of dependency through aid, nor for marginal concession”.

Paragraph 6 States:

“We are convinced that an historic opportunity presents itself to end the scourge of underdevelopment that affects Africa …”

Paragraph 7 states:

“Across the continent, Africans declare that we will no longer allow ourselves to be conditioned by circumstances. We will determine our own destiny and call on the rest of the world to complement our efforts …”.

There are other such soul lifting declarations as:

“Africans must not be the wards of benevolent guardians rather they must be architects of their own sustained upliftment … The hopes of Africa’s people for a better life can no longer rest on the magnanimity of others”.

The summary of the NEPAD initiative is encapsulated in three principal domains of development: that is, promotion of accelerated growth and sustainable development; poverty eradication and ending Africa’s marginalization in the context of globalization.
However, the nature of the African crises and the solution were grossly misjudged by neo-liberal orthodoxy. Globalization is not driven by abstract economic logic but by practical dynamics or realities in developed economies. Globalization is about the penetration not the integration of all economies into the emerging global economy. In this, trade is a source of unprecedented wealth but most of the world’s poorest people in Africa are being left behind as Oxfam rightly reveals:

“The problem is not that international trade is inherently opposed to the needs and interests of the poor, but that the rules that govern it are rigged in favour of the rich … In their rhetoric, governments of rice countries constantly stress their commitment to poverty reduction. Yet the same government use their trade policy to conduct what amounts to robbery against the world’s poor”. (59)

Against the backdrop of the approach spelt out in the rest of the document, NEPAD in deeply flawed. It claims to be internally driven and an instrument for a new strategic framework for re-engineering Africa’s development. NEPAD is definitely neither new in its policy prescription nor African-driven. The documents represent a unified role engaging a bit of the Lagos Plan of Action and a large dose of SAP. As analysts contend, NEPAD is rather donor focused and rooted in the neo-liberal economic discourse of the (post) Washington Consensus. It then becomes vital to wonder if the G.7 (or 8) will put their money in a programme that looks like a threat, if pushed credibly, to their economic hegemonies.

On this platform NEPAD will not be able to foster a reparation agenda, because its donor-driven sensibilities will be offended and it will run into a cul de sac. It is against this submission that the emerging African Union should adopt the reparations agenda as one of its departments. Africa should speak for itself on this matter through its own solidarity and the solidarity of others speaking for the continent.

**CONCLUSION**

What has been established in the larger segment of this paper is to allow for a better verdict that the evil trilogy of slavery, imperialism and colonialism are responsible for Africa’s continued underdevelopment and marginalisation. The continent had been brutalized to strengthen other economies. African states efforts to make real, in their communities, the principles of self-reliance, their efforts to give real and concrete
meaning to their political independence are having to function against a horrifying order which has hitherto insistently made victims of them.

It is against this background, for a safer world, that Africa’s quest for reparations must be viewed and supported. No amount of paternalism will free the continent from its squalored position, not even western aid which some Third World nationalists condemn as modern day cultural imperialism. Not even debt relief which can at best only bring marginal benefit to the poor. Writing off bad debt, which is even been resisted by the global financial clubs and are unlikely to be paid any way, does not amount to significant poverty reduction. African countries need much more than debt relief and they require massive inflow of capital that will at least match the Marshall Plan in scale. (60) Just as Abraham Lincoln once remarked, the dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate for the stormy present. What is important for poor nationals of Africa seeking to escape poverty is the net flow of resources by way of reparations. It is not a plea for charity but justice because no matter how high-minded, charity in some ways diminishes both the giver and the receiver because it reminds the recipient of helplessness and the donor of guilt. (61) If nothing urgent and significant is done for Africa, as a ‘global community we shall sink or swim together’. What is required is the development of a ‘global caring society’ to soften the harsher aspects of global capitalism.
NOTES:


2. Ibid P.3


4. This has been re-emphasized recently by the Canadian Prime minister during his visit to Nigeria, April 5, 2002, where he remarked that this is no more era for charity but direct partnership involvement.


6. Ibid. P.8


10. Ibid

11. See Offiong T. Abia “Reparations is not the Solution”, HISTOSCOPE Magazine, Published by the Students Historical Society of Nigeria, University of Calabar, 1991 p.3.


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The Editorial by Ronald Segal elucidated on this in Oliver and Fage, *A Short History of Africa* op. cit.

Oliver and Fage Ibid. The first 3 Chapters are relevant.


Roland Oliver Ibid, p.40 cited in Nkrumah *Africa Must Unite* op. cit p.3


Ibid.

See Parker Thomas Moon Op. cit p.9


Ibid.


Ibid.


34. Ibid


37. **The Canadian Prime Minister** on a state visit to Nigeria April 4-5, 2002 reemphasized this in Abuja.


41. Ibid.


43. Ibid.


47. Read Eskor Toyo Background to Globalization. (ASUU Educational Publication Series, Ibadan 2000).

49. **Ibid.**

50. **Ade Ajayi**, “The Slave Trade, colonialism and Neo-Colonialism in Historical Perspective”, _op.cit._


53. **Gye-Wado Ibid** and Mimiko Ibid.


60. **See Tunde Obadina** “Nationalism and Economic Development” _AFRICA TODAY_ April 2000 pp. 40-41.